

# Making health better: priorities for the 2019 Federal election

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The Federal election has begun with a welcome focus on health, yet there is much more Australia could do differently to achieve better health for all.

The Consumers Health Forum has called for the next Federal Government to take early action on three health priorities to set 21st century health goals for all Australians. Fundamental to the priorities is a commitment to closing the gap in health and disadvantage between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

Our three *Making Health Better Priorities* are:

- **Childhood overweight and obesity:** Committing to a national strategy based on the *Tipping the Scales*\* report's eight steps including tougher curbs on unhealthy food advertising, mandatory food stars rating, active transport and a 20 per cent health levy on sugary drinks.
- **Primary care:** Modernise Medicare by building on current health care homes and integrated care programs that support patient-centred services, particularly for children under five, those with chronic illness and older Australians, including reforms in payment systems to reward GPs more effectively, to encourage providers to work in teams and reduce dependence on hospitals.
- **Dental reform:** Extending the child dental benefits scheme to adults to roll out in stages beginning with those on low incomes and ultimately providing universal dental benefits.

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The CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said the three priorities are based on the findings of a detailed CHF report, also released today, *Making Health Better: Priorities for the 2019 Federal Election*. See: <https://chf.org.au/publications/making-health-better-priorities-2019-federal-election>

“We appreciate the health announcements made by the three political leaders so far in this election campaign, including the focus on out of pocket health costs which has been a long-term concern of CHF.

But what Australia needs more fundamentally now are effective plans that tackle our health challenges in a comprehensive way, that also would reduce health costs in future.

“We do have top quality health care available, yet many Australians need more support to get the best out of our health system. A consumer sentiment survey conducted by CHF found that most people are largely satisfied with the health system, but many raised two recurring issues: cost and uncertainty.

“Healthcare is more than hospitals. We need a connected health system in the community that focuses on primary care where GPs have the resources to provide team-based care for those with chronic and complex conditions, including mental illness, resulting in better outcomes that keep people out of hospital.

“Many people skip getting a prescription or getting recommended tests or follow-up, often because of cost. Official statistics show that nearly two million people, delayed or did not see a dentist due to cost.

“More broadly, our society and health system are failing to take effective measures against overweight and obesity. More than a quarter (27%) of Australian children are overweight or obese. If current trends continue,

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there will be approximately 1.75 million deaths in people over the age of 20 years caused by overweight and obesity between 2011 and 2050 in Australia.

“The reluctance of the two major parties to propose effective action to quell our unhealthy eating culture is disturbing given the widespread public support for stronger measures such as a sugary drinks tax.

“What experience and evidence tell us is that we can work towards a healthier and happier society by placing the best interests of the consumer and patient first.

“Change need not cost a fortune, but it can save us a fortune in longer, healthier and more productive lives,” Ms Wells said.

VIDEO: *Making health better* <https://youtu.be/bjIU3Hv307Q>

\* *Tipping the Scales* report is at <http://www.opc.org.au/what-we-do/tipping-the-scales>

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