

Health inequalities a “national shame” but preventable: PHA

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The Public Health Association (PHA) says today’s call by The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) for the Government and Health Sector urgently to address inequalities is further endorsement that we’ve had the wrong health focus for too long.

PHA National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating says New Zealand continues to perform poorly in terms of health outcomes when compared to other high income countries because we do not pay enough attention to the things that make us sick in the first place; and this is a major concern.

“Our health system is over-burdened with people suffering serious but preventable medical conditions. A large percentage of these arise because our poor and vulnerable, including many Māori and Pacific families, do not have access to the good health care or the freedom to make healthy choices that should be taken for granted.”

The NZMA’s Health Equity position statement, published in today’s *New Zealand Medical Journal*, says things like education, transport, and quality housing have a huge impact on health outcomes. It also emphasises that wealth and ethnicity play a huge, unfair part in the different rates of death and disease.

Dr Keating said it’s important to understand today’s call comes from doctors, the ones who see every day the burden of disease carried unfairly by our vulnerable families, and the suffering and the deaths that could have been prevented.

She says the PHA agrees with the NZMA that Government must focus more on policies which will give every child the best start, as a child’s early experiences have a profound influence on the diseases they suffer in later life.

“Our life-long health starts in our families and in our social environments when we are young. It doesn’t make sense to be focusing solely on the problem of providing more operations while we could free up hospital beds, now and in the future, if we did not have so many children languishing in poverty – which is the root cause of much of the problem.”

The PHA also agrees with the NZMA that child poverty in this country is a “widespread national shame” and says it is one for which we are all paying in terms of unnecessary ill health and an unsustainably expensive healthcare system.

For more information, contact:

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