

MEDIA RELEASE

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When will reports of unacceptable health inequity lead to action?

As another report outlines that Australians are dying too young and dying because of a lack of adequate treatment, the Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDoHA) continues to wonder when political and civic leaders will take their heads out of the sand and start to take meaningful action on health inequity.

The National Health Performance Authority's report released today, *Healthy Communities: Avoidable deaths and life expectancies in 2009-2011*, found 33,000 Australians die each year from avoidable causes like skin cancer, heart disease, lung cancer, suicide and alcohol-related diseases. It also found vast disparities in the number of avoidable deaths between areas, even when accounting for age, levels of poverty and geography.

Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDoHA) chair Martin Laverty said the NHPA research contains some very concerning statistics that a wealthy nation like Australia should not tolerate.

"Are our leaders simply going to watch more reports showing life expectancy disparities that are approaching double digits, two-thirds of Australians under 75 are dying from avoidable conditions and access to quality health care is patchy at best?" Mr Laverty asked.

"It seems like we read a report of this kind every couple of weeks while a Senate Inquiry report that was tabled nine months ago is gathering dust on politicians' bookshelves. This inertia is simply unacceptable."

Mr Laverty said the NHPA report again confirms what the Social Determinants of Health Alliance has been saying for almost a year. It confirms the findings of that bipartisan Senate Inquiry report that Australians in the most disadvantaged social groups are far more likely than those in the higher socioeconomic groups to have long-term physical or mental health problems.

"Coalition, Labor and Greens senators told us that the evidence is clear: Health inequities arise through the differing circumstances in which we grow, live, work and age. They can be changed and reduced," Mr Laverty said.

Mr Laverty said the evidence-based recommendations from the World Health Organisation's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health Report have reaped benefits around the world, but don't seem to be able to find their way to Australia's shores.

"Work needs to commence on building up a body of evidence for Australian governments to back those interventions supported by evidence of what works," he said. "When more than 33,000 Australians die each year from avoidable causes and the impact is felt more profoundly in the most vulnerable populations, this does not represent a fair go for all.

"How much more evidence does the government need to act? This report shows life expectancy and death rates vary according to social determinants such as income inequality, lack of affordable housing, poor transport, inadequate education and poor access to health services.

"The blueprint for reform is there. Where is the political will to do the right thing?"