

Media Release

RACP calls for health equity in all government policies

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The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) is supportive of increases to the Accommodation Supplement announced by the New Zealand Government in its 2017 Budget, but warned that issues of housing quality and availability need urgent attention to improve rates of poverty-related hospitalisations and health outcomes.

RACP New Zealand President Dr Jonathan Christiansen said: “while it represents assistance for thousands of families who have been under enormous pressure from rapidly increasing housing costs, access to healthy homes that are affordable remains an issue.

“New Zealand homes, particularly rented homes, tend to be cold, damp, hard to ventilate and expensive to heat.

“This can lead to children and adults developing chronic respiratory conditions which often require hospitalisation and increases the risk of infectious disease in overcrowded homes.”

Other initiatives announced today shows the Government continues to prioritise New Zealanders at risk of poor health, social and education outcomes as part of its Social Investment package:

- \$28.1m to expand Family Start
- \$34.7m to support children with behavioural issues
- \$19.5m for the Intensive Work and Income Client Support Service
- \$11.6m for prisoners at risk of self-harm and suicide

Dr Christiansen said these initiatives are well intended and are important steps towards health equity. However he added there is a need for more holistic approaches to addressing the structural determinants of good health, including healthy housing, ‘good’ work and whānau wellbeing.

“Ensuring whānau are supported to lead healthy lives by addressing the causes of poor health will lead to reduced costs for the health system and greater health equity.

“The need for more support for affordable, healthy housing; programmes and initiatives to assist young people not in education, employment or training; and measures to improve our food environments to reduce rates of childhood obesity are urgently needed,” Dr Christiansen said.

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 15,000 physicians and 7,500 trainee physicians across Australia and New Zealand.

The College represents a broad range of medical specialties including general medicine, paediatrics and child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology, public health medicine, occupational and environmental medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, geriatric medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients.

The College offers 60 training pathways. These lead to the award of one of seven qualifications that align with 45 specialist titles recognised by the Medical Board of Australia or allow for registration in nine vocational scopes with the Medical Council of New Zealand.