Identifying Priority Health Issues

Summary Questions

1 What are the social justice principles and how do they relate to prioritising health issues?
2 What are the priority population groups in Australia?
3 Identify the potential for prevention and early intervention of a condition of your choice.
4 What are direct and indirect costs relating to health?

Summary of Responses

1 The principles are equity, diversity and supportive environments. Inequities exist where a significant difference in the health status of certain population groups exists, compared with the general population. Therefore, social justice is achieved by recognising and eliminating these health inequities.

   - **Equity** – the fair allocation of funding and resources
   - **Diversity** – Australia has a diverse population, and the needs of everyone should be met. Therefore, sufficient health-care services and facilities are needed for all the diverse groups within Australia.
   - **Supportive environments** – Australians have the right to be healthy and the environment needs to support this concept. This can be achieved through attention to cost, availability and ease of access.

2 Population groups that suffer health inequities include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; socio-economically disadvantaged people; people who live in rural and remote areas; people born overseas; the elderly; and people with disabilities.

3 The main risk factors for CVD are related to an individual’s lifestyle and health-related behaviours (such as smoking, diet, alcohol and physical activity levels). Therefore, being aware of the risk and protective factors can help to prevent the condition. Those who require early intervention can access services to assist limiting the risk factors, access pharmaceutical assistance and implement other medical interventions.

4 **Direct individual costs** include the financial burden that is associated with illness and disability, such as ongoing medical costs (hospital charges, medical professional fees, medications, travel) and loss of employment. Indirect individual costs include persistent pain and loss of quality of life, possible exclusion from social activities, increased pressure on families to offer support and the emotional toll of chronic illness.
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**Direct community costs** include the vast funding of the Australian health-care system (which is projected to markedly increase with an ageing and growing population). Most of this supports primary health care and pharmaceuticals, and the nature of chronic illnesses tends to require high degrees of medical intervention to manage them. Indirect community costs include the premature loss of contributing and valuable members of society, and the costs for employers in absenteeism, decreased productivity and retraining.

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<td>2 What role do social justice principles play in identifying priority health issues?</td>
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<td>3 Why is it important to prioritise?</td>
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Summary of Responses

1. By looking at social justice principles, priority population groups, the prevalence of a condition, potential for prevention and early intervention, and costs to the individual and community.

2. Social justice entails equity, diversity and supportive environments. Therefore, when identifying priority health issues, it is important to assess the areas where inequity exists. It is also important to consider the diversity of Australia and to not only consider mainstream societal trends. By looking at the supportive environments within Australia, it is also possible to identify areas that would benefit from further support.

3. In order to effectively address areas of concern in the health status of all Australians, priorities must be established. These priorities then allow for the equitable allocation of resources and funding, to minimise the gaps in health status that exist between various sub-groups of the population. Without prioritisation, there is a chance of health issues unnecessarily becoming a problem, other health issues blowing out to be worse and millions of dollars being wasted.