# FOREWORD

This special report from the Chief Medical Officer is important and opportune. Encouraged by my predecessor Senator Patterson, this report presents facts about communicable disease in straightforward language. The report will help the Australian public to understand new diseases such as SARS and variant-CJD, as well as continuing problems such as HIV. Readers will also see how pandemic influenza could re-emerge and how serious infections could make a come-back as bacteria become resistant to our powerful antibiotics. Furthermore, in the new era of terrorism, there is the possibility that microbial agents, new or old, might be spread deliberately. Such possibilities threaten public confidence and economic growth as well as health.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Australia is well served by highly trained health professionals, with measures in place for effective disease surveillance and control that would also provide early warning of any possible bioterrorist threat. Australia has a proud record of achievement in medical research and development. Some of our best minds are being recruited to advise government and to devise new means for prevention, early detection and treatment of communicable disease.

The facts and ideas in this special report will inform future thinking and planning for communicable disease control and enhance our level of preparedness. With better understanding, Australians in the wider community will be more able to protect themselves from infection. They will understand that in protecting themselves, they are protecting others. Decision-makers outside the health portfolio will also come to consider the unintended health consequences of their decisions and actions. They will better understand how health threats, such as SARS, can impact on public and business confidence. The media will be more engaged in communicable disease issues, promoting discussion to strike the right balance between individual rights and public good when these are in conflict.

In the years to come, the Australian community will have many reasons to thank Professor Smallwood for his leadership in commissioning and oversighting the project and the Editorial Advisory Committee and the many experts who have contributed to it. I welcome the report and congratulate all those involved in its planning and production.

Tony Abbott
**Minister for Health and Ageing**