

By email 20/12/2005 08:59 AM

Dr J Goodall
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Dear Dr Goodall

re Review of the Health Act 1958-draft policy paper for
consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this review.

I am pleased to note that the draft policy paper recognises that modern public health of mental and physical health is now much more comprehensive than prevention of communicable diseases. The natural, built, social and economic environments are vital in supporting a positive approach to the basic hierarchy for necessities of life (air, water, food for nourishment) and general safety as well as equity, freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination. These are all core public health issues for healthy living which require articulation in the new Act.

Governments already have a mandate for the support and provision of the natural, built, social and economic environment to residents and visitors but not all embrace the concept of planning and creating a healthy environment in its fullest sense. I would therefore like to see these aspects of public health strengthened and in more detail than the draft policy paper provides.

The Object states that the new Act will aim to support programs that promote and advance, as well as protect, the public's health and reduce health inequalities (refer Objects, page x). However, it is striking (refer page 19) that there is absence of any discussion and/or recommendation that Councils employ an adequately trained Public Health (Promotion) Officer to carry out this function.

The absence of such a recommendation is in stark contrast to the detail given to the recommendation of the appointment of qualified Environment Health Officers. EHOs do not usually have the training or capacity to take responsibility for such an important role as public health planning for non-communicable diseases.

To reduce health inequalities and the cost of primary through tertiary health care, we must make a higher investment in public health strategies. Many of these can be accomplished through the natural, built, social and economic environments without additional cost - if only the leadership and commitment is provided to facilitate a different paradigm.

If the revised policy is serious about the public health objective directed towards the non-communicable diseases, then it must include a recommendation that adequately trained Public Health (Promotion) Officers be employed to carry out this function.

Yours sincerely

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