



AMA TASMANIA POLICY POSITION STATEMENT September 2019

Addressing intergenerational health disparities: The -1 to 5 Healthy Start Agenda

Position

The AMA recognises that many factors impact a child's health and wellbeing. In particular, a healthy start to life commencing with parental health pre-conception through to age 5 years, fundamentally impacts every person's lifelong health and wellbeing prospects. Many of the factors impacting the -1 to 5 years of life are influenced by the family, community and access to government services.

The AMA believes that all government policy, implementation strategies and actions can be assessed against five target domains so as to ensure every child has a healthy start to life. The five domains are:

1. **Healthy families:** ensure access to housing, food and employment which will help to provide good physical, mental health and emotional security to a child; provide programs to assist parental literacy and particularly health literacy, so parents can make well informed decisions that will impact positively on their children.
2. **Preconception planning:** help prospective parents to look after their own nutrition; stop or reduce the consumption of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs; increase iodine, folate and exercise; and reduce obesity
3. **Healthy pregnancy:** encourage exercise to help reduce obesity and increase fitness; encourage better general nutrition and increase iodine and folate; discourage consumption of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs
4. **Healthy early childhood:** promote exercise, play, general nutrition, iodine, folate and immunisations; encourage healthy family environments to help provide emotional and physical security for children; improve parental literacy and education
5. **Education for a healthy life:** support language development, which is the foundation of literacy and later learning

Background

The start children get from the beginning of pregnancy through to school age has a critical impact on health life-long. During this time genes are turned on and off, massive brain development occurs and the foundations of both good and poor health are laid. Parental health and parental environment are also critical factors impacting on a child's healthy start to life.

Issue

Tasmania has a higher portion of people living in a lower economic status group than other states. Around 120,000 Tasmanians live in poverty. Families can struggle to find stable accommodation and provide appropriate nutrition for their children. Access to medical care and appropriate health literacy can be challenging. The health, wellbeing and environment of the parents and family fundamentally impact the growth and development of the foetus as well as the child. A safe and stable family environment along with literacy precursors such as being read stories in early childhood and addressing family violence are critical to subsequent socialisation, wellbeing and educational opportunities when children enter to school system.

Summary

A health start to life in the period of -1 to 5 years age is critical to lifelong health and wellbeing. Health-related capacity building between -1 to 5 years age means requires support for children, their families and their communities. Government can play a key role through thoughtful design and implementation of all policies and programs, in ensuring all children get a health start to life.

Relevant AMA resources

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational dependency through health-related capacity building August 2011

References

The Health and Wellbeing of Tasmania's Children and Young People Report 2018 (Commissioner for Children)

Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework 2018 (Tasmanian Government)

Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy (2018-2021) (Tasmanian Education Department)

Suburbs with the worst smoking rates in Australia revealed (ABC 1 June 2019)

'I'm sleeping in my car': These are the victims of Hobart's housing affordability crisis (SBS News 8 July 2019)

Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage – ABS 2016 Australia snapshot

What does poverty look like in Tasmania? TasCOSS July 2019