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WITS No.: 86201

The Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
Chair
Joint Select Committee on Preventative Health Care
Parliament of Tasmania
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Ms Forrest

The Tasmanian Government welcomes the continued work of the Joint Select Committee on Preventative Health Care (the Committee). Preventive health is a key component of a balanced health care system and the Government is working hard to deliver on its goal to make Tasmania the healthiest population in Australia by 2025 through implementation of our *A Healthy Tasmania* policy.

It is critical that any approach to preventive health includes a strong evidence-base to ensure the most effective and sustainable use of resources. The decision by the Australian Government to cease the *National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health* is an example of the recent fiscal constraints for the system and to preventive health in particular at the national level. While I am actively seeking to ensure sustainability and certainty in health funding from the Australian Government, it is important that our approach to preventive health continues to progress in tandem with other health reforms underway.

As the Committee is aware, Tasmania faces significant challenges in this area, including high rates of smoking, physical inactivity and obesity, poor nutrition, risky alcohol consumption and high levels of chronic disease. In order to address these challenges there must be a focus on key lifestyle risk areas, using an integrated health promotion and prevention approach. This approach must be strategic and targeted at the vulnerable elements of the community where the need is the greatest.

In order to positively influence the health of Tasmanians, the Government is pursuing an integrated approach to promoting good health and preventing chronic disease. The Tasmanian Government is committed to working collaboratively to identify funding streams, resources, skills, experience and programs to focus on a whole of government, whole of community and health-in-all-policies approach to improving the health of Tasmanians.

The *A Healthy Tasmania* policy recognises how critical the consumer is in the focus of care, and that there are clear roles, responsibilities and support for providers, as well as clear referral pathways to direct Tasmanians at risk to locally-based lifestyle change programs, services and information. Community led approaches are also recognised to be of growing importance to improving health and reducing health inequalities.

As an initial step under this policy, the Government engaged the University of Tasmania to conduct a review of existing preventive health activity across the Tasmanian Government and an assessment of how effective this activity has been. The recommendations from this report are as follows:

Recommendation 1

That the Tasmanian Government considers the following as strategic preventive health priorities:

- Helping people to live longer and healthier lives through implementing evidence-based health promotion initiatives according to need and that address Tasmania's high rates of smoking, poor diet, poor mental health, insufficient physical activity, harmful alcohol and other drugs use, obesity and high blood pressure.
- Reducing the burden of disease and disability affecting the Tasmanian community through evidence-based primary, secondary and tertiary prevention initiatives that target multi-morbidity and the chronic conditions with the greatest societal impact in terms of their prevalence, morbidity, mortality and health system effects.
- Supporting families to give children and young people the best start in life, through health promotion in homes, communities, schools and health services.
- Reducing and eliminating health disparities, including improving equitable access to high quality health services according to need.
- Collecting, monitoring and reporting against indicators of chronic disease and associated risk factors, as well as other measures of population health status, to inform and evaluate public health status, preventive health strategies and health service provision in Tasmania.

Recommendation 2

That the Tasmanian Government adopts a whole of government approach to addressing social determinants, including development of a Health-in-All-Policies approach.

That the PHS social determinants of health program of work is transitioned to the Department of Premier and Cabinet which has overarching responsibility for whole of government social determinants action.

That the health portfolio continues to drive social determinants improvement under the leadership of Department of Premier and Cabinet.

That a formal mechanism is established by the Department of Premier and Cabinet for all government portfolios, including the health portfolio, to work collaboratively to improve the health of Tasmanians.

Recommendation 3

That PHS preventive health resources are realigned toward proven, evidence-based anticipatory care, lifestyle risk factor reduction and the prevention and management of chronic diseases, with a focus on people in higher risk population groups.

Recommendation 4

That through a preventive health commissioning model the Tasmanian Government works through Local Government to support communities to:

- decide evidence-based health promotion priorities; and
- develop evidence-based preventive approaches.

With a focus on vulnerable communities that are the most deprived and least engaged.

Recommendation 5

That evidence-based health promotion that targets lifestyle risk factor reduction and the prevention and management of chronic diseases is inclusive of health services as a key setting for preventive action.

That health promotion providers work across the community health and social care system on referral pathways for providers to direct Tasmanians at risk to locally-based lifestyle change programs, services and information with a focus on vulnerable individuals and communities.

Recommendation 6

That the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of current health promotion initiatives are evaluated.

That the Tasmanian Government commissions the development of a five year strategic plan for the delivery of preventive health services using the results of evaluations to determine priorities for commissioning evidence-based, effective preventive activities and disinvestment in preventive activities for which there is not strong evidence of directly related health improvement.

Recommendation 7

That the Tasmanian Government establishes under the Health Council of Tasmania a consortium of key preventive health stakeholders to support its strategic leadership role and guide the development of the five year strategic plan.

Recommendation 8

That preventive health services which are funded and / or provided by the Tasmanian Government are monitored and that performance is reported across relevant quality domains.

Recommendation 9

That Health Improvement functions are retained within PHS.

That Health Improvement better aligns its priorities to Tasmanian Liberal Government's *A Healthy Tasmania* commitments.

That Health Improvement functions within PHS are clinically led.

Recommendation 10

That a Health Information function is established within PHS.

That the Health Information function is situated organisationally alongside, rather than within, the statutory or non-statutory functions of PHS and provides knowledge and intelligence services that are accessible to DHHS, health services and external stakeholders.


That a Health Information function within PHS is clinically led.

The Government's strategy for preventive health needs to be considered in the context of the current *One State, One Health System, Better Outcomes* (One Health System) reforms. The Health Council of Tasmania (HCT) has been established as part of that broader reform process, so as to provide expert advice on a range of issues. The HCT will assist in accessing the views of key stakeholders through a new Committee dedicated to preventive health, to be chaired by Dr Tim Greenaway.

This Committee will comprise members of the University of Tasmania, the community sector, Tasmania Medicare Local and the Department of Health and Human Services. Together with the contributions and recommendations made by the previous Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council, the University of Tasmania report will inform the ongoing work of the Committee in devising a five-year strategic plan and advising on the future direction and strategies for preventive health. This will have a real and practical impact on our health system to help us achieve our goal of Tasmania having the healthiest population in Australia by 2025.

The Tasmanian Government values the work of the Committee and will take the outcomes of the inquiry into consideration when developing its five year strategic plan. I look forward to continuing to work together to progress the preventive health reform agenda for Tasmania.

Yours sincerely



Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Health

25 February 2015