

Comments on the Australian Labor Party's National Platform - Consultation Draft

29 May 2015



About the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education

The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol.

Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. More than 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy.

In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.

FARE is guided by the World Health Organization's *Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol*¹ for stopping alcohol harms through population-based strategies, problem directed policies, and direct interventions.

If you would like to contribute to FARE's important work, call us on (02) 6122 8600 or email info@fare.org.au.

About the Public Health Association of Australia

The Public Health Association of Australia Incorporated (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia and works to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. PHAA seeks better population health outcomes based on prevention, the social determinants of health and equity principles.

PHAA is a national organisation comprising around 1900 individual members and representing over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level.

Core to our work is an evidence base drawn from a wide range of members working in public health practice, research, administration and related fields who volunteer their time to inform policy, support advocacy and assist in capacity building within the sector.

PHAA has been a key proponent of a preventive approach for better population health outcomes championing such policies and providing strong support for the Australian Government and for the Preventative Health Taskforce and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in their efforts to develop and strengthen research and actions in this area across Australia.

To find out more information about PHAA's important work visit www.phaa.net.au or contact us on (02) 6285 2373 or email phaa@phaa.net.au.

¹ World Health Organization (2010). *Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

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Introduction

The Foundation for Alcohol Research for Education and the Public Health Association of Australia welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the Australian Labor Party's *National Platform Consultation Draft* (National Platform). The comments provided relate to sections within the National Platform consultation draft concerning chronic disease and preventive health.

Chronic disease has been described by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) as "Our biggest health challenge".¹ Australians are living longer, but our ageing population presents a challenge for our health system, as we are living longer with chronic diseases.

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and heart failure, cancer, chronic kidney disease, lung disease and type-2 diabetes, are responsible for 90 per cent of all deaths and 85 per cent of total disease.² These diseases are largely driven by four modifiable risk factors; physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, tobacco use and alcohol consumption.³

Australia has also joined all other members of the World Health Organization (WHO) to endorse a robust set of nine goals and 25 indicators to achieve a 25 per cent reduction in mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory diseases by 2025.⁴

This follows agreement at the United Nation's (UN) High Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in September 2011, which was only the second time that the UN has convened a summit on a major health issue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged the NCD challenge confronting health systems and in 2013 adopted the *Global monitoring framework and targets for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases* (the Framework).⁵

The Framework includes nine global voluntary NCD targets and 25 indicators, which are to be met by 2025. The targets are:

1. A 25 per cent relative reduction in the overall mortality from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory diseases.
2. At least ten per cent relative reduction in the harmful use of alcohol, as appropriate, within the national context.
3. A ten per cent relative reduction in prevalence of insufficient physical activity.
4. A 30 per cent relative reduction in mean population intake of salt/sodium.
5. A 30 per cent relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15+ years.
6. A 25 per cent relative reduction in the prevalence of raised blood pressure or contain the prevalence of raised blood pressure, according to national circumstances.
7. Halt the rise in diabetes and obesity.
8. At least 50 per cent of eligible people receive drug therapy and counselling (including glycaemic control) to prevent heart attacks and strokes.
9. An 80 per cent availability of the affordable basic technologies and essential medicines, including generics, required to treat major non-communicable diseases in both public and private facilities.

The economic burden placed on the Australian health system as a result of chronic disease is enormous. The four most expensive chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, oral health, mental disorders and musculoskeletal disease) cost \$27 billion and accounted for 36 per cent of health expenditure in 2008-09.⁶

The Gillard/Rudd Governments provided a sharp focus on preventive health with the establishment of the National Preventative Health Taskforce. This Taskforce, led by Professor Rob Moodie, outlined a comprehensive plan *Australia: The healthiest country by 2020. Preventative Health Strategy – the roadmap for action*. The Gillard/Rudd Government was also the first government to set up an agency with the sole focus of prevention, the Australian National Preventive Agency (ANPHA). The work of ANPHA focused on addressing three risk factors: alcohol, tobacco and physical activity.

Under a Labor Government, Australia positioned itself as world leader in preventive health. In 2010, the then Minister for Health, the Hon Nicola Roxon stated that “preventative health is now here to stay at the heart of our health reform agenda”.⁷

In order to reduce the burden that chronic disease has on Australia’s health system, there is a clear need for a revitalised focus on preventive health. The suggested amendments below provide the opportunity to reposition preventive health and reduce the burden of chronic disease in Australia.

