

SPORTS PLAN MUST PROMOTE ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIVING ON AND OFF THE FIELD

17 August 2017: Health experts have welcomed Commonwealth Government plans to include preventive health as a central pillar of a new the national sports plan but have cautioned against developing only half a solution.

They argue that to be truly impactful, the plan must not only encourage participation in sports and physical activity, but must also ensure the removal of unhealthy sponsorship and advertising in sport.

The development of the National Sports Plan comes at a time when sports participation is decreasing and the burden of chronic disease is increasing.

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of illness disability and death in Australia, accounting for 83 per cent of all premature deaths, 66 per cent of the burden of disease, and significantly, a third of chronic disease is preventable. Treating chronic disease in Australia is estimated to cost \$27 billion annually, accounting for more than a third of our national health budget.

Bluearth Foundation Chief Executive, Wendy Gillett says she wholeheartedly welcomes the Australian Government's determination to ensure the National Sports Plan contributes to positive population health outcomes, but also argues this will only happen if the plan promotes healthy and active living both on and off the field.

"Sport and physical activity is only one part of the solution to prevent chronic disease. We can't encourage people to be physically active while failing to create a healthy environment for them to thrive in," Ms Gillett said.

FARE Chief Executive, Michael Thorn agrees.

"In our submission to the National Sports Plan, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education and Bluearth Foundation have called on the Commonwealth to phase out alcohol and junk food sponsorship from sport. We want sports to stop sending contradictory messages through unhealthy sponsors. Because as vital as physical activity is, half a solution is really no solution at all. Only by doing so, can it send a clear message about the value it places on the health and well-being of all Australians," Mr Thorn said.

Among its six recommendations the joint submission calls for the establishment of a sports sponsorship replacement fund, with revenue to be generated from a long overdue and much needed reform of the alcohol tax system.

This would be introduced together with legislative changes that would see alcohol advertising banned between the hours of 5am and 8:30pm across all media platforms, and including during televised sport.



The submission also calls for the Minister for Health and Sport and the Minister for Communications to work together to ensure the regulation of alcohol and junk food marketing and promotion is standardised, legislated and independent of the alcohol, food and advertising industries.

Mr Thorn says it is no surprise that the current system of self-regulation has failed to put the interests of Australians and Australian children first.

“It’s time to admit that self-regulation doesn’t work. Given the opportunity, the industry will always prioritise its profits over people. And with products such as alcohol and junk food where the potential harm is so high and the cost to all Australians so great, we can no longer allow a self-interested, and self-serving industry to regulate its own behaviour,” Mr Thorn said.

The joint submission also recommends that the focus of participation in sport should not just be at the elite level and proposes that a new entity be established with a clear focus on community participation and preventive health.

Ms Gillett says development of the National Sports Plan is an opportunity to reshape and realign the values of the nation’s sporting codes to ensure the great benefits they provide are not diminished through the promotion of products that inflict significant harm.

“It makes no sense to partner elite sport with unhealthy products; promoting burgers and beers when in fact good health is the key to sporting success and enjoyment at all levels of sport, whether it’s a kick in the park or going for gold,” Ms Gillett said.

Mr Thorn and Ms Gillett are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation’s greatest preventive health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.