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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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FIRST EVER NATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH POLICY

The Rudd Government will develop Australia's first ever National Men's Health Policy – in recognition of the fact that men often have poorer health than women, are likely to die earlier, and are at greater risk of suicide.

To mark the start of International Men's Health Week, Minister for Health Nicola Roxon is launching the paper *Setting the scene: developing a men's health policy for Australia*.

As an initial downpayment on a broader approach, the Government will invest:

- \$460,000 to help prevent suicide in men, through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy
- \$95,000 to encourage men to see their GP

Men's health is too often overlooked. This comes at a cost. We know that:

- Men are expected to live 4.8 years less than women
- Men are three times more likely to commit suicide
- Men experience 70 per cent of the burden of disease related to injury
- Men are over-represented in deaths related to HIV/AIDS.

The health of Indigenous men is also significantly worse than for any other group in Australia, with an average life expectancy of only 59 years – some 20 years less than non-Indigenous Australian males.

The Government's decision to develop a National Men's Health Policy recognises that men have specific health needs and challenges.

The funding for the National Suicide Prevention Strategy will include:

- \$122,000 for the Men's Health Information and Resource Centre Men's Shed, University of Western Sydney;
- \$80,000 for the Toowoomba Older Men's Network (TOMNet);
- \$150,000 for OZHelp Tasmania, a workplace program; and
- \$117,000 for INCOLink in Victoria to undertake suicide prevention with apprentices in the building and construction industry.

Funding of \$95,000 will be provided to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners to help establish the “Would you pass a Roadworthy?” campaign – to encourage men to see their GP for preventive health checks.

Men’s health deserves attention. Over the next twelve months, the Government will develop a comprehensive men’s health policy. We want to know what men consider to be the priorities for their health, and we want to look at how we can build up the evidence base in this area, including opportunities for research over the long term.

Prostate cancer is now the most commonly diagnosed internal cancer in Australia, with more than 15,000 cases diagnosed each year. Prostate cancer is also the second leading cause of cancer death in Australian men, with almost 3,000 dying of prostate cancer in 2005.

This was recognised in last month’s Federal Budget, with the Government committing \$15 million to set up two dedicated prostate cancer research centres.

Australian men have the second highest rate of bowel cancer in the world, after New Zealand. Bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in Australian men, after prostate cancer. And yet, it is one of the most preventable cancers.

The Government has responded by expanding the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program at a cost of \$87.4 million over three years.

Consultations will be held throughout Australia, including a forum to be held in Canberra towards the end of 2008.

A copy of the paper on the development of a National Men’s Health Policy can be found at www.health.gov.au/menshealthpolicy

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