

Time to make prevention matter

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The Consumers Health Forum urges the Federal Government to produce a preventive health strategy that reflects the wishes of most Australians for more action on population-wide pro-health measures, including curbs on the promotion and sale of junk food and sugary drinks.

The results of a [new survey](#) by CHF's Australia's Health Panel find that an overwhelming majority (94%) agreed that Government has a responsibility to promote conditions that support individuals leading healthy lives.

"The survey shows there is widespread support for the Government to foster healthier living in Australia, whether it be through such measures as a sugar tax or incentives for healthier environments and support for public transport," the CEO of CHF, Leanne Wells said.

"The survey showed that only 12% of panellists believed that the current Australian health system has got the balance right between 'preventing illness and disease' and 'treating illness and disease', showing strong community support for reviewing and changing how we currently approach preventive health.

"These findings are timely as they come as the Health Minister considers the final shape of the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030*.

"The Federal Budget papers said that the Preventive Health Strategy "*will assist Australians to consider how they can improve their health and well-being, and address early signs before it impacts them and their families. It will also reduce the overall burden on the health system that comes with supporting patients with persistent and chronic conditions*".

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

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“But when it comes to persistent and chronic conditions,” Ms Wells said “we need to be doing more to discourage the unhealthy diets and inactive lifestyles that trigger chronic conditions like obesity and diabetes.

“It is vital that the Federal Government provides not only the necessary funding but also the leadership in promoting healthier lifestyles in Australia.

CHF has published a [Position Statement](#) summarising our response to the consultation draft of the Strategy.

“CHF welcomes the immediate priorities in the draft Strategy including a health literacy strategy to improve the health literacy environment in Australia and individuals’ self-care capabilities, a consumer engagement strategy and primary care that is more prevention-oriented”.

“We need to address the variation and low levels of health literacy in our community. Equipping the community with the information and knowledge required to prevent disease and make better lifestyle decisions will ensure we have ‘wise consumers’ making the right decisions for their health and wellbeing”.

“Consumers must have a central role in co-creating the community engagement necessary to encourage preventive health initiatives.

“And an important player in effective preventive health measures will be primary health --- the part played by GPs, nurses and other health practitioners in supporting preventive health initiatives.

“When survey panellists were asked what items the National Preventative Health Strategy should use to measure its success against, two of those cited were population wide measures of specific health conditions, with a decrease in the number of people with chronic illness and a decrease in

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the number of people considered to be overweight/obese. These success measures were supported by 73% and 64% of panellists respectively.

“Other measures of success supported by the panellists related to reducing the inequality between groups within the overall population, with panellists supporting a decrease in the rates of illness, disability and death in both disadvantaged communities (72%) and between different socioeconomic groups (72%). While the fifth measure that a majority (69%) of panellists supported was increasing the average number of “quality years” lived in good health by people.

“There also appears to be strong community support for much broader preventive interventions that fundamentally alter where we live, with 72% of panellists supporting urban planning measures that encourage people to have a more active lifestyle by increasing the accessibility and safety of walking paths, cycling paths and public transport options in all communities.

“This indicates that there is community support for the Strategy to “aim high” and pursue policies and a comprehensive set of programs that will bring benefits to health over the long-term,” Ms Wells said.

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