

8 May 2007

Still more to do on obesity

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) acknowledged health promotion and illness prevention measures in the Federal Budget but believe they don't go far enough to seriously deal with obesity.

The AGPN budget submission indicated that if the obesity epidemic was to be seriously tackled it had to be recognised under Medicare as a chronic disease. This would allow for general practice to more effectively treat and manage the condition.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said that too many people are developing diseases and dying prematurely due to avoidable lifestyle risk factors.

"A recent Access Economics report indicates that well over 3 million Australians are obese and if rates continue to increase at historical rates, there could be as many as 7.2 million obese Australians by 2025.

"It is indefensible that this should be happening in first world country such as Australia.

"Supporting divisions to provide lifestyle modification programs, extension to the Australian Primary Health Care Collaboratives and newly introduced diabetes group allied health services will all make major inroads to preventing and managing diabetes and other chronic conditions.

"However, obesity remains one of our biggest population health challenges. The total cost of obesity now is \$21 billion – imagine the costs of these future projections.

"It is disappointing that this Budget with its focus on health promotion and chronic disease prevention has failed to fully deliver a solid agenda in this area," Dr Hobbs said.

There are low cost, easily implemented solutions to tackle obesity. These need to be funded as a package of measures not as a piecemeal collection of ideas.

AGPN's Budget submission called for:

- for obesity to be included as a treatable condition under the Medicare chronic disease management item numbers
- an MBS health check item number to be implemented by the practice team, including a specific preventative health check item number for practice nurses and aboriginal health workers
- a network of chronic disease service coordinators linked to GP practices to assist with care planning and service coordination.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell 0415 662 266