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Media Release

THE BEHAVIOURS THAT LEAD TO A HEALTHIER, LONGER, BETTER LIFE

Environment and mental health added to list of factors responsible for more than 90 per cent of deaths in Australia

Melbourne, 9 July 2021 – Leading life, health and wellbeing specialist AIA Australia has highlighted the increasing evidence of the impact of mental health conditions on Australia’s health statistics, as well as the significant link between the environment and chronic disease.

Until recently, the evidence and data on global disease found that four modifiable lifestyle factors – *physical inactivity, poor nutrition, smoking and excess alcohol* – led to four major NCDs – *cancer, diabetes, respiratory and heart diseases* – that were responsible for 90 per cent of deaths in Australia. In recognition of this, AIA Australia had termed the insight 4490 (4 + 4 = 90; 4490).

AIA Australia has now presented its 5590+ framework, recognising that a fifth modifiable risk factor: *our interaction with the environment*, and a fifth NCD: *mental health conditions and disorders*, in addition to the existing NCDs, account for more than 90 per cent of deaths in Australia.

CEO and Managing Director of AIA Australia and New Zealand, Damien Mu, said 5590+ was critical to increasing awareness about the impact that lifestyle factors have on mostly preventable NCDs.

“At AIA Australia, our dream is to champion Australia to be one of the healthiest and best protected nations in the world. As a life, health and wellbeing insurer, we see the devastating impact that chronic health conditions can have on Australians and their families, and we are concerned at the increasing numbers of people who are hospitalised or unable to work due to a serious medical condition,” said Mr Mu.

The insurer has been a passionate advocate for prevention and early intervention measures for Australians. The key messages from 5590+ align with those of its science-backed health and wellbeing program AIA Vitality, which incentivises people to focus on four core elements of their wellbeing; physical activity (Move Well), nutrition (Eat Well), mental wellbeing (Think Well) and preventive measures (Plan Well).

“A greater focus on prevention and early intervention is required to prevent symptoms from developing into more serious and lasting conditions. The 5590+ insight shows us that by focusing on and improving five behaviours, we can help prevent five major non-communicable diseases.”

The fifth modifiable risk factor, the environment, is now recognised as a significant cause of disease, with research demonstrating links between NCDs and environmental factors such as air pollution, climate change, agriculture and food, and urbanisation.

Environmentalist and AIA Vitality Ambassador, Tim Jarvis AM, said that it is almost impossible to separate human health from the health of the broader environment today: “The two are inextricably linked by a whole range of environmental factors that have a direct impact on personal, physical and mental health.

“For example, we now know that the quality of the air we breathe has implications on non-communicable diseases in the form of cardiovascular disease, lung function and asthma; the quality of food we eat is impacted by environmental factors such as food safety, microbes, chemicals and bio toxins; and ultraviolet radiation increases the risk of skin cancers like melanoma.”

Mr Jarvis said that the best way to reduce our negative impact on the environment is to focus on what can be controlled at an individual level and reduce the impact it has on our own health.

“Some valuable first steps could include conserving natural resources, being mindful of our consumption and dietary choices and reducing household waste. Or even choosing to use public or active transport, such as walking and cycling, when possible.

“By breaking down the enormity of some of these big challenges, whether it’s health or climate change, into small manageable pieces that we have influence over people can get onboard with being part of the solution.”

The fifth NCD, mental health conditions and disorders, is on the rise in Australia and overseas. It is estimated that one in five Australians are impacted by mental health conditions, with almost four million Australians suffering from a chronic or episodic mental health condition each year. Depression is also the leading cause of disability worldwide.

Mental health/performance expert and AIA Vitality Ambassador Dr Jaime Lee said that as a nation we do not have a baseline level of good mental health and this needs to change: “Mental health is as important as physical health. We need to regularly exercise our brain through physical activity, maintaining social connections, sleeping well, doing meaningful things, and learning.”

Dr. Lee believes that further public health education, awareness and resources are needed, as are tools, practices, and community support to create a more community-based mental health care system.

“Health awareness is about disease prevention and appropriate treatment to support, maintain and advance individual and community health, to create a safe space as a society for us all to thrive. This requires societal commitment, sustained efforts and collaboration between communities, governments, public and private sectors to maximise our quality of life and health for all,” said Dr Lee.

AIA Australia has invested heavily in developing initiatives that support Australians to maintain and improve their health throughout their lives.

“5590+ provides the foundation for our work on life, health and wellbeing,” said Mr Mu.

Using these insights, AIA Australia has developed an ecosystem of products, services and partnerships, designed to shift healthcare efforts away from treatment towards health promotion and prevention of NCDs, by addressing the modifiable behaviours that have the greatest impact.

“By prioritising self-care in five key lifestyle areas – good nutrition, regular exercise, living in a clean environment, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol intake – we can reduce the collective rate of disease across the nation,” said Mr Mu.

Mr Mu is optimistic that the 5590+ research will drive collaboration between the private sector, government and not-for-profit organisations to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in Australia, as well as globally.

“It is about using the knowledge of 5590+ to support Australians with the small steps they can take to improve their health and wellbeing — these small steps can result in big changes and can help Australians to lead healthier, longer, better lives,” said Mu.

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About AIA Australia

AIA Australia is a leading life insurance specialist with over 48 years' experience and a commitment to help Australians live healthier, longer, better lives. In 2014 the company launched AIA Vitality, a world leading, science-based health and wellbeing program, to the Australian market. In July 2017, AIA and its partners launched AIA's health insurance business, now known as AIA Health Insurance.

In 2021, Commsure Life was integrated into AIA Australia. The lives of more than 3.8 million Australians are protected and enhanced through AIA Australia's unique value proposition of life, health and wellbeing. Our vision is to embrace shared value in championing Australia and New Zealand to be the healthiest and best protected nations in the world.

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), iSelect Partner Awards Insurer of the Year (2019), Insurance Asia International Life Insurer of the Year (Australia, 2020), Shared Value Awards Corporate Organisation Leading Through Shared Value (2019) and Shared Value Awards Organisation of the Year (2020).

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