

PHA urges continued focus on prevention

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The Public Health Association (PHA) is urging the members of a health ministerial advisory group to ensure prevention is high on the agenda, and not to underestimate the role bureaucrats play in preventing ill health. The membership of the group, which will advise on improving the quality and performance of the public health system, was announced today.

PHA National Executive Office, Dr Gay Keating, says the Government's focus on value for money is hugely important.

"The system should be able to see patients being treated sooner and better, but it's even more important that we stop people becoming really sick in the first place.

"One of the best ways to get good value is to keep people healthy and to get little problems sorted out before they become big problems. A lot of the health budget goes on illnesses that are largely preventable. These include infections, tobacco-related illnesses and type 2 diabetes.

"About one-in-five hospital beds is taken up with someone whose illness could have been prevented. Every preventable admission means that someone else goes further down the waiting list."

Dr Keating says it's important to focus on the results, not on an ideological position to reduce bureaucrats, as maintaining a level of bureaucracy is essential to ensuring good health and health services.

"Bureaucrats play an important part in the prevention of illness. Every day we rely on bureaucrats to keep our food and water supply safe. Other examples are the smokefree enforcement officers whose work leads to the prosecution of people selling cigarettes to kids; and the administrators who set up and maintain the systems to check that people's immunisations are up-to-date, that women are having their breast screening and cervical smears, that middle-aged men are getting their blood pressure checked, that people with diabetes are having their eyes checked and that older people are getting their flu shots.

"While the focus on frontline patient services is important, let's not underestimate the importance of preventing illness or getting in early, and the crucial role bureaucrats play in this."

ENDS

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The Public Health Association of New Zealand is a non-party political voluntary association, which provides a major forum for the exchange of information and stimulation of debate about public health in New Zealand.