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Smoking down, exercise levels down, diabetes, obesity and alcohol consumption up

Yesterday's release of the *Changes in Health- A snapshot, 2004-05* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicated that lifestyle risk factors need more community awareness and government action according to Australia's peak body representing divisions of general practice, the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN)

"Lifestyle risk factors such as obesity, physical inactivity, smoking and alcohol overuse are significant contributing factors to the majority of chronic disease in Australia," AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said.

Dr Hobbs said he was concerned that despite increased social awareness about the dangers obesity and physical inactivity, the report shows that all ages and both sexes had increased levels of obesity and no increased levels of physical activity. Already seven out of ten GP consultations relate to chronic disease and it is anticipated that within 10 years, 80% of the entire health budget will be chronic disease related.

Dr Tony Hobbs said whilst it was excellent to see a decrease in smoking levels, the increasing levels of diabetes is extremely disturbing.

"This report states that the number of people aged 65 years or more reporting Type 2 diabetes has more than trebled between 1995 to 2004-05 and more and more young people being diagnosed.

"It is estimated that there are now over 1 million Australians with Diabetes Type 2, and the tragedy is, that the majority of these cases could have been avoided with a good diet and adequate exercise," Dr Hobbs said.

Dr Hobbs urged all Australians aged over 55 or with risk factors including overweight or obesity, a family history of diabetes, smoking or high blood pressure or people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander to see their GP.

"The earlier we can pick up a problem or a potential problem, the better the long-term health outcomes are for the patient.

"A recent Finnish study has shown that 58% of patients with pre Diabetes can avoid the onset of Diabetes with lifestyle changes" Dr Hobbs said.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said general practices, with the support of their local division of general practice, have introduced a program called "*Lifescrpts*" to help patients make better lifestyle choices.

"The *Lifescrpts* program provides fantastic resources that GPs can use to support their patients loose weight, increase their activity levels, stop smoking and reduce alcohol intake.

"This is just another way that the Divisions Network is providing local health solutions through general practice," Ms Carnell said.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 66 22 66