

Growing public support for government action to prevent chronic disease: study

MEDIA RELEASE

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Research released today by The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre shows an unexpected leap in public support for government action on chronic disease.

The landmark 2018 Australian Perceptions of Prevention Survey (AUSPOPS) found more than 60% of people supported a large role for government in maintaining people's health, up from 46% in 2016.

Study lead Dr Anne Grunseit, of the University of Sydney, said the study showed governments should not be so worried about 'nanny state' accusations when intervening to improve population health.

"These findings confirm the public wants stronger government intervention. A majority of Australians have given governments a licence to be bolder in taking action to prevent people from developing chronic diseases," she said.

More than half of all Australians have a chronic disease such as arthritis, cancer, respiratory disease, heart disease or diabetes. Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia and restrict how millions of Australians live and work.

The World Health Organization estimates that 80% of all heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and more than 40% of cancers could be prevented by addressing risk factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption, poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

Nearly all Australian adults have at least one of these risk factors and half have two or three.

The AUSPOPS survey found strong public support for actions such as banning smoking in cars with children, restricting advertising of unhealthy food to children, limiting salt in processed foods and compulsory immunisation at school entry.

A large majority (81%) of respondents agreed that it was OK for a government to pass laws to keep people from harming themselves. However, they did not abandon the idea that people should also be responsible for their own health.

"Over 90% thought that maintaining the community's health requires a combination of government regulation and personal responsibility," Dr Grunseit said.

Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) CEO Terry Slevin called for leadership on prevention and health promotion at every level.

“There is too little focus on preventing the enormous and anticipated wave of chronic disease that is hitting communities.

“The AUSPOPS survey backs calls for doing more.

“Many chronic diseases are preventable. There are a number of easy reforms Australia can make to stem the tide, and at relatively low cost compared with the high cost of medicines and hospital treatment,” Mr Slevin said.

PHAA will this week open its [Public Health Prevention Conference 2019](#), being held in Melbourne. The theme this year is ‘Smashing the Silos’. Across three days, experts from across public health will offer insights on health challenges in Australia and what needs to be done on prevention.

The AUSPOPS survey was conducted nationally among 2,600 respondents.

Media inquiries

Dr Grunseit and Terry Slevin are available for interview. Please contact:

- The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre: Helen Signy; helen.signy@saxinstitute.org.au; 0425 202 654
- PHAA Media: Toni Hassan; thassan@phaa.net.au; 0426 207 726.