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**For immediate release**

**OVERALL HEALTH PLAN INVESTS IN PREVENTION – but Victorian Healthcare Association calls for a broader focus**

A focus on funding infrastructure and reducing hospital waiting lists while welcome, will not be enough to stop chronic disease epidemics like obesity, a peak public health group has warned.

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) welcomed major funding commitments to public health infrastructure in yesterday's state budget but called for a greater commitment to preventative health strategies.

Among the commitments welcomed by VHA was the \$150 million Cancer Action Plan and significant new funding for mental health initiatives, including a 24-hour 7-day-a-week mental health information telephone line and new mental health facilities at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Ballarat and Dandenong Hospitals.

VHA chief executive Trevor Carr said while these announcements are commendable further funding is required to target other illness categories critical to disease prevention.

A greater emphasis is needed on patient outcomes rather than patient throughput, traditionally measured by hospital waiting lists and emergency department presentations, Mr Carr said.

While VHA welcomes the increase in funding for the treatment of patients – including a commitment to lower elective surgery waiting lists – money cannot be put into treatment at the expense of prevention, Mr Carr said.

What this budget lacks is an overall emphasis on systematically promoting healthy behaviours to prevent illness and chronic disease.

"Preventing chronic disease is critical to avoid further strain on an already overstretched public health system with up to 32 per cent of admissions to acute services due to preventable illness."

"VHA has consistently advocated for the need for a population health approach which provides funding to support individuals to maintain good health and well-being – as opposed to the provision of funding only when people are ill."

"Currently less than half a percent of Victoria's health budget is spent on health advancement via health promotion programmes to improve individual health status and this must change."

VHA commends many initiatives in the state budget including: the \$179.2 million to maternity and child health services; \$104 million for information technology; \$185.7 million for the overhaul of the state's metropolitan and rural ambulance services; and \$32 million to assist hospitals more effectively manage demand on critical services.

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While these investments are needed, more work is required to develop an integrated whole-of-health approach across Victoria.



Rather than continuing to rely on acute bed-based methods of service delivery, investment in the prominence and continued growth of community based service models must occur.

"Victoria's health system should be the fence at the top of the cliff not an ambulance below," Mr Carr said.

The VHA is the peak advocacy body representing public health in Victoria. Its membership includes public hospitals, rural and regional health services, community health services and aged care facilities.

VHA's latest Position Statement "Tackling Obesity: Healthy Food Labelling in Victoria's Health Services calls for an overhaul of food labelling. A full copy of this report is available at [www.vha.org.au](http://www.vha.org.au).

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