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MEDIA RELEASE

Australian of the Year and leading Health groups say Rudd's reform does not yet fit the bill.

A group of leading national prevention and community health organisations led by the Australian of the Year, Professor Patrick McGorry, is calling on the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to include fundamental principles on prevention, mental and Indigenous health at next week's Council of Australian Governments meeting.

Professor Pat McGorry, 2010 Australian of the Year, said: "Focusing on hospitals leaves out large and important parts of the health system. We have no specific commitments on a range of key areas including prevention, Indigenous and mental health. All these areas were identified by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission as requiring structural reform and significant new investment.

"Unless we see reforms in these areas we will not reduce Australia's dependence on hospital based care," Professor McGorry said. "The current proposals for health and hospital reform do not yet constitute the kind of real structural health reform that is necessary to deliver improved mental health outcomes."

Specifically, he called for government leaders to adopt a real, co-ordinated national mental health plan with new investment, new programs and a focus on improved outcomes, particularly for those millions of Australians who get no care at present.

Professor Mike Daube, President of the Public Health Association of Australia said, "Health reform should be about keeping people healthy as well as treating the sick. We need action now to protect our children's futures. The National Preventive Health Agency is a good start, but as the Prime Minister has said, it is crazy that only 2% of our health spend goes to prevention. A long-overdue tobacco tax increase would save lives – and enable massive boosts for prevention, mental health and Indigenous health."

Chair of the Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, Professor Ian Olver, said health system sustainability was a key to the Prime Minister's reform agenda, yet there had been no discussion of the thousands of unnecessary hospital admissions that could be avoided through improved prevention strategies.

"Cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and kidney disease could in many cases be prevented through the measures recommended by the Government's Preventative Health Taskforce, yet nowhere in the health reform discussion are we hearing about how governments will take these necessary steps," Professor Olver said.

"A sustainable health system is one that does not use up vital resources on chronic diseases that we know could be prevented through government actions."

Professor Rob Moodie, University of Melbourne and chair of the Federal Government's Preventative Health Taskforce, said: "Major reforms in prevention are vital to combat the huge burdens of premature death, disease and loss of productivity due to obesity, tobacco and harmful use of alcohol. These reforms, in three phases over the next ten years have been detailed in the National Preventative Health Strategy presented to government over 9 months ago."

Adjunct Professor John Mendoza, Chair of the National Advisory Council for Mental Health, said there is nothing to date that indicates the Government has a plan or a commitment to addressing the 12 recommendations made by the NHHRC on mental health.

"Mental health is responsible for the largest burden of disability in the Australian community and the third largest burden of disease after heart disease and all cancers, yet we have seen or heard nothing on how the government plans to address a mental health system in crisis".

Professor Ian Hickie, of the Brain and Mind Research Institute and a member of the National Advisory Council for Mental Health added, "Mental health is the largest cause of health-related disability in Australia. As highlighted by Christine Bennett, there can be no serious plan for health reform that does not include nation-wide mental health reform".

Dr Tony Hobbs, former chair of the Federal Government's Primary Health Care Expert Advisory Group and rural GP said "I am disappointed that much of the discussion about health reform remains focussed on hospital care rather than on preventive care, reducing health inequality particularly for Indigenous Australians, rural communities and those with mental health problems. None of this will be possible without system-wide change that directs health services to those most in need and is supported by e-health investment".

Available for Interview:

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- Professor Rob Moodie – 0413 838 657
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This statement has the support of:

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Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance
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