



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH ALLIANCE

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Further evidence of urgent need to address health inequity

An alliance working for health equity in Australia says a new report from the COAG Reform Council provides further evidence of health gaps widening in this country, underlining the need for governments to follow international recommendations on how to address the social determinants of health in a way that's relevant to the Australian context.

Responding to the *Healthcare 2011–12: Comparing performance across Australia* report released today, the Social Determinants of Health Alliance this morning renewed its call for Parliament to adopt the World Health Organisation's *Closing the gap in a generation* report and for the social determinants of health to be considered across all policy areas.

The Social Determinants of Health Alliance (SDOHA), representing more than 45 health, social service and public policy organisations, was launched in February. Its members believe it is well and truly time for action on health inequity in a nation that aspires to give everyone a "fair go".

"The findings from COAG's report are shocking. How many more of these reports do we have to wait for – as health gaps widen further and further – before we take action on the social determinants of health?" SDOHA spokesman Michael Moore asked.

"The report shows that people from the most disadvantaged areas are more likely to be overweight or obese, and smoke. Those living outside major cities are also more likely to be overweight or obese, and smoke than those living in major cities. This is a country that prides itself on giving everyone a 'fair go', but it's clear from these findings that we're a long way from actually being fair."

SDOHA spokesman Martin Lavery said "the report also shows that when it comes to accessing elective surgery, people living in the most disadvantaged areas wait longer for elective surgery and the gap is widening. Similarly, while waiting times are improving for patients in major cities, they are getting worse for patients in remote areas."

COAG Reform Council chair John Brumby said in his letter to Prime Minister Julia Gillard that Australians "continue to experience health inequalities based on who they are, how much they earn and where they live. We do not see consistently strong performance across all states and territories in key areas of hospital care and continue to find that there are health inequalities for Indigenous Australians".

Professor Sharon Friel, a health equity professor at Australian National University and one of the lead advisors to the WHO's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, said this report reinforces the need to act on the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry report.

"Senators from across the three major parties worked diligently to produce a report that offered thoughtful recommendations on important first steps in addressing health inequity in this country," she said. "As we see another report today laying bare the extent of the challenges, the Alliance is hopeful this will remind governments around the country of the urgent need to implement those recommendations, which will support economic, social and health policy goals."