

Date: April 13th 2015

Australasian Medical Research Societies applaud Federal Government efforts to strengthen the nation's vaccination programs.

News Release.

Vaccination represents one of the safest and most effective means of protecting us against a range of devastating diseases, and its effectiveness in maintaining disease control, including protection of unvaccinated individuals, depends on the great majority of the community being immunised (herd immunity). Herd immunity helps protect babies and young children prior to them being fully vaccinated, and also the sick or elderly with reduced immune function and those individuals who, for legitimate medical reasons, cannot be vaccinated.

Figures from the National Health Reporting Authority show that while policies aiming to achieve high vaccination rates are working in many locations, there remain areas where vaccination rates are low. In some regions of Australia, over 7% of families have registered as conscientious objectors, leading to pockets of increased susceptibility to infectious diseases.

We applaud changes to the nation's welfare system that will prevent conscientious objectors from accessing family tax benefits where vaccination is normally a prerequisite. We believe that this strategy will help to increase vaccine coverage, particularly in areas where vaccination rates are low.

Other measures to drive further increases in vaccination uptake are necessary. For example, indigenous and socially isolated Australians, and recent immigrants, continue to have lower vaccination rates. One way to address this is to develop a system of home visits by vaccination providers, along with further public education into the safety and efficacy of this important form of preventative medicine. We encourage the government to use any funds saved through these policy changes to invest in these additional activities and increase protection against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Our respective scientific societies: the Australasian Virology Society, the Australasian Society for Immunology, the Australasian Society for Clinical Immunology and Allergy, and the Australian Society for Microbiology, collectively represent approximately 4000 members that include Australia and New Zealand's most prominent researchers, clinicians and scientists working with infectious diseases and the means for their management and prevention. We applaud government policy guided by solid scientific evidence.

Gustav Nossal, Emeritus Professor, The University of Melbourne.

Professor Dale Godfrey, past President, Australasian Society for Immunology

Professor Christopher Goodnow, President, Australasian Society for Immunology

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