

**Sent:** Friday, 7 May 2004 1:28 PM  
**To:** demographics@treasury.gov.au  
**Cc:** 'Alexandra Rothern'

**Subject:** Australia's Demographic Challenges

Having read the Australia's Demographic Challenges paper, it is obvious that Australia needs to make some important decisions to secure a viable future for our children.

Having worked in both the Health Promotion and Aged Care industries it is imperative that incentives be given to people to adopt healthy lifestyles and in particular to increase the activity levels of all age groups in the population.

I was employed in the Aged Care industry to initiate health and fitness activities for residents of retirement villages and aged person hostels. While it was difficult to convince older individuals that exercise was important to them, those that participated had much improved quality of life. Improved fitness at any age leads to reduced health costs, enhanced quality of life and greater ability to participate in the workforce. The benefits are multifaceted and have significant benefits to the community.

As overweight and obesity levels continue to increase it is imperative that action be taken to reverse this trend. Activity is the single most important component in combating obesity and the earlier the lifestyle habit of regular exercise is started the greater the chance of lifetime compliance.

The typical pattern of people keeping relatively fit until early adulthood has changed and many children are now unfit and overweight. This sets them up to for a lifetime of trying to combat obesity and reduced fitness. This trend must be reversed or the health system will never be able to keep up. In addition, the difficulty of caring for an overweight senior will make it impossible for the Aged Care sector to cope with an obese aged generation.

Young adults need to be encouraged and supported to maintain their natural fitness as they enter the workforce. It is common for the fitness levels of people leaving school and organised sports to decline rapidly as they enter the workforce. This needs to change. It is significantly harder for an individual to regain lost fitness in their 40's and 50's than to maintain fitness levels. Like superannuation, an investment made early into the health and fitness makes huge differences in later life. It also requires much smaller ongoing commitment to one's fitness than that required to reverse years of inactivity.

In summary, without doubt the single greatest factor that will impact the prosperity and economic viability of our society is the current activity levels of all ages but in particular our younger generations. If 10% of the current expenditure on health was diverted to preventative programs the long term benefits would be exponential.

In addition, if money from the welfare budget was used to encourage welfare recipients to maintain their personal health and fitness levels the benefits would be far reaching and long term.

We need a community of fit and healthy individuals to have any chance of a decent quality of life for future generations.

Activity is the key to achieving this and government must introduce initiatives to encourage and support this. The longer this is left the harder it will be to change the mindset of society that obesity and inactivity are the norm.

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