

Partnering for Prevention

Strengthening Australia's chronic disease prevention system

April 2026

Phase 1 findings: perspectives from primary prevention



Chronic disease prevention operates within a complex system involving many entities, sectors and influences.



Leaders across prevention worked together to identify where and how the system can be strengthened.



Nine interdependent action areas provide a clear and shared direction for strengthening the system.

Key messages

- Nine interdependent areas define where action is needed to strengthen the chronic disease prevention system in Australia, bringing together a shared and structured view of what must change.
- Three areas — cross-sector partnerships, embedding equity and communicating the value of prevention — are cross-cutting in nature and shape how action is implemented and sustained across the system.
- This work moves beyond describing longstanding challenges. It brings together collective insight from leaders across government and non-government organisations to establish a common direction for strengthening the prevention system.
- By building shared understanding and alignment on where and how to act, this work creates a foundation for more effective, efficient and equitable investment in chronic disease prevention.

The project: Partnering for prevention: strengthening the Australian chronic disease prevention system

Phase reported in this brief: Phase 1: perspectives from primary prevention

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Why is this issue important?

Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and many cancers remain the leading causes of illness, disability and premature death in Australia.¹ Much of this burden is preventable, yet the health system and society continue to bear the growing consequences of inaction.

Preventing chronic disease requires coordinated action across governments, health services, communities and sectors beyond health.^{2,3} However, action is often fragmented, with responsibilities distributed across levels of government, organisations and sectors.

Chronic disease prevention operates within a complex system of organisations, policies, resources and relationships.⁴ Yet the prevention system itself has not been clearly described or collectively examined in Australia. Without a shared understanding of how the system functions, it is difficult to identify where change is needed or how organisations can work together effectively.

The Partnering for Prevention initiative, led by The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, addresses this gap by working with leaders across prevention to identify opportunities to strengthen the system.

What did we do?

Phase 1 of the initiative focused on hearing perspectives from the health sector working on primary prevention.

Two participatory workshops brought together senior leaders from government and non-government organisations working in chronic disease prevention at national and state levels.

Participants worked together to:

- identify key entities within the Australian chronic disease prevention system
- explore how the system currently functions
- identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening the system
- articulate practical actions to strengthen the system.

Insights from the first workshop were synthesised into key themes, which informed the identification of areas for system strengthening. These were further developed into practical actions in the second workshop.

What did we find?

Participants identified nine interdependent action areas that together define the key elements of a stronger chronic disease prevention system in Australia (Figure 1). These areas are grouped into three domains: system stewardship, system infrastructure and system-wide action.

Three action areas within the system-wide domain — developing cross-sector partnerships, embedding equity and communicating the value of prevention — are cross-cutting in nature (Figure 2). They influence how action is shaped across all parts of the system.

Strengthening the system requires coordinated progress across all nine areas. Participants also identified specific actions within each area to support implementation in practice. These will be further developed through later phases of the initiative to inform a shared roadmap. Further detail is provided in Appendix 1.

System stewardship

Clear leadership, coordination and accountability are essential for a strong prevention system.

System infrastructure

A well-functioning prevention system requires the capability and infrastructure to support evidence-informed action.

System-wide action

Effective prevention requires collaboration across sectors, embedding equity across all aspects of prevention, and engagement with communities.

Figure 1. Domains and action areas for strengthening the chronic disease prevention system.