Comments on the National Platform

The following sections provide suggested changes to the National Platform. The titles used in this document are the same titles as they appear in the National Platform for ease of reference. Where suggestions are made to amend existing text, the change is shown with a strikethrough or text to be deleted and underline of text to be added.

Responsible fiscal policy (Chapter 2, p.13)

Amend the third dot point in paragraph 11 to:

- Recognition of long-term revenue challenges, including the ageing of the population and the increasing burden of chronic disease.

A fair and efficient tax system (Chapter 2, p.26)

Suggested changes

Include an additional dot point in paragraph 68:

- Use corrective consumption taxes to minimise economic externalities, encourage healthier choices and maximise the benefits to the community.

A health system for all (Chapter 8, p.113)

Suggested changes

To ensure that a Labor health agenda includes preventive health, the introduction, values and achievements need to be reframed to reflect the importance of prevention. The following are suggested inclusions and amendments under each of these areas.

Include an additional dot point in the introduction:

- Investing in early detection and prevention of chronic disease can not only save lives but also reduce pressure on our health system, particularly as the population ages.

Amend paragraph 15 in the Labor values section to:

- Labor believes a strong primary care system, ~~complemented by prevention~~ which focuses on prevention to address diet, consumption of alcohol, smoking and physical inactivity, will be critical to tackling chronic disease and put Australia in the best position possible to meet our future health care challenges.

Amend the last dot point in paragraph 17 in the Labor achievements section to:

- The Gillard/Rudd Governments delivered record investments in health, including in public hospital funding, cancer services, health infrastructure, general practice training, better access to general practice after hours, the largest ever mental health funding package, a national organ and tissue donation scheme, our very first children's dental scheme, our very first children's dental scheme ~~and the world's first plain packaging legislation to reduce the rates of smoking~~ and undertook a comprehensive review of Food Labelling Law and Policy. Labor's whole of system reform to Commonwealth/State financial relations in health established Local Hospital Networks and Medicare Locals, all critical to improving transparency and efficiency in our health system.

Add an additional dot point to paragraph 17 in the Labor achievements section:

- Labor positioned Australia as a world leader in prevention by introducing the world first tobacco plain packaging and developing *Australia: The healthiest country by 2020. Preventative Health Strategy – the roadmap for action*, a national plan focused on preventing chronic disease by addressing the major risk factors diet, alcohol, tobacco and physical inactivity.

Rebuilding Australia's health care reform agenda (Chapter 8, p.115)

Suggested changes

Include an additional dot point to paragraph 18:

- Labor will support innovative models of care to ease pressure on hospitals by encouraging home-based care and improved rehabilitation and secondary prevention programs.

Promoting wellness, preventing disease (Chapter 8, p.116)

Suggested changes

Amend paragraph 19 to:

- ~~Preventive health~~ Prevention must be central to the Australian health care system and focus on addressing chronic disease risk factors including diet, alcohol, tobacco and physical inactivity.

Include additional dot points in paragraph 23:

- Improve nutrition by supporting food reformulation strategies to improve affordability and accessibility of healthy foods, especially in vulnerable communities, food literacy skills embedded within a national food and nutrition curriculum and community education programs and promote uptake of the Health Star Rating front-of-pack labelling system.
- Address low levels of physical activity through a comprehensive across-government approach including health, transport, infrastructure, aged care and education portfolios and programs.
- Adopt financial measures that assist people to make healthier food and lifestyle choices.

Strengthening primary care (Chapter 8, p.117)

Suggested changes

Include additional dot points in this section:

- Support early detection of people at risk of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and kidney disease, and early intervention through the integrated health check.

Investing in health and medical research (Chapter 8, p.122)

Suggested changes

Amend paragraph 61 to:

- All Australians benefit from health and medical research, particularly when that research is translated into improved primary and hospital care, aged care, or better ~~preventive health prevention strategies~~ to address the chronic disease risk factors of diet, alcohol, tobacco and physical inactivity. Our national economy also benefits as research findings lead to the development of innovative new industries and better health outcomes. Research needs to be embedded throughout the health system and actively involve all health professionals.

