



Tony Abbott tells Liberal Party to stop accepting tobacco industry donations

By Katie Cassidy

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Tony Abbott announced the Liberal Party would no longer accept donations from tobacco companies as he unveiled the Coalition's health policy today.

It comes after Kevin Rudd said a future Labor government would ban all political parties from receiving donations from the tobacco industry.

The Labor Party has not accepted donations from tobacco companies since 2004, when then-leader Mark Latham promised to stop what he called an "unethical" practice.

According to Australian Electoral Commission figures, Philip Morris and British American Tobacco donated a combined total of \$8,000 to the Liberal Party during 2011-12, significantly less than the year before.

Labor says the Liberal Party has accepted donations from the two firms totalling more than \$2.1 million over the past 10 years.

In the past Mr Abbott has defended his party's acceptance of tobacco industry donations, saying the money does not influence policy.

Today the Opposition Leader again stressed the Liberal Party is not swayed by donations, but said tobacco industry funds were no longer welcome.

"As health minister I wrapped graphic health warnings all over cigarette packets and under the Howard government, smoking rates declined by about 20 per cent," he said.

"So I have a terrific record when it comes to getting smoking rates down and doing what is dictated by public policy, not what might be desired by donors.

"I do what is right in the interests of our nation. I don't simply listen to people

who may or may not have donated money to my political party.

"I've instructed the Liberal Party to accept no further donations from tobacco companies and on that note, I suggest that Mr Rudd might like to refund the airfare that he received from a German tobacco company to attend a conference.

"If he's going to get sanctimonious about this, he might like to come to it with clean hands and refund that money."

Kevin Rudd was a backbencher at the time of the trip last year and was flown to Germany by the Korber Foundation, which makes machinery for the tobacco industry.

The Prime Minister has since said he did not know the trip was funded by a foundation with links to the tobacco industry.

Earlier, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said Labor would take steps to end tobacco investments across government.

In particular he said Labor would work to stop public sector superannuation schemes investing money in the industry.

He said the measures will reduce the influence of big tobacco over public policy in Australia.

Coalition flags plan to expand GP training

Mr Abbott visited Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital this morning to announce policies including funding to expand GP training and a review of Labor's Medicare Locals, which is aimed at redirecting money spent on bureaucracy to services.

The Coalition says it wants to tackle chronic diseases, provide faster access to newly approved medicines and prepare the health system for the demographic changes ahead.

Mr Abbott said Australia's health system is relatively well-funded, but could be improved.

"What we intend to do is to maintain existing levels of health funding but try to ensure that some of that money is redirected from bureaucracies to frontline services," he said.

"We want to try to ensure that the additional health professionals that are now coming out of universities, because of the expansions which the former Coalition government put in place, have proper training to go to.

"That's why there's money here for an expansion of general practice training, money here for an expansion of internships, particularly in a private hospital setting, but essentially what we want to do with our health system is make a good system better.

"The last thing we want to do is to impose an overall cut in health funding which, as it happens, gives the lie to some of Mr Rudd's more shrill and hysterical claims."

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