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VICHEALTH URGES SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL PREVENTIVE HEALTH AGENCY

VicHealth CEO Todd Harper has welcomed the Federal Government's bid to establish the Australian National Preventive Health Agency (NPHA) and urges support from politicians on all sides when the issue is debated in Parliament today.

"It's great that the Federal Government is pushing for such an important initiative and I hope there is a lively and supportive discussion about it today," he said.

"This agency is a chance to improve Australia's health and an opportunity for governments to better allocate their precious health resources in years to come. Small measures now will result in big gains for health in the future."

The work of the proposed NPHA would complement findings in the recent *Assessing Cost-Effectiveness of Prevention* report, which was the result of five years of research by 130 leading health experts.

Led by the University of Queensland and Deakin University and supported by VicHealth and the Public Health Association of Australia, this research assessed 123 illness prevention measures to identify those which will prevent the most illness and premature deaths and those that are best value for money.

It showed that doubling investment in prevention from \$2 billion to \$4 billion would give Australians one million extra years of good health. This would increase prevention spend from just \$100 per person to \$200 per person each year.

Mr Harper added: "Illness costs us all, even those of us who have the good fortune to be fit and healthy, yet public health only receives a miniscule 2 per cent of the health budget. At a time when the obesity threat, among many other health challenges, is on our doorstep, we need to think differently about health.

"Today's debate is an important step to acknowledge the challenges our health system faces and how we can better allocate our resources to find solutions.

"As the world's first health promotion body, VicHealth has first-rate evidence that prevention works and is good value for money and I hope this is reflected in the debate today."

VicHealth research from 2009* showed that:

- If annual per capita alcohol consumption were reduced by one-third (already achieved in Norway), this would result in 98,000 fewer new cases of alcohol-caused disease and 21,000 fewer years lost to illness and death a year.
- Cutting physical inactivity by 5 per cent would save 1000 lives nationally, and result in 3000 fewer cases of illness every year. This equates to around \$129 million in savings, including \$48 million in the health sector and \$81 million in production and leisure.
- If tobacco smoking in Australia were reduced to 15 per cent (achieved in California), there could be 5000 lives saved a year and 158,000 fewer new cases annually of tobacco-caused illness.

* Source: *The health and economic benefits of reducing disease risk factors (2009)*

Todd Harper will attend the debate and is available for media interviews on 0417 561 412.