

TASKFORCESUBMISSION: submission

NAME: Professor Garry Jennings

POSITION: Director

ORGANISATION: Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute

SUBMISSION1:

The Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute welcomes the Rudd Government's focus on prevention and endorses the approach outlined in the National Preventative Health Taskforce discussion paper "Australia: the Healthiest Country by 2020".

Baker IDI engages in research and translational activities primarily related to obesity and its diabetic and cardiovascular complications through clinical and bench-top research in a tertiary hospital setting and among general practitioners and other health professionals. Baker IDI would like to offer this expertise as a both consultant and through collaborative projects.

Baker IDI recognises that obesity and associated chronic disease may be the single most important challenge for public health in the 21st century. The causes of obesity are complex, involving interactions between genes and behaviour against a background of environmental and socio-cultural influences. In addition, intrauterine factors also likely contribute to the risk of obesity later in life. The contemporary environment promotes obesity, and at most risk are vulnerable sectors of our community, including our indigenous populations.

Policies aimed solely at individuals are inadequate, and simply increasing the number or type of small-scale interventions is not enough to reverse this trend. Significant effective action to prevent obesity at a population level is required.

Baker IDI would like to highlight four specific areas and welcomes the opportunity of further development in partnership with the Taskforce in these or other identified areas of need:

- National surveillance and research will be key to developing and directing a cohesive preventive strategy. Baker IDI supports the suggested inclusion of biomedical risk factors for chronic disease in an expanded national nutrition and physical activity survey which should become a permanent national five-year study (page 48 of the Obesity Technical paper).
- The effects of the intrauterine environment on propensity for obesity and chronic disease in later life are likely mediated in part through epigenetics. Baker IDI has specific expertise to pinpoint key epigenetic modulators of an obesogenic environment during

pregnancy. Current studies involve animal models, but the recent acquisition of new equipment under a Commonwealth grant allows high throughput screening of the entire genome in humans.

- Workplace behaviours (as highlighted in the technical report on obesity) are a key target for lifestyle improvement. More work is needed to monitor and understand the impact of sedentary workplace behaviours on health. Such surveillance is a key prerequisite to workplace interventions to reduce sitting time and potentially improve long term health and productivity. Baker IDI has key expertise in this area and has commenced a “Stand-up Australia” program as a mechanism to address these issues.
- Baker IDI is currently tackling the Indigenous Health crisis through the Centre for Indigenous Vascular and Diabetes Research at Alice Springs Hospital which was established in 2007 under a Commonwealth grant. This purpose-built research and education facility supports the work of Alice Springs Hospital and the Northern Territory Government towards the provision of health services to local and remote Indigenous populations, and to rural and remote health in general.

We look forward to working with the Taskforce and would welcome any opportunity to contribute to the research, monitoring and evaluation work of the National Prevention Agency.

PRIVACY: yes

SUBMIT: Submit

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