

24 October, 2013

Local action on smoking rates and obesity levels vital

The number of Australians who are overweight and obese is reaching alarming levels following the release of the latest two [National Health Performance Authority \(NHPA\) reports into tobacco smoking; and overweight and obesity rates for 2011-12.](#)

AML Alliance Chair, Dr Arn Sprogis said all Governments will need to increase their funding efforts to stop the increase in obesity and Medicare Locals are the local organisations which are able to tackle this critical task and although smoking rates are declining, this also remains a major community problem.

The release today of NHPA reports, has provided a valuable grassroots analysis of the public health status of Australia's communities on these two key preventative health issues.

The key findings of the NHPA reports show that nearly 2.8 million Australians are smoking daily, while nearly 10.8 million Australians are either overweight or obese – that's 63% of the population compared to the rate of 44% back in 1989, according to the reports.

AML Alliance Chair Dr Arn Sprogis, said these reports clearly show why a major effort at the community level by Medicare Locals is needed and renewed government support for this is overdue.

"For instance with the smoking rates, the range is 6% in one high socio-economic metropolitan Medicare Local compared to 28% for a rural Medicare Local. The difference between metropolitan and rural regions is reflected again in the overweight and obesity findings with 49% rated overweight or obese in a high socio-economic metropolitan Medicare Local compared to 79% for a rural Medicare Local.

"It's clear from these reports that the rural and regional areas of Australia are struggling with higher rates of overweight people, obesity and rates of smoking amongst adults. Governments need to provide equal resources and funding to realise the investment that's needed in rural and regional Australia in terms of health services, program and health prevention strategies, if inroads are to be made in improving these figures.

"Many Medicare Locals are already running healthy lifestyle programs in local communities to tackle smoking and obesity but much more needs to be done and Medicare Locals are ready to take on an increased role.

"Examples of the work Medicare Locals are doing at the frontline in the areas of smoking and obesity are outlined below and each of these tailored programs is reaching out to a demographic that needs specific attention and is ultimately working at keeping people well and out of hospital," Dr Sprogis said.

.../2

 FOLLOW US on Twitter: @amlalliance_ceo

For media interviews contact
Karen Warner
Media & Communications Adviser
t 02 6228 0819 m 0438 179 520
e kwerner@amlalliance.com.au

www.amlalliance.com.au

Ground Floor, Minter Ellison Building
25 National Circuit, Forrest ACT 2603
PO Box 4308 Manuka ACT 2603
t 02 6228 0800 f 02 6228 0899
ABN 56 157 818 883

Far North QLD ML partners with the Islanders Board of Industry Service (IBIS) to use their facilities and work with their nutritionists on joint healthy eating/cooking programs in each of the Torres Strait communities. FNQML have also developed partnerships to provide 50 free pairs of walking shoes for the Masig Island Walking Group to take on the 10,000 step challenge.

Goldfield-Midwest ML's dietitians have introduced a four week community-based educational program targeting overweight and obesity

Southern NSW ML funds *dietetics services* for one day per week in the Eurobodalla for type 2 diabetes management and one day per week in residential aged care facilities in both Bega and the Eurobodalla.

Wide Bay ML's *Tackling Smoking and Healthy Lifestyle* programs and activities are helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to get regular health checks, eat healthily, exercise and stop smoking as a way to improve health outcomes.

ACTML, in collaboration with the University of Canberra and the Heart Foundation ACT, is providing the HeartLink program which improves the rate at which people are identified at high risk of developing cardiovascular disease and offers lifestyle change support from a HeartLink Lifestyle Advisor to reduce their risk further.

Sydney North Shore and Beaches ML is delivering a workplace preventive health program in business precincts in which a qualified health professional conducts health checks which may include waist and BMI measurements (obesity), blood pressure and AUSDRISK diabetes assessment tool (chronic disease), K10 questionnaire (anxiety/depression), cancer awareness/early detection programs and healthy interventions (alcohol, drugs and smoking). Lifescrpts will be given for the GP to follow up on.

Western Sydney ML's SHAPE program is tackling the high rate of obesity in western Sydney. In 12 months over 140 programs have been delivered to children right through to the elderly with an additional focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. 73% of participants have increased their rate of exercise; and nearly 90% improved their dietary habits.

South Western Melbourne ML's Deadly Community Kitchen is bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members from Wyndham and Hobsons Bay to cook, socialise and learn about healthy lifestyle options.

Tasmania Medicare Local is working with community groups and local government in the state's south to help young parents and pregnant women kick the smoking habit.

South Eastern Melbourne ML in collaboration with Dandenong Neighbourhood House, is delivering a community cooking program for newly arrived disadvantaged migrant and refugee men. The program provides nutritional learning experiences covering the basics on how to cook healthy meals.

Greater Metro South Brisbane ML's Positive Impact program delivers a targeted approach to chronic disease prevention within primary care and community settings. Delivered by a multidisciplinary team of qualified health professionals, it provides a free and individually tailored phone coaching program focussed on nutrition, weight management and physical activity.