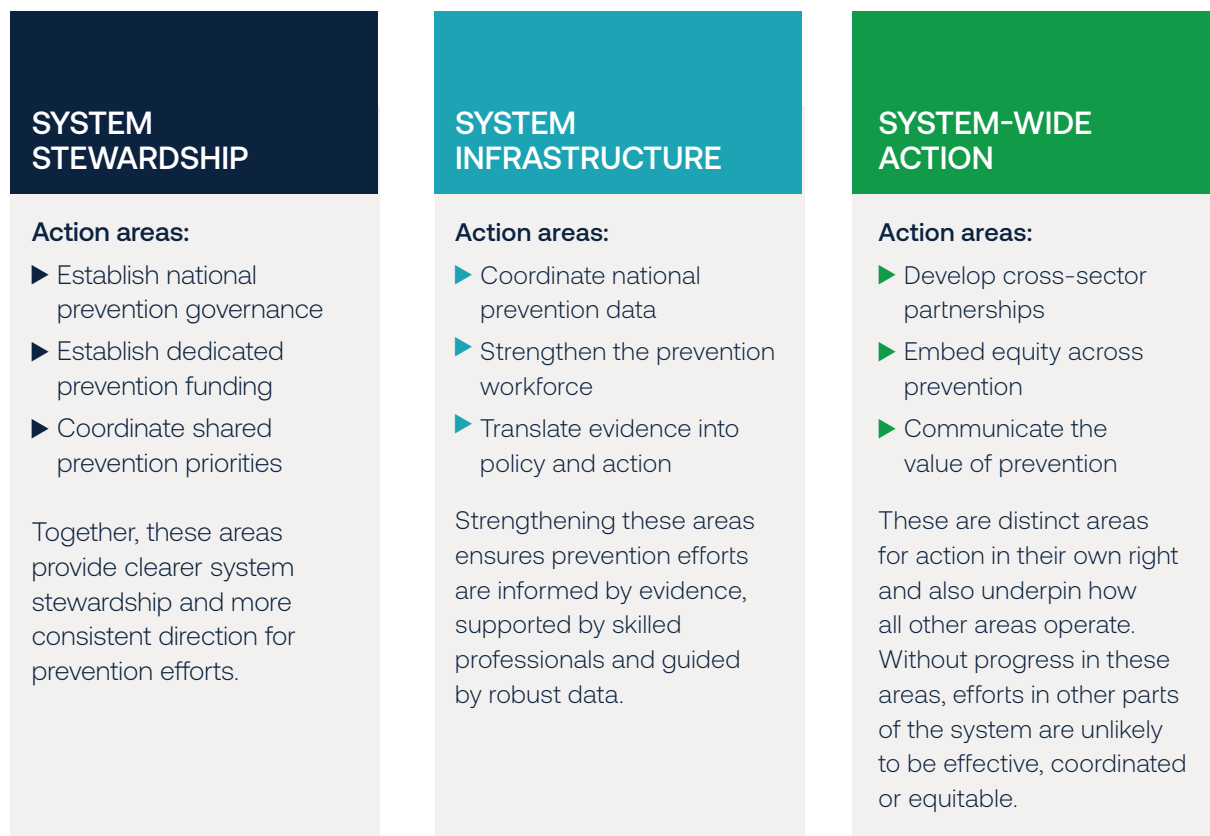
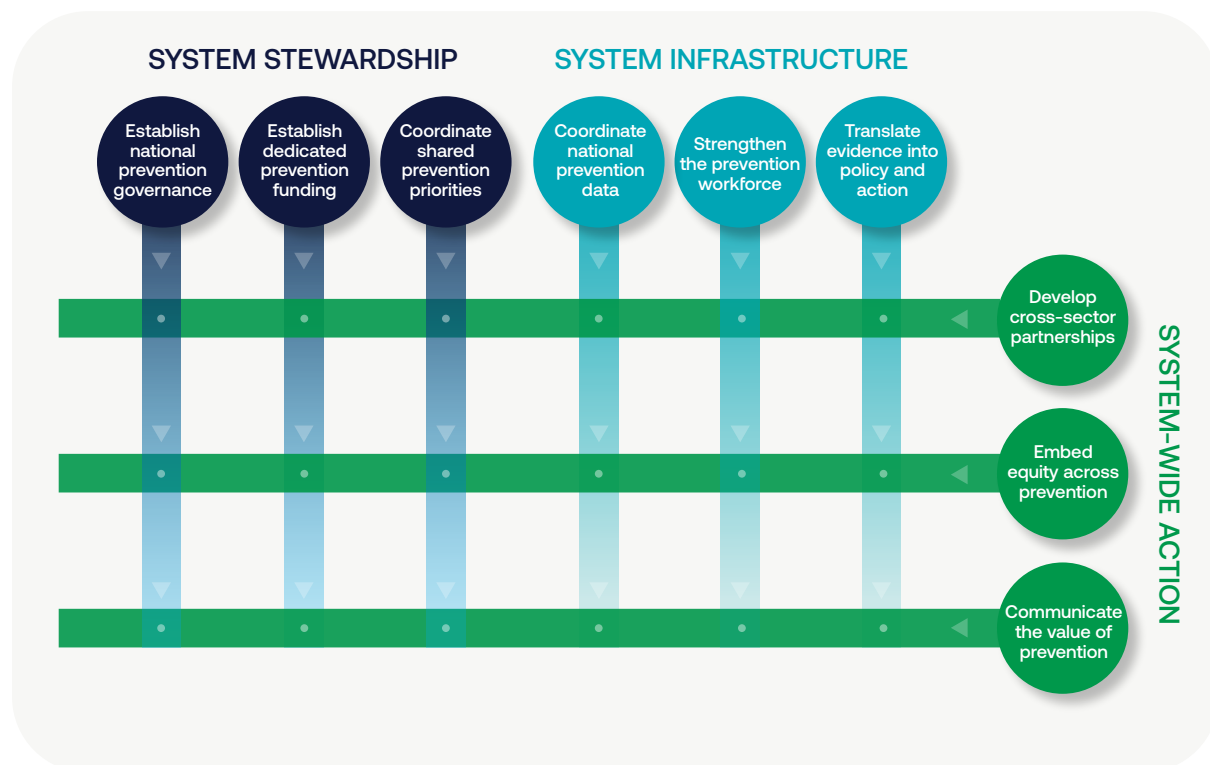


