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Media Release

Australians experience positive “silver linings” in nutrition and physical activity according to new data by AIA Australia

Melbourne, 28 May, 2020 – Leading life and health insurer AIA Australia has unveiled comprehensive data which demonstrates the impact of small lifestyle changes on health and wellbeing, including how Australians have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic and are experiencing lifestyle “silver linings” as a result.

The *AIA Vitality COVID-19 Insights* report, which analyses data from the 150,000 AIA Vitality members who engaged in various activities, reveals nutrition and physical activity are two health and wellbeing indicators that have seen positive changes since the start of 2020.

Data shows members are eating healthier and eating behaviours are changing, with people’s happiness about their diet increasing by 20 percent from January to April. There has also been a 32 percent decline in the number of people who are eating at least one meal per week from a restaurant or takeaway.

With gyms closing and limits on personal training posing a challenge to staying active during restrictions, AIA Australia’s data has shown our appetite for physical activity has stayed strong – members using tech devices to track their physical activity increased by 23 percent in April.

According to the World Health Organisation, people are at a higher risk of getting severe symptoms of COVID-19 if they are older (60+) or have a pre-existing non-communicable disease (NCD) such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease or cancer. NCDs cause nearly 90 percent of deaths in Australia and are known to be largely impacted by lifestyle factors such as insufficient activity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and the harmful use of alcohol.¹

CEO and Managing Director of AIA Australia and New Zealand, Damien Mu, said that right now, health is at the forefront of everyone’s minds, and it was important for Australians to understand that small lifestyle changes can have a significant positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

“At AIA, our purpose is to make a difference, and to champion Australia and New Zealand to be the healthiest nations in the world. The world we live in is changing dramatically, and we are in the midst of a global fight for healthier, longer, better lives.

“In Australia, we are witnessing a once-in-a-generation re-orientation of priorities, especially in terms of health and wellbeing. While we know there have been a lot of challenges, it is also fantastic to see the positive impacts that are taking place in this wonderful, blessed country of ours,” said Mr Mu.

“From cooking more at home, finding time to be more active and spending more quality time with our families – we want to highlight the positive small changes that people are making, and discuss the broader impacts on our community. Our goal is to inspire Australians about the power of making small healthier choices that are within their control and therefore instil a sense of not only hope but optimism as we start to move from surviving to thriving,” he added.

AIA Australia’s data also sheds insight on the challenges many Australians are facing in the current climate, particularly around mental wellbeing. Stress related to social life or lack of social contact has increased by 156 percent in April (the highest of all stress indicators) followed by an increase in stress related to managing the home and looking after children at 76 percent.

Preventative health through advanced health screenings is another health indicator where Australians have faced challenges due to the current restrictions, with AIA data showing there has been a 40-50 percent drop in

¹ https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/aus_en.pdf?ua=1.

advanced screenings (mammograms, cervical screening tests and colon cancer tests) completed by its members in April.

Co-Director, Health and Policy at The University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre, Professor Ian Hickie, says tackling mental health challenges during times of crisis should be considered through utilising a mix of interventions, particularly those that encourage social connection.

"Predictive modelling of the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 indicate that we now face at least a 25 percent increase in suicides each year for the next five years," commented Professor Hickie.

"Putting an emphasis on physical activity, sleep patterns, healthy diet and reduced smoking, increasing social connection (while still physically distancing) – these are things every person can be doing now to help their mental wellbeing and are not only likely to have direct benefits in reducing depression levels but, very importantly, should minimise the increased risk of premature death or disability due to cardiovascular disease," he added.

Alongside the *AIA Vitality COVID-19 Insights* report, AIA has also launched its inaugural *AIA Vitality Wellbeing Index*. Ranking Australia's States and Territories in six key indicators that contribute to health and wellbeing – physical activity, risky behaviours, nutrition, mental wellbeing, preventative health and chronic disease – the *AIA Vitality Wellbeing Index* presents a snapshot of Australia's health and wellbeing at the start of 2020, shining a light on the lifestyle behaviours that directly influence our health.

While the inaugural national health index has seen **the Australian Capital Territory take out the national overall wellbeing ranking**, followed closely by **Western Australia** and **Victoria** in **second and third place** rankings respectively – what the in-depth analysis also provides is a starting baseline position for how the States and Territories' health and wellbeing will change as we move throughout 2020 and into 2021.

The nation's capital outperformed the other States and Territories in three of the six health and wellbeing indicators - including **risky behaviours** (smoking and alcohol consumption) where Canberra had the fewest smokers; **physical activity** where the ACT had the highest number of people meeting exercise guidelines; as well as **mental wellbeing** where anxiety and depression, suicide and mental health conditions were all considered.

Additional standout findings from the *AIA Vitality Wellbeing Index* include:

- **Physical activity** – In addition to taking out the top physical activity ranking, it was also found that Canberrans took out the top spot for participating in organised sport and having the most people who used a bicycle for transport.
- **Nutrition** - VIC leads the nutrition category overall, however those living in NSW rank the best in terms of meeting daily fruit consumption guidelines, and Tasmanians come out on top when it comes to meeting their daily recommended vegetable targets despite drinking the most sugary drinks of all the states and territories.
- **Risky behaviours** – ACT secured the top ranking in this indicator, followed by VIC (which had the lowest alcohol consumption), and then SA and NSW tied in third. NSW also had the lowest levels of binge drinking.
- **Mental wellbeing** - After the ACT, NSW and WA (tied 2nd ranking) also performed well in the mental wellbeing area followed by VIC and NT (tied 3rd ranking). When considering AIA Vitality member data in this category, the NT had the highest proportion of members meeting the sleep guidelines of at least seven hours per day.
- **Preventative health** - South Australians ranked best overall when it came to preventative health which considers participation in bowel cancer, breast cancer and cervical cancer screenings.
- **Chronic disease** - Queenslanders ranked best in the chronic disease category, having the lowest number of people who suffer from a chronic disease (which includes diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol).

-ENDS-

Full versions of the AIA Vitality COVID-19 Insights report and AIA Vitality Wellbeing Index are available upon request.

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About AIA Australia

AIA Australia is a leading life insurance specialist with over 47 years' experience. With a unique customer value proposition focused on life, health and wellbeing, our purpose is to make a difference in people's lives.

In November 2019, AIA Group commenced its Joint Cooperation Agreement (JCA) with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) for the joint operation of their Australian life insurance businesses, AIA Australia and CommInsure Life.

Together, AIA Australia and CommInsure Life offer a range of products that protect and enhance the lives of more than 3.8 million Australians. Our vision is to embrace shared value in championing Australia and New Zealand to be the healthiest and best protected nations in the world. With AIA Vitality – the world's leading science-based health and wellbeing program – we help members to live healthier, longer, better lives.

AIA Australia has been recognised with multiple awards, including the Women in Finance Employer of the Year Award (2018, 2019), Super Review's Best Insurer of the Year (2018, 2019), and iSelect Partner Awards Insurer of the Year (2019).

Further information at www.aia.com.au.

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