

Embargoed until 1am 25 May 2007

25 May 2007

A call to action - 32 per cent of disease preventable

A report released today stating an estimated 32 per cent of disease is preventable has been described as a serious wake up call for all levels of government and the community at large by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report, *The Burden of Disease and Injury in Australia 2003* found that cardio vascular disease, diabetes, cancer, injury and mental disorders were the leading causes of the burden of disease in 2003.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said even though the figures are three years old and governments have increased their efforts in addressing preventable illnesses but there is still far more work to be done.

"By addressing the contributing lifestyle factors such as smoking, lack of physical activity, excess alcohol consumption and obesity the burden of disease can be reduced considerably.

"AGPN was pleased to see COAG start focusing on these issues through the Australia Better Health Initiative. This requires a move away from an acute health system focussing on treating illness to one that concentrates on keeping people healthy.

"In the last four years changes to the Medicare system have supported general practice to improve outcomes for patients with conditions such as type 2 diabetes using team care arrangements.

"Team Care Arrangements allow GPs to refer patients with chronic illness such as type 2 diabetes to allied health professionals such as dietitians and exercise physiologists under Medicare.

"This improved access to team care sees patients receive care from professionals with a mix of clinical skills for optimal care," Dr Hobbs said.

Despite these welcome changes more needs to be done.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said the Network has repeatedly called on the Australian Government to recognise obesity as a chronic condition under Medicare.

"Blind Freddy can see that in one way or another, obesity is linked to all five disease states highlighted in today's report.

"By addressing obesity in the first instance we know many of these conditions would be either preventable or identified in early onset.

"Over 3 million Australians are estimated to be obese. If GPs could refer or treat these patients under GP Care Plans or Team Care Arrangements without waiting for the onset of a chronic condition actually eligible under Medicare this would go a long way to reducing the burden of disease reflected in this report," Ms Carnell said.

For more information please call AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266