Figure 2. Three cross-cutting actions influence how action is shaped across all parts of the prevention system.



What this phase has established

This first phase of the Partnering for Prevention initiative has:

- brought together leaders from across primary prevention to examine how the system currently functions
- established a shared understanding and alignment of where system improvements are needed
- identified nine action areas that together provide a clear structure for strengthening the primary chronic disease prevention system
- provided a foundation for developing a roadmap for strengthening prevention in Australia.

Why does this matter?

Strengthening chronic disease prevention in Australia requires more than implementing individual programs. Effective prevention depends on systems that support coordinated, equitable and well-governed action across sectors. Without these supports, even well-designed initiatives are unlikely to deliver their intended impact.

The nine action areas identified through this work provide a clear and structured way to act where change is needed across the system. They show that strengthening prevention is not a single action, but a set of interconnected efforts that must be progressed together.

Importantly, this includes system-wide areas — cross-sector partnerships, equity and communicating the value of prevention — which shape how action is implemented and sustained. Without progress in these areas, efforts in other parts of the system are unlikely to be effective, coordinated or equitable.

Prevention is not the responsibility of the health sector alone. Action spans governments, sectors and communities, making accountability, commitment and investment more complex. Without clear coordination, efforts can become fragmented and difficult to sustain. By bringing together leaders from across the system, this work supports shared understanding and a more coordinated approach to strengthening prevention.

What's next?

Phase 1 focused on primary prevention within the health sector. Future phases of the Partnering for Prevention initiative will include perspectives from:

- secondary and tertiary prevention
- organisations beyond the health sector
- community and consumer groups.

Insights from all phases will be integrated to develop a shared, co-designed roadmap for strengthening the chronic disease prevention system in Australia. By bringing together perspectives from across the system and clarifying the roles different organisations play, this work will enable more coordinated action to prevent chronic disease and improve health outcomes for all Australians.

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Appendix 1. High-level actions to support system strengthening

The table below outlines the high-level actions identified within each action area. These are informed by workshop data, including more detailed activities and implementation considerations, which are not included here.

DOMAIN	ACTION AREA	HIGH-LEVEL ACTIONS
SYSTEM STEWARDSHIP	Establish national prevention governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a national prevention governance system with ministerial level accountability
	Establish dedicated prevention funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish dedicated, accountable prevention investment Build and communicate cross-sector investment case for prevention Strengthen investment reporting
	Coordinate shared prevention priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional prevention action Define a shared vision and agreed prevention priorities Align evidence, advocacy and investment around agreed priorities
SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE	Coordinate national prevention data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish national stewardship, governance and accountability for prevention data Build a shared, integrated national prevention data system Ensure equitable, accessible and locally relevant use of prevention data
	Strengthen the prevention workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build workforce capability in advocacy and communication to influence prevention Grow, diversify and maintain a visible prevention workforce Strengthen cross-sector capability and system leadership
	Translate evidence into policy and action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a shared, policy-relevant prevention evidence base Embed evidence translation and accountability across research and policy systems Strengthen cross-sector pathways, evidence-based advocacy and communication
SYSTEM-WIDE ACTION	Develop cross-sector partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build shared prevention purpose, goals and commitment across sectors Coordinate structured cross-sector collaboration for prevention Share evidence and show the value of prevention Enable sustained cross-sectoral prevention action
	Embed equity across prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed equity in governance, leadership and accountability Design prevention with communities through co-design and partnership Measure, monitor and act on equity and structural drivers
	Communicate the value of prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a shared, cross-sector prevention narrative Coordinate advocacy to demonstrate prevention value to decision-makers Build communication capability and community-led prevention messaging