Tackling health inequality (Chapter 8, p.124)

Suggested changes

Amend the following dot points in paragraph 70:

- Tackling chronic disease, particularly diabetes and renal diseases, and the shared risk factors contributing to the mortality and morbidity of health outcomes;
- ~~Preventative~~ Preventive health, by addressing the common risk factors of chronic disease; alcohol, tobacco and physical inactivity, particularly amongst young children.

Include an additional dot point in paragraph 70:

- Reducing the devastating impacts of alcohol on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Include additional paragraphs after paragraph 74:

- Improve access and affordability of healthy food supply to remote communities.

Tackling chronic disease (Chapter 8, p.132)

Suggested changes

To reflect the importance of reducing the burden of chronic disease as Australia's greatest health challenge, the 'Tackling Chronic Disease' section should be repositioned to the beginning of the health chapter after the 'Rebuilding Australia's health care reform program' section and before the 'Promoting wellness, preventing disease' section.

Amend paragraphs 104-106 in the Tackling Chronic Disease section to:

- Chronic disease has become the leading cause of preventable death in Australia and ~~one of the~~ is the greatest challenges facing our health system, responsible for 90% of all deaths and 85% of the burden of disease.
- Levels of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes and kidney disease are largely preventable and correlate strongly with socio-economic status in Australia, disproportionately disadvantaging poorer communities both economically and with regard to health outcomes.
- Labor will address ~~this~~ the chronic disease challenge by:
 - > Targeting the causes of chronic disease, particularly in economically disadvantaged and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through working with local government, Primary Health Networks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Organisations and the primary health care sector more broadly;
 - > Developing preventative health policies and solutions, including those that focus on tackling obesity and physical inactivity/sedentary lifestyles, ~~noting that this is often a condition that manifests as a result of multiple morbidities;~~
 - > Leading the world in action to reduce rates of smoking and consumption of alcohol;
 - > Promoting and supporting evidence-based early detection checks for chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and cancers;
 - > Improving access to primary health care multi-disciplinary teams and exploring and trialling innovative models for management of chronic disease, including coordinated case management, lifestyle modification pathways and programs, and where appropriate, involve the community and not for profit sectors.

Include additional paragraphs in this section:

- Labor is committed to Australia achieving the non-communicable disease targets set by World Health Organization (WHO) by 2025.
- Labor is committed to acting on the recommendations of the 2009 Preventive Health Taskforce's *Preventative Health Strategy – the roadmap for action.*

Australian aid and international development (Chapter 11, p.209)

Suggested changes

Amend paragraph 58 to:

- Labor supports the Sustainable Development Goal process as a global blueprint to end extreme poverty. Like the Millennium Development Goals they replace, the SDGs will guide Labor's plan for Australia's international development assistance. Labor also supports the World Health Organization's Global Monitoring Framework for the prevention and control of non-communicable disease.

Include an additional paragraph after paragraph 62:

- Labor is committed to reducing the global burden of disease by working towards the nine global non-communicable disease targets set by the World Health Organization to ensure health systems across the world are sustainable.

Amend paragraph 64 to:

- Labor believes the empowerment of women should be a fundamental principle of Australia's aid program. It is one of the most effective tools to increase the chances of education for all young women and girls, raise economic productivity, reduce infant and maternal mortality, and improve health, including preventing HIV/AIDS and reducing non-communicable diseases.

References

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- ¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2014). *Australia's health 2014*. Australia's health series no. 14. Cat. no. AUS 178. Canberra: AIHW.
 - ² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2014). *Australia's health 2014*. Australia's health series no. 14. Cat. no. AUS 178. Canberra: AIHW.
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 - ⁴ World Health Organization. (2013). *NCD Global Monitoring Framework*. Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/nmh/global_monitoring_framework/en/
 - ⁵ World Health Organization. (2013). *NCD Global Monitoring Framework*. Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/nmh/global_monitoring_framework/en/
 - ⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2014). *Australia's health 2014*. Australia's health series no. 14. Cat. no. AUS 178. Canberra: AIHW.
 - ⁷ Australian Government. (2010). *Taking preventative action – A response to Australia: the healthiest country by 2020 – The report of the National Preventative Health Taskforce*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

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Australia's greatest health challenge

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