

Health promotion disbandings make little sense – PHA

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The Public Health Association (PHA) is questioning government proposals to disestablish and merge a number of crown agencies, including The Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) and the Health Sponsorship Council.

PHA President Richard Egan says it makes little sense to be disbanding organisations that play such a critical role in health, and probably putting less funds into any new body. If the government wants to save money, this is the wrong place in which to do it.

“Health promotion needs to be well-funded. By preventing New Zealanders from developing health problems associated with alcohol, smoking or gambling, we’re actually saving massively in terms of social cost further down the line.”

The Health Sponsorship Council, which funds smokefree, problem gambling, and SunSmart services will be merged with ALAC into a new crown agency, but Dr Egan says this could be a serious mistake.

“ALAC is an autonomous crown entity which means it has an independent voice and can freely criticise government policies on alcohol. New Zealand is currently looking seriously at much-needed alcohol law reform, so one really has to ask why they’re taking this voice away right now.

“ALAC is also funded by alcohol tax levies that must be earmarked for alcohol programmes, so disestablishing it will not result in any significant savings for the taxpayer.”

Dr Egan says the timing of the proposals is especially odd in the light of the report, *Improving the Transition*, released today by the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor Sir Peter Gluckman, which stressed the importance of spending early on programmes to reduce the number of health problems that develop.

“If we don’t keep investing in prevention, we’ll just end up paying through the nose to pick up the pieces later,” Dr Egan said.

“It’s becoming pretty crowded with ambulances at the bottom of the cliff, and many lives are being ruined along the way.”

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