

## Excerpt from “Why Child Public Health should be included in the Strategic Plan of the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine”

Drs Bret Hart and Sharon Goldfeld (President Chapter Community Child Health)

*“...child public health [is] a rapidly emerging field and puts the health of children centre stage as society’s greatest asset.”*

Professor Siân Griffiths OBE MB Bchir FFPHM FRCP President UK Faculty of Public Health Medicine

### **Rationale for including children on the public health agenda**

- Child public health is potentially the most important – and most effective - activity in health and social care, encompassing as it does interventions in health, education, housing and public policy.
- Focusing on children highlights their contribution to contemporary society and future populations. Addressing the determinants of health and well-being for children and adolescents will improve population health and well-being overall.
- Recent developments in understanding the biology of mental and physical development, in the identification of childhood risk factors for adult disease, and the importance of early care, are now rekindling the interest of policy makers in the health of children and allowing them to see that interventions to improve child health may be very important to the improvement of public health in general.
- Combining the knowledge bases of all three schools of thought (psychoneuroimmunology, developmental neuroscience and psychology) and developing social policy which takes into account all three could have an important effect on public health. The impact that such policies could have on health in both adulthood and childhood could be as great as that delivered by the public health reforms of the last century.
- There is a need to join forces, in the face of powerful financial interests, to advocate for a healthier environment for children (against the tobacco industry, the motor industry, and baby milk manufacturers)
- Prevention and early intervention services have the greatest effect on health, education and welfare when they cover a broad range of issues and are provided through a coordinated network.
- Children represent a vulnerable group in society and their health and well-being thus reflect the will and ability of society to care for its citizens.
- Children have no political power and are not represented in formal or informal pressure groups able to influence health and related policies.
- There is now a large body of literature attesting to the vital importance of child health and pointing to approaches to improvement. As a result public health interest in child health is now being rekindled across the world.
- The political glasnost on social inequalities in health and recognition at a professional level that these inequalities have their most noxious impact on children.
- The need to maintain high levels of immunisation and the need to modernise the child health surveillance programme
- The rediscovery of the “life course approach to health” and of “cycles of disadvantage”
- Publication of research which shows that it is possible to have an impact on intractable adult public health problems by intervention in early childhood.
- Promoting health from the beginning of life should improve health and well-being both at midlife and in later years while at the same time reducing the cost of treating degenerative diseases.