



The Hon Greg Hunt MP

Minister for Health

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister
for the Public Service and Cabinet

TRANSCRIPT

12 June 2019

PUBLIC HEALTH PREVENTION CONFERENCE 2019

E&OE...

Topics: Preventive Health Strategy; National Screening Programs; Immunisation; Child Dental Benefit Scheme;

GREG HUNT:

Well welcome everybody to the Public Health Association of Australia's Preventive Health Conference for 2019.

I want to acknowledge Terry and to all of the members of PHAA, to all of the experts and participants, everybody involved in the great task of helping Australians have better health.

Keeping them out of hospitals, giving them a better quality of life and you play a critically important role in that.

Preventive health is one of the four pillars of our long term national health strategy. Primary care, hospitals, mental health and preventive health, consciously together and medical research. And you play a critical role in that strategy.

So let's look at the challenge, what we're doing and what we can do together. In terms of the challenge, the Burden of Disease Report is out tomorrow and so I don't want to pre-empt all of its findings, but we do know that there has been a 20 per cent reduction in the fatal burden of disease over the period which the report covers.

That's an enormous step forward, that's in part about the preventive work of dietary and other elements, about the greater focus in terms of support for diabetes and in particular addressing and dealing with the consequences of so many of our fatal chronic conditions through new medicines and that's been an extraordinary example of research, approval and treatment working together.

And many of you have been advocates for such powerful new medicines as Spinraza for spinal muscular atrophy, Tagrisso for lung cancer, cystic fibrosis being covered through the new medicines such as Orkambi, so thank you for that.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

Then we know that the report also not surprisingly sets out that the major risk factors which are addressable – alcohol, drugs and tobacco – that we also have to deal with obesity and poor diet which come together and contribute to issues in relation to blood pressure, in relation to our glucose levels.

All of these effect our quality of life, our longevity and increase the burden of disease. So then what are we doing together and what should we do? In terms of what we're doing together, we start with the national screening programs and here Australia is undoubtedly a world leader.

In cervical cancer we are, I think, without doubt the world leader. And the work that we've been doing with the National Cervical Cancer Screening Program, the immunisation through Gardasil and now Gardasil 9, all of that means that we're on track to be perhaps the first nation in the world to effectively eradicate cervical cancer as a fatal condition.

It won't happen overnight, but when Professor Ian Fraser and others are talking about this possibility, that's a powerful moment in medical and public health history.

Similarly, our programs in relation to bowel and breast cancer are absolutely world class.

We back that with what we're doing in terms of immunisation. It's a \$450 million a year program, but we have to keep driving forward to lift and expand immunisation coverage. And as the medical experts develop new and safe vaccines and prove their effectiveness, we will list them – that's a guarantee.

Related to all of that is oral health and we've recently added a billion dollars in funding for dental health in the recent Budget through the Child Dental Benefit Scheme.

An immensely important investment and that's about setting people up for life. So there's an extraordinary amount of work that's being done.

But of course we can do more and that's what this conference is about. So I ask and I request that you bring together your best ideas and through Terry and others, share them with us.

For me in particular, I've already asked the Chief Medical Officer to work with other experts across the country in identifying the next phase for screening. Firstly, we have to lift the uptake of existing screening programs – the breast and bowel and cervical cancer screening programs.

We want to get as close to 100 per cent coverage as possible. They're voluntary but we really want the public to participate. So your ideas in how we can do that will be deeply appreciated.

Related to that of course is looking at the new tests as they emerge and arrive. Whether it's blood screening, whether it's something that I was hearing about recently in terms of the ability to look for different types of illnesses and chronic conditions, through puffers and respiratory tests, or whether it's genomic testing.

And the Genomics Mission is investigating those. So we look for those new tests as they come through. We want to continue to expand and lift the uptake of immunisation and your thoughts on what will help deliver that outcome are immensely important.

And lastly, to bring it all together, whether it's drugs and alcohol, whether it's the work in relation to diet, whether it's other elements, we are developing with you a long term national preventive health strategy.

So I'm delighted to announce that we will be developing a long term national preventive health strategy.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

I'll be inviting representatives from this group, but I would like all of you to feed in your ideas and I'll be looking forwards to a roundtable with you at some stage in the near term, to have your views, your advice, your comments, frank and fearless as always.

But the work you do is appreciated and my task is to now take that forwards with a national strategy.

I want to thank you and honour you and wish you good judgement and good sort of movement together as you put forward the ideas for the national strategy and the individual programs.

Thank you.

(ENDS)