

Submission to the National Preventive Health Taskforce

Draft National Preventive Health Strategy

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Australian Academy of
Technology & Engineering

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DRAFT NATIONAL PREVENTIVE HEALTH STRATEGY

The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE)¹ welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the National Preventive Health Strategy. ATSE supports the vision and aims of the Strategy, which is a comprehensive roadmap for preventive health for the next ten years.

ATSE has been a strong advocate for a system-wide, evidence-based approach to supporting equitable good health, and provided recommendations for government, industry and research to that effect in our major report on technology readiness in Australia's health sector *A New Prescription: Preparing for a Healthcare Transformation* in 2020.² The report provided a roadmap to shift Australia's healthcare system towards a focus on prevention and wellness, enabled by technology. The most critical priority is the digitisation of health records, which underpin the technology solutions identified by ATSE.

Embracing new technologies will also be vital in ensuring that the benefits of a wellness system are available in regional areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to disadvantaged people in urban communities. Barriers to equitable outcomes include distance, communication difficulties, financial resources, education levels, accessibility, and shortages of healthcare workers. Mobile and telehealth services can easily and inexpensively help Australians overcome these obstacles and access the best available care in a timely way.

Based on the findings of this report and the expertise of ATSE's Fellows, ATSE recommends the following amendments to the draft National Preventive Health Strategy:

- full and rapid digitisation of healthcare information to underpin equitable access to preventative healthcare
- prioritising preventive health measures for vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- embedding patient-centred lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic such as the rapid uptake of remote healthcare
- planning to fully utilise a technology-supported health sector.

¹ The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering is a Learned Academy of independent, non-political experts helping Australians understand and use technology to solve complex problems. Bringing together Australia's leading thinkers in applied science, technology and engineering, ATSE provides impartial, practical and evidence-based advice on how to achieve sustainable solutions and advance prosperity.

² The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (2020) A new prescription – Preparing for a healthcare transformation. <https://www.atse.org.au/research-and-policy/publications/publication/a-new-prescription-preparing-for-a-healthcare-transformation/>

The National Preventative Health Strategy must include the role and opportunities of technology if it is to be successful, and critically it must include the role of electronic health records. Without a shift to electronic records, the fragmented healthcare system will not cope with increased volumes of data and the emergence of digital technologies, nor with the increasing personalisation of healthcare. Integrated care will be unachievable without electronic health records, which are essential for efficient, accurate, timely and patient-centred care.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of electronic healthcare and proved its efficacy in many areas, such as electronic prescriptions and telehealth.³ ATSE's 2020 report, *A new prescription: Preparing for a healthcare transformation*, highlighted a number of emerging and enabling technologies that will improve care and empower patients. Digital technologies will be key to delivering economical preventive care through faster, more efficient service delivery, and by analysing health data to improve system-wide resource management. Digital health services, including telehealth, apps and communications, will improve access to primary and specialist care and minimise regional and financial barriers.⁴

The Strategy must leverage the integration of technology in preventive healthcare, including:

- full and rapid digitisation of health records
- upgrading health infrastructure to use new technologies, and the development of interoperability standards for digital health
- enabling and upskilling the workforce to take advantage of new capabilities
- unlocking the opportunities to better utilise health data
- including technology in health literacy education to improve take-up and awareness of electronic healthcare
- ensuring the benefits new technology are equitably distributed

The draft Strategy is underpinned by a solid set of enablers and principles, and ATSE commends the inclusion of a specific aim and principle addressing health equity for underserved populations. ATSE urges the Taskforce to go further and embed a partnership approach to improving preventive health for these populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The place-based, community-driven responses to protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated how cooperation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, governments, and non-government health and community service providers can deliver very positive outcomes.⁵ The Strategy must affirm the centrality of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing and integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and perspectives throughout the Strategy to ensure this priority is made clear to all health providers and policy makers.⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic response also exposed some weaknesses in our health system that must be addressed in the Strategy. Adding an enabler around infrastructure and logistics would help to embed these lessons for a more resilient system. This includes working towards a system with clear

³ Duckett, S. & Stobart, A. (2020) 7 Lessons for Australia's health system from the coronavirus upheaval.

<https://theconversation.com/7-lessons-for-australias-health-system-from-the-coronavirus-upheaval-141122>

⁴ The Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (n 2)

⁵ The Lowitja Institute (2021) Leadership and legacy through crises: Keeping our mob safe. Close the gap campaign report 2021. https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Document/CTG_Report_2021_FINAL_WEB.pdf

⁶ The Lowitja Institute (2021) Leadership and legacy through crises: Keeping our mob safe. Close the gap campaign report 2021. https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Document/CTG_Report_2021_FINAL_WEB.pdf

responsibilities between providers (public, private, state and national), such that each authority or organisation is properly resourced to provide excellent care.

ATSE welcomes the collaborative approach taken by the draft Strategy. Australia is a world leader in medical research and home to many outstanding medical research institutes and universities. Encouraging and supporting collaboration between researchers, industry, clinicians and consumers in health precincts would help to translate research into practice and minimise duplication. To further boost this, targeted support is required for research and development, including investing in improving pathways to translation of research and commercialisation for Australian-developed medical technology. This needs to be enabled by fit-for-purpose regulation and market access pathways to market and implementation. Governments, for example, should actively encourage value-based preventive care through the structure of procurement and reimbursement systems.

Recent environmental events in Australia have had significant health impacts on our population, including extreme bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. Acting on climate change must therefore also be an urgent priority for the Preventive Health Strategy.^{7,8} Research leading to evidenced-based recommendations on how environmental impacts on health will be addressed to improve preventive health could be coordinated through a dedicated centre focusing on climate and health.

A copy of ATSE's report *A New Prescription* is attached, and ATSE would be pleased to provide further information, evidence or assistance to the Taskforce in this consultation. For more information, please contact Dr Esa Chen, Policy Analyst (Esa.Chen@atse.org.au).

⁷ Australian Academy of Science (2021) The risks to Australia of a 3°C warmer world.

<https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2021/risks-australia-three-deg-warmer-world-report.pdf>

⁸ Duckett S, Mackey W and Stobart A. (2020) Climate change and health: preparing for the next disaster.

<https://grattan.edu.au/report/climate-change-and-health-preparing-for-the-next-disaster/>