APPENDIX 1

What if there were no lobbying?

The growth in lobbying activity indicates an underlying appetite for a greater say in the process of government by groups and individuals. It is fair enough to ask whether lobbying is necessary, desirable or effective. Perhaps the answer to this reasonable question is best addressed by looking at the process of government in the absence of any lobbying. Consider the following scenarios:

The ideal alternative?

- Public servants are apolitical, conscientious, fair-minded and diligent
- Ministers are thoroughly briefed by their public servants and would formulate policy on the basis of rational thought.
- Cabinet make decisions on the advice of the responsible Minister
- Backbenchers are open to and take advice from individuals in the community
- Backbenchers influence Cabinet through party room debate
- Parliament debates the issue free from outside interference or influence
- Decisions and actions are bold, fair and free of self interest
- The electorate accepts the decision as hard but fair and reasonable.

The cynical view?

- Public servants take short cuts and drive their own agendas
- Ministers are ignorant of the facts
- Cabinet doesn't trust the advice given to it by the Minister
- Backbenchers are overwhelmed by the volume and range of information and become more and more isolated
- Backbenchers don't know enough about any subject to have productive input
- Parliament debates issues in a vacuum
- Decisions are made without necessarily knowing their full impact
- The electorate feels confused and frustrated.

What really happens?

- Public servants listen to rational argument and hidden agendas are more difficult to pursue
- Ministers keep their ears to the ground through a wide range of formal and informal contacts
- Cabinet is subject to pressure and scrutiny from various interest groups
- Backbenchers see representatives of groups with focused aims rather than an endless trail of individual, perhaps rambling complaints
- Backbenchers may use the prepackaged arguments of the groups they support to influence their Cabinet colleagues
- All sides of a given issue may be aired publicly before debate in Parliament
- Decisions and actions are influenced by the quality and persuasiveness of the arguments put forward by competing interests
- Electoral response can be more accurately predicted.

In summary...

- Issues are crystallised by those who have a personal interest in pushing for or against an issue
- Opposing interests highlight the strengths of their own arguments and expose the weaknesses of others' arguments
- Competing forces within similar interest groups compel each group to lift its game

(Lobbying Australia, 1995).

COALITION BUILDING

Coalitions offer:

- strength and power in numbers, leading to a wider reach

- added credibility to the health community when it has a coordinated plan, a united front and a consistent message

- a public perception of tangible, broad community support

- media attention and public profile for organizations which they may not otherwise achieve

- increased access to policy makers

- networking and partnership opportunities

- economies of scale and cost-efficiency

- division of labour and reduced duplication

- information

- the exciting feeling of belonging to something greater than the sum of its parts

The Disadvantages:

- conflict is inevitable because of the variety of groups in a coalition and the strengths and weaknesses, as well as personalities, that they bring to the table

- a great deal of time is therefore spent in consensus-building (note that consensus should be defined as "Can you live with it?", not "Do you agree with it?" - otherwise, consensus often becomes the lowest common denominator, which is probably not the most effective approach

- you have to spend valuable time "selling" advocacy coalitions to your organization because few people involved in health charities, public health organizations, etc., understand advocacy

- coalition management can become cumbersome, unless a concerted effort is made to ensure that there is a convenor who has the resources to share information among the players - at the very least, the job is time-consuming

TