



Media release – Wednesday 16th July 2014

Australians need to tell the NHMRC about lead

Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released a draft of their information paper 'Evidence on the effects of lead on human health' for public consultation. You can find their media release regarding this draft [here](#). You can also find their key findings and recommendations of the draft Information Paper in the media release. The draft Information Paper can be found [here](#) and comments are due by Sunday 14th Sept 2014.

In response to this media release the President of The LEAD Group, Elizabeth O'Brien has sent questions to the NHMRC about their paper and the NHMRC lead committee.

Elizabeth O'Brien says in response that "While the NHMRC's paper minimises the health effects of lead, they are not taking their responsibility seriously, to inform doctors, public health professionals and the public regarding lead. NHMRC has done nothing since 1994 to inform doctors to use a risk factor questionnaire to determine which of their patients should have a blood lead test and now they're telling doctors to test people who show symptoms of lead poisoning. Assoc Prof Sophie Dwyer has said that, "People should only really get tested if someone in their family is already poisoned or living in a mining community or showing symptoms." However damage has already been done once symptoms arise, and in some people, symptoms never arise, despite damage – potentially fatal damage – being done."

Some of the questions asked by Elizabeth regarding the NHMRC lead paper are listed below:

- How can the current air lead standard be regarded as sufficiently protective if more than half the young children in lead mining and smelting towns in Australia exceed PbB (blood lead) 5 µg/dL?
- We have evidence that PbBs of children under 5 yrs in these towns are plateauing or rising, but what published evidence is there that PbBs in the general population of all ages are falling in Australia? With no national blood lead surveys or even test data collation, the claim that blood lead levels are falling is not based on fact;

"Clearly, Australians need to determine for themselves, by reading the evidence collected by The LEAD Group, whether to ask their doctor to test blood lead levels in their family, and then hope that their doctor will research the question themselves rather than just telling the patient: "she'll be right mate."

"Everyone who cares about IQ, longevity and crime prevention, needs to submit comments on this information paper, before we end up with another 20 years of poor public health policy on lead in Australia."

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