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No, Minister! More – not less – uni sport

Federal Government plans to abolish compulsory student union fees that pay for sport and physical activity at universities is devastating news - not just for sport but also for those who are trying to deal with the problems of overweight and obesity – one of the most serious health problem of our time.

This was stated today by sports physician Dr John Orchard, spokesman for Sports Medicine Australia (SMA), the peak body representing sports medicine, sports science and public health professionals around Australia.

“The Government’s plans are equally harmful to the work of practitioners in the areas of medicine and health – public health, cardiology, endocrinology, oncology, neurology, etc -- where activity and exercise have proved to be major instruments of disease prevention

“Only today, we have news of truly depressing research showing that overweight and obesity which are growing alarmingly among our young people, will cut life expectancy levels in 20 or so years.”

SMA President Marilyn Feenstra, sports podiatrist, points out that “at a time when physical activity levels are falling and obesity rates rising, the last thing a Government should be doing is cutting infrastructure and services that support sport and physical activity”.

“We know that there is a risk reduction of around 30% in all-cause mortality for those who can achieve 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on most days of the week, yet fewer and fewer people are managing to reach these levels.

“A recent special edition of SMA’s Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport detailed the growing range of health areas beneficially affected by increased sport and physical activity. The same edition noted ‘*an interesting policy challenge has been the slow uptake of this evidence by health decision makers.*’ Policymakers like Dr Nelson need to find ways to implement findings such as those published in the JSMS – not wreck opportunities that currently exist, Ms Feenstra said.

“This policy will be terrible for sports participation.”

“The sad thing,” Dr Orchard said, “is that Dr Nelson’s view reflects a prevailing attitude that busy people can’t and shouldn’t find the time to play sport. As a society we are already paying the price for this, with inactivity being equal to smoking as the No. 1 preventable risk factor for disease.”

media release

“Mr Howard claims to be a sports fan but, if he doesn’t think through policies like Dr Nelson’s more carefully, he might find that his legacy will be of a Prime Minister who presided over the greatest drop in physical activity levels in Australia’s history,” Dr Orchard said.

He urged colleagues and other health professionals to oppose the Government’s plans.

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