



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH ALLIANCE

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New alliance calls for action on social determinants of health

A collaboration of health, social service and public policy organisations has today called on governments at all levels to consider how the legislative decisions they make will affect the health of the nation and address increasing health inequity across Australia.

Social Inclusion Minister Mark Butler will officially launch the Social Determinants of Health Alliance at Parliament House this morning, welcoming the formation of a group that will seek to share the knowledge its members have gained working with those most affected by inequity to bring about fundamental change to how governments address the health of Australians.

“Over many years, there has been growing evidence about the role of the social determinants of health – the everyday conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and play – in predicting the ongoing health of a person, but the response in Australia has been slow,” said Professor Fran Baum of Flinders University, who sat on the World Health Organisation’s Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. “This alliance is saying ‘enough is enough’ and ‘it’s time for action’.”

Australian National University Professor Sharon Friel was head of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health’s science secretariat. She said the current Senate Inquiry into Australia’s response to the WHO report *Closing a gap in a generation* creates an opportunity for progress to be made.

“There is some good work going on in Australia, but in a piecemeal fashion,” Professor Friel said. “We need an explicit policy framework and we need systematic analysis of what is happening around the country, and what is working. We may be underselling what is happening, but there’s currently no real way of knowing that.”

Professor Stephen Duckett, health program director at the Grattan Institute, said truly addressing health inequity requires a recalibration of how politicians, policy makers and health professionals think about disease.

“When we look at a condition like diabetes, prevalence is better explained by where you live than behavioural risk factors such as smoking or exercise,” he said.

Lin Hatfield Dodds, the chair of the Australian Social Inclusion Board, said Australia is lucky to have internationally renowned experts on the social determinants of health and “An advisory body like the Social Inclusion Board has much to gain from the insights that can be offered by those experts and by the new Alliance. I welcome its formation and launch today, and what it could mean for Australians’ health.”

Current members of the Social Determinants of Health Alliance include the Australian Council of Social Service, Australian Health Care Reform Alliance, Australian Health Promotion Association, Australian Medicare Local Alliance, Australian Nursing Federation, Catholic Health Australia, Centre for Health Equity Training Research & Evaluation, CRANaplus, Doctors Reform Society, HealthWest Partnership, Heart Foundation, Indigenous Allied Health Australia, NACCHO, People’s Health Movement Oz, Public Health Association of Australia, Ragg Ahmed, Sane Australia, Society of St Vincent de Paul, St Vincent’s Health Australia and Tasmania’s Social Determinants of Health Advocacy Network.