



**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

**Public Health Association of Australia  
submission on the *Commonwealth  
Electoral Amendment (Real Time  
Disclosure of Political Donations) Bill 2019***

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## Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Preamble</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The Public Health Association of Australia</b> .....             | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Vision for a healthy population</b> .....                        | <b>3</b> |
| <b>Mission for the Public Health Association of Australia</b> ..... | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The ‘Real Time Disclosure’ Bill</b>                              | <b>4</b> |



## Preamble

### **The Public Health Association of Australia**

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public's health in Australia.

The PHAA works to ensure that the public's health is improved through sustained and determined efforts of the Board, the National Office, the State and Territory Branches, the Special Interest Groups and members.

The efforts of the PHAA are enhanced by our vision for a healthy Australia and by engaging with like-minded stakeholders in order to build coalitions of interest that influence public opinion, the media, political parties and governments.

Health is a human right, a vital resource for everyday life, and key factor in sustainability. Health equity and inequity do not exist in isolation from the conditions that underpin people's health. The health status of all people is impacted by the social, cultural, political, environmental and economic determinants of health. Specific focus on these determinants is necessary to reduce the unfair and unjust effects of conditions of living that cause poor health and disease. These determinants underpin the strategic direction of the Association.

All members of the Association are committed to better health outcomes based on these principles.

### **Vision for a healthy population**

A healthy region, a healthy nation, healthy people: living in an equitable society underpinned by a well-functioning ecosystem and a healthy environment, improving and promoting health for all.

The reduction of social and health inequities should be an over-arching goal of national policy and recognised as a key measure of our progress as a society. All public health activities and related government policy should be directed towards reducing social and health inequity nationally and, where possible, internationally.

### **Mission for the Public Health Association of Australia**

As the leading national peak body for public health representation and advocacy, to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.



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## The 'Real Time Disclosure' Bill

PHAA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's consideration of the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Real Time Disclosure of Political Donations) Bill 2019*, recently presented to the House by Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP.

The pursuit of strong public policy on public health issues often involves countering corporate influence on government policy making that undermines the public good, particularly where business sectors which are responsible for unhealthy foods, products, services and industries are operating to distort public decision-making and regulation to their financial benefit. For this reason, PHAA has monitored developments in the field of political financial regulation, including laws governing political donations, disclosure and expenditures.

In October 2017 PHAA made a [submission](#) to the inquiry of the Senate Select Committee into the Political Influence of Donations.

In January 2018 PHAA made a related [submission](#) to JSCEM addressing the *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017*.

These two submissions (particularly the former) lay out our organisation's general framework for addressing the issue of political finance regulation.

In our Senate Select Committee submission (2017), we wrote that:

"The Commonwealth is lagging behind the states and territories on making improvements in transparency, and needs to take a leadership role in creating an integrated, transparent, evasion-proof donations reporting system.

Influence purchasing can also occur through mechanisms other than reportable donations, including gifts, event sponsorship, fundraising events, fees for membership to and attendance at networking forums and hosting events. A tightening of the system needs to include each of these methods of seeking influence, in order to be effective.

Transparency would be further enhanced through public disclosure of all invitations to events hosted by donors, and of all meetings between donors or their representatives, and political candidates, politicians and political parties and their representatives. Such information presented alongside donation disclosures would present a clearer picture of the influence of political donations. If there is no undue influence being purchased by donations, there is nothing to fear from such transparency." (p.7)

"... If donations are to be allowed, transparency must be paramount. If the donations are truly not seeking to purchase influence, and are not having that effect, there is no reason for secrecy. There should be no ability to conceal the identity of the donor through the use of associated entities; the public should have real time access to complete, national and state/territory information about all donations made to any political party, candidate and election campaign, regardless of the amount; and certain industries including tobacco, liquor and gambling industries and associations should be banned from making donations in recognition of the public health damage of their products." (p.8)

Our recommendations included the following:

- "Political donations should be banned
- If donations are to be maintained, or in the meantime:
  - There should be a single national online register of all donations, regardless of the amount, updated daily for real-time disclosures ..." (p.9)

*PHAA submission on Electoral Amendment (Real Time Disclosure of Political Donations) Bill 2019*

We restate those comments. For these reasons, we support the present Bill.

However, we note that the present Bill deals with only one limited aspect of the overall regulatory reform which is desirable. Parliament should address related issues of removing disclosure thresholds, limiting donations to those from individuals only, reporting of in-kind donations and gifts in the same way as financial donations, closing loopholes allowing evasion of reporting obligations, and the need for efficient interaction of the state and Commonwealth schemes.

That said, the present bill has been drafted to at least improve the situation on the narrow aspects which it covers. The Bill should be passed promptly, and other reforms should also be pursued as speedily as possible.

The PHAA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information or have any queries.

  
Terry Slevin  
Chief Executive Officer  
Public Health Association of Australia

17 October 2019