

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
New International Development Policy**

Via email: development.policy@dfat.gov.au

**Submission from the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia
30 November 2022**

The Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission on Australia's new international development policy. We support the framework focus on sustainable development, resilience, connecting partners and collective action. Our brief submission fully supports those lodged by partners such as the McCabe Centre for Law & Health (McCabe Centre) which reinforce the essential role of health in an effective sustainable development program. COSA specifically wishes to highlight the importance of addressing the impact of noncommunicative diseases such as cancer in our region.

WHO IS COSA?

COSA is the peak national body for all health professionals whose work involves the care of cancer patients. In 2021 COSA established a Global Oncology Group to focus on increased sustainable collaboration on regional capacity building. The four broad intersecting themes driving COSA's work in the region are Education, Research, Advocacy and Collaboration. Previous funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, along with significant commitment and investment by our members and non-government partners (including John James Foundation, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Doctors Assisting in South Pacific Islands (DAISI), Flinders Foundation, American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), Australian Volunteers International, Australian Volunteers and IAEA) has allowed our members to develop training/twinning programs and fellowships that are building the capacity of practitioners and governments in the Asia Pacific Region to prevent and treat all forms of cancer.

Members have, to date, undertaken training and capacity building programs in-person and virtually in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and West Timor amongst other countries. Participants from the Asia-Pacific region have also travelled to Australia to undertake training, observation and fellowships. All programs are designed to be sustainable and are always driven by the needs of communities in the region as articulated by those communities and cancer practitioners.

THE NEED TO PRIORITISE HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

COSA, like our partners, believes health is critical to all aspects of international development. It is well recognised that healthy populations drive economic growth and productivity. Lack of capacity or inability to sustainably address health issues imposes enormous costs on regional governments and their populations, undermining Australia's investments in other development priorities.

Non-communicable diseases are a key regional development challenge: Cancer incidence is rising globally and is expected to reach 26 million by 2040 with 70% of new diagnosis occurring in low and middle income countries.¹ By 2040, cancer incidence in the Asia Pacific is projected to rise to 12.6 million, equating to a disproportionate 48.7% of global cancer incidence.¹ COSA believes the Australian Government's new international development policy should ensure investments in health reflect the severe and growing burden of cancer in the region. The ongoing disruptions to essential health services during the regional COVID-19 response intensified the health crisis in most countries reducing their ability to adequately address the growing needs of cancer affected patients and their treatment. Cancer has a significant burden on the individual, their family, and the community. Loss of productivity and potential generational economic impacts associated with cancer diagnosis has been well documented in literature.

Cancer and non-communicable diseases have long been a neglected development priority, particularly during the initial stages of the COVID pandemic when scarce health development resources were diverted to vaccine and other front-line activities. As we emerge from the pandemic we have an opportunity to foster capacity and collaboration for improved health and wellbeing in our region.

Australia has world-leading expertise in cancer prevention, diagnosis, treatment, education and health promotion invaluable to other countries in the region. As one example, as the McCabe Centre has pointed out in its submission, the Western Pacific region bears one quarter of the global cervical cancer cases. The McCabe Centre rightly notes that Australia's leadership in cervical cancer research and prevention programs could be harnessed to deliver significant benefits to the region, including increased health and well-being of women and girls.

PARTNERSHIPS

As COSA has discovered and continues to promote as a core value, true collaboration in health is a powerful way to strengthen relationships at all levels of society with benefits beyond the health sector. Sustained investment in health partnerships (time and network development as well as funding) foster deeper and broader relationships, making Australia a trusted regional partner of choice.

Alumni of capacity building programs by COSA members have become powerful and loyal advocates of Australia's role in the Indo-Pacific. They speak from experience about our ability to listen and work collaboratively for the good of the region without hidden agendas.

A PLEA FOR THE FUTURE

It has been argued that the previous Australian Government's international development policy was lacking in long term vision, commitment and sustainability and therefore had several glaring omissions. Health was sadly one of these. COSA believes the current review provides a valuable opportunity to address this problem.

Acknowledging health as a cross-cutting development issue requires prioritisation of health in Australia's new international development policy. This includes specific reference to the importance of health programs in any future policy documents. We urge the Australian Government to take up this challenge and become both a leader for change and the trusted partner of choice for governments in our region.

We are happy to be contacted for further information or discussion.

We can be contacted via email

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References:

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