

PHAA submission on the Cth Electoral Act (Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold) Bill 2019



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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold) Bill 2019

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public's health in Australia, and seeks to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, evidence informed policy and effective population-based practice in public health.

The pursuit of strong public policy on public health issues often involves countering corporate influence on government policy making that undermines the public good, particularly where business sectors which are responsible for unhealthy foods, products, services and industries are operating to distort public decision-making and regulation to their financial benefit. For this reason, PHAA has monitored developments in the field of political financial regulation, including laws governing political donations, disclosure and expenditures.

PHAA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's consideration of the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold) Bill 2019*. The Bill makes the simple change of lowering the current statutory donation disclosure threshold from \$13,800 (indexed) to \$1,000.

PHAA has made previous submission to parliamentary committees on related topics including:

- [Submission](#) to the 2017 inquiry of the Senate Select Committee into the Political Influence of Donations (submission No. 32).
- [Submission](#) to JSCem's 2018 inquiry into the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017

Essentially, PHAA's policy position is that corporate donations to political parties should be banned altogether.

However we recognise that this is a complex regulatory landscape, and one in which overall reform has proved to be beyond Parliament in recent years. The Committee's last comprehensive report on this field was the 2011 [Report into the 2010 federal election](#). Reports on this subject by the Committee since that time have done little to advance the cause of systematic reform of the national political finance system. The last Parliament legislated in 2018 for the Australian Electoral Commission to host a slightly improved online 'Transparency Register' as a by-product of legislation to address foreign influence, but the wider questions about regulation of Australian political party finance and transparency went unaddressed.

The Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold bill only addresses one specific setting in the broad legislative regime of the Electoral Act. However the Bill would allow a significantly wider range of political donations to be brought to light, and thus be a positive step in the public interest. In all the circumstances, it would be of public benefit in the immediate term for Parliament to pass the Bill being considered here.


PHAA urges the Committee to recommend to the Parliament that the Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold bill be passed into law promptly.

That should take nothing away from the larger need for comprehensive reform of constraints on political donations, regulation of lobbying, electoral spending by parties, and the transparency system as a whole. These matters await a comprehensive response by Parliament. If the Committee were minded to make strong recommendations to Parliament about political finance in the near-term, the stand-alone Lowering the Donation Disclosure Threshold bill would not be necessary.

PHAA urges the Committee to take up the challenge of comprehensive reform of the political donations, spending and lobbying regime as soon as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information or have any queries in relation to this submission.

Yours Sincerely,



Terry Slevin
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia