

# Transforming the Sleep Health of Australians

February 2020

## What is needed

- Improvement in the sleep health of Australians to enhance mental health and reduce chronic disease risk.
- Reduction in the current economic burden of poor and inadequate sleep to the Australian economy, which is costed at \$66.3 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> Inadequate sleep is a regular problem for 40% of all Australians.<sup>2</sup>
- Funding for a world leading comprehensive sleep health strategy as an integral component of a broader preventative health plan. Our joint Sleep Health Foundation/ Australasian Sleep Association proposal to deliver this strategy is for \$28.9M, staged over 5 years (year 1 = \$5.8M). (See our *Pre-Budget Submission*, submitted in December 2019, for more details).

## Building on the 2019 Bedtime Reading Parliamentary Report

In September 2018 a Parliamentary Inquiry into sleep health awareness was convened by the Federal Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, with the encouragement and support of the Minister of Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP. The report of the inquiry, *Bedtime Reading*, was released in April 2019 and detailed 11 major recommendations. These recognised **sleep as the third pillar of a healthy lifestyle**, alongside nutrition and exercise, and called for improved access to services and therapies to address sleep problems.

We wish to address two key recommendations (8 and 9) through a costed 5-year **Sleep Health Awareness and Behaviour Change Campaign** to be conducted in partnership with all states and territories and key stakeholder groups. This would be supported by a comprehensive Primary Healthcare Practitioner Sleep Education Program involving key stakeholders and utilising evidence-based interactive tools. (*Pre-Budget Submission*, December 2019)

## Alignment with current national health priorities

The proposal is well aligned with the:

- Health Minister's Long-Term National Health Plan (pillar 3 - prioritising mental and preventive health)
- Productivity Commission Mental Health Report (reducing the impact of mental ill-health and suicide)
- National Preventive Health Strategy (preventing and managing chronic disease)
- Recommendations from the 2019 Parliamentary Inquiry into Sleep Health Awareness

The proposal is particularly timely because the government wishes to address the **health consequences of the recent bushfires**. These have caused profound anxiety, stress and trauma, which can directly lead to long term impairment of sleep quality and quantity. It is well established that a period of poor sleep due to emotional stress can quickly lead to chronic insomnia<sup>3</sup>, even when the initial stressor has passed. Thus Australia's prevalence of chronic insomnia could be expected to significantly increase from its current level of 15%<sup>4</sup> in the medium term due to psychological distress resulting from the bushfire disaster. The proposed program will assist with reducing the burden of this distress.

## Reduce mental ill-health

Improving sleep quantity and quality and better diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders will have a profound effect on reducing mental ill-health. Sleep disturbance predicts the development of depression, anxiety and suicide and hinders the response to treatment. Treatment of sleep disorders (e.g. continuous positive airway pressure for sleep apnoea, cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia) reduces the burden of clinical depression, anxiety and suicide ideation.



drive **15** chronic conditions

accounting for **80%** of total costs for all chronic illnesses worldwide

- 1 Diabetes
- 2 Coronary Artery Disease
- 3 Hypertension
- 4 Back Pain
- 5 Obesity
- 6 Cancer
- 7 Asthma
- 8 Arthritis

- 9 Allergies
- 10 Sinusitis
- 11 Depression
- 12 Congestive Heart Failure
- 13 Lung Disease (COPD)
- 14 Kidney Disease
- 15 High Cholesterol

## Reduce chronic disease and save lives

Improvements in sleep health will prevent or reduce the impact of the most significant chronic diseases affecting Australians (see Figure<sup>5</sup>). Further, it is estimated that there are over 3,000 deaths from sleep loss annually in Australia (includes workplace and driving accidents, sequela of heart disease and diabetes, sleep disorders).<sup>1</sup>

## Reduce the economic burden of sleep ill-health

It costs the Australian economy more to *not* treat sleep apnoea than to treat it, with net savings of \$AU470 per person treated per year when the well-being, productivity and safety gains are taken into account.<sup>6</sup> Treating insomnia with cognitive behavioural therapy (e.g. with the internet) has also been shown to be highly cost effective.<sup>7</sup>

The annual economic burden relating to poor and inadequate sleep is \$66.3 billion.<sup>1</sup> A reduction in the number of Australians having inadequate sleep from 40% to 30%, an achievable aim based on other successful public education and intervention campaigns,<sup>8</sup> would **save the economy \$16.5 billion annually**.

## Who we are

The Sleep Health Foundation (SHF) is Australia's leading advocate for healthy sleep. Its mission is *to improve people's lives through better sleep*.

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The Australasian Sleep Association (ASA) is Australia's peak scientific body for sleep medicine and science professionals, *promoting sleep health and sleep science*.

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