

Population Health Congress 2008

Media Release

NATIONAL POPULATION HEALTH GROUPS CALL FOR ACTION Improved health requires action on environment, equity and food

Public health experts and practitioners from around the country and overseas gathered in Brisbane last week for the 2008 Population Health Congress. Each full day of the Congress, had its own theme resulting in calls to improve our health through a focus on *Environment and Health*, *Social Cohesion, Social Capital and Health* and *Food and Health*.

The highest priority for population health in the coming century was identified by the Congress. In calling on all sectors of the community to support the principles of sustainability with regard to climate change and the environment the Congress agreed that, "in the context of large-scale environmental change, including climate change, we call for urgent and immediate action to achieve a just and sustainable society as the greatest health priority this century."

This inaugural Congress was attended by over 1,300 people. It is Australasia's pre-eminent population health event, jointly hosted by the Australasian Epidemiological Association (AEA); Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine (AFPHM); Australian Health Promotion Association (APHA); and Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA).

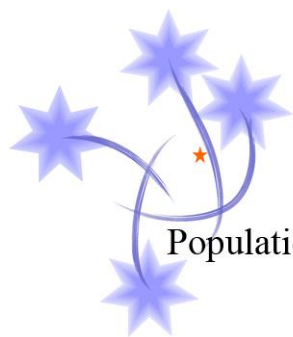
Following a presentation by Professor Sir Michael Marmot from the World Health Organisation, the Congress discussed the importance of equity in regard to improved health. He reported on research highlighting the gradient that exists between health and wealth, i.e. the wealthier a group is, the healthier it is. To ensure fairer health outcomes for all it is important to look beyond the impoverished, as important as that is, so that interventions are aimed at all levels of society.

A key issue coming from discussion on food was the challenge of dealing with obesity. The Congress concurred that one of the key goals for future health was to move beyond a narrow approach to food that is solely nutrient-focused. Instead, if we are to be successful in improving community eating, food should be seen in context. This means that the origins of food; environmental impact; use of whole foods; reduction in waste and cultural context are some of the issues that should be taken into account if our use of food is to improve.

The view of the Congress was circulated in a Communiqué (attached). The challenge of a healthier society goes well beyond personal well being. It requires immediate preventive action across the health and environmental spectrum to ensure that everyone in our community can enjoy equitable opportunity for better health outcomes.

For further information please contact one of the four organisations

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Congress Declaration

We the undersigned Australian and Australasian population health associations declare our support for and belief in, the values enunciated in the World Health Organisation declaration that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. We believe that health is a basic and universal human right and is essential for social and economic development.

We call on government at all levels, industry, civil society and other key stakeholders to act effectively on the social determinants of health that underpin many of the causes of ill health in our society and that lead to unfair health outcomes.

In the context of large-scale environmental change, including climate change, we call for urgent and immediate action to achieve a just and sustainable society as the greatest health priority this century.

We call on all key stakeholders to invest in sustainable policies, actions and infrastructure to address the determinants of health. In doing so we believe that individuals and society will be able to take action through informed decisions that allow the fullest attainment of health.

Furthermore we affirm our commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of the Australian and New Zealand populations through collective action that advocates for:

- Healthy public policy.
- Health development focusing on environments that support and enhance health.
- Reducing health inequities within and between populations.
- Improvements in the quality of life of the Australian and New Zealand populations.

Collectively, our associations share common ideals to reduce the burden of disease through processes that protect the population, prevent disease and promote individual and collective health and well being. We share knowledge and experience through research, professional training and communication. Through the use of evidence, our associations strive to influence through evidence, public policy that creates, supports and sustains healthy environments. We share a common belief that government support and community mobilisation are needed to effect change in policy and practice through multisectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration. Our associations share a common commitment to lobby for support to change the health care system to one that allocates resources equitably across the health continuum.

We agree in principle to reconvene a Congress in four years time to review our progress in achieving collective action on the above points and to bring together population health researchers, policy makers and program providers once again to share their experiences and knowledge in improving the health of our populations.

This declaration was signed by the presidents of the respective population health associations

Jane Halliday
President
Australian Epidemiological
Society

George Rubin
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Australasian Faculty of
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Ian White
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