

2015

FAT QUEENSLAND CAUSING A STATE OF EMERGENCY

Queensland Doctors want the state's obesity crisis declared a State of Emergency. Releasing AMA Queensland's 2015 Election Wish List, President Dr Shaun Rudd said eight out of ten Queenslanders will be too fat for their own good within just five years¹.

"This is disastrous for the health system – like a slow moving flood or smouldering bushfire." Dr Rudd said.

"It's crunch time for the next Queensland Government. We have to stem the obesity tide now, before it swamps our hospitals.

"Those three million overweight and obese people, the equivalent of south-east Queensland's entire population, pose an unprecedented challenge to the entire health system."

AMA Queensland's election platform focuses on four main areas: obesity, alcohol abuse, end-of-life care, and hospital technology.

Key recommendations include:

- Banning fast-food outlets from opening with 1km of new schools
- Subsidising fruit and vegetables for 'at-risk' communities
- Additional funding to allow more people to die at home
- Investing in a world-class IT system for Queensland hospitals.

AMA Queensland President Dr Shaun Rudd said all politicians have a vested interest in putting health first.

"Recent polls show more than 80 per cent of voters regard health as the major election issue²," Dr Rudd said.

"Being too fat, drunk and violent puts an enormous burden on our communities and our health care system but it doesn't have to be that way."

Dr Rudd urged all sides of politics to step up to the plate.

"It's no secret that Queensland has the shameful title of Fat Capital of Australia and we pay the price for that with bad health," Dr Rudd said.

Diabetes Queensland CEO Michelle Trute agreed urgent action was required.

"Obesity costs the Queensland economy more than \$11.6 billion per annum according to research from 2008, and with rates of overweight and obesity rapidly increasing we expect to see these costs increase in tandem," Ms Trute said.

"People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes which means they put a greater strain on our health system. This is clearly unsustainable.

"Type 2 diabetes can be prevented or delayed in almost 60 per cent of cases so it is clear that addressing obesity, one of the leading risk factors for type 2 diabetes, will help reduce the personal and economic costs."

AMA Queensland President-Elect Dr Chris Zappala said obesity could also lead to an increase in chronic pain, heart and sleep problems.

"Like a flood or bushfire, this is a state emergency and should be treated as such," Dr Zappala said.

About 1.1 million adults were obese, according to the 2014 Health of Queenslanders report, and 1.2 million were overweight; 75,000 children were obese and 146,000 overweight.

AMA Queensland has recommended:

- a ban on fast food outlets opening within one kilometre of new schools
- a ban on fast food meals on school campuses, and
- a pilot program to subsidise fruit and vegetables for "at-risk" communities.

"Communities in the far north and west pay exorbitant prices for fresh produce which means they're more likely to choose the cheap, processed option," Dr Rudd said. "We want to level the fresh food playing field for families across the state."

Other recommendations include:

- funding for interactive online learning program to fight obesity,
- a Fringe Benefits Tax-free bicycle purchase scheme, and
- a push for star rating on food packaging to be brought in earlier and be mandatory.

Alcohol-fuelled violence and the danger of excessive drinking were also on AMA Queensland's hit list.

Dr Rudd said the Government's Safe Night Out Strategy was a step in the right direction but focused only on violence in entertainment precincts and did not take into account the devastation caused by alcohol abuse in the home and small communities.

"Alcohol-related violence and illness damage us all, directly or indirectly," Dr Rudd said. "While most people like a quiet tittle, any emergency department doctor will tell you that the procession of booze-

fuelled injuries is unrelenting.

“More needs to be done to prevent alcohol-abuse, restrict alcohol advertising and sponsorship, and support doctors to provide counselling in hospitals.”

AMA Queensland has recommended:

- banning nightclubs from offering energy drinks mixed with alcohol after 10pm,
- setting up diversionary programs for minor alcohol related offences, and
- banning alcohol sponsorship of sporting events, youth music events and junior sports teams, clubs and programs.

End-of-life planning is also a major priority in AMA Queensland’s election document.

It called for a large-scale campaign to boost the number of Queenslanders with an Advance Care Plan, outlining how they want to spend their final days.

A recent Palliative Care Australia survey showed that while 74 per cent of Australians wanted to die at home, only about 16 per cent do so. 20 per cent die in hospices and 10 per cent in nursing homes.

Most people die in a hospital.

“We’re living longer than ever but not everyone has the luxury of mapping out their final days,” Dr Rudd said.

“We need a system where everyone can easily put together an Advance Care Plan and store it safely online so that health professionals can quickly read your wishes for end of life care.

“Information Technology offers us so many opportunities for better health care; it can also reduce the burden of paperwork.

“Unfortunately, some of Queensland’s regional health boards have reduced the number of administrative staff in hospitals, forcing doctors and nurses to spend more time on filing and bookkeeping.

“It would make untold sense for the Queensland Government to invest in integrated electronic health records and an ICT system that doesn’t lag behind the rest of the country.”

Dr Rudd called on the state’s leaders to make clear and measurable commitments to providing the best healthcare in the world.

“Our health system has been through the wringer and desperately needs to be future-proofed. We’re all

getting older and fatter and that's not going to make it any easier.”

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858. 1 http://www.health.qld.gov.au/cho_report/ 2 <http://www.9news.com.au/national/2015/01/12/01/32/Inp-better-at-health-management-newspoll#v3LKl0uzzcslag3c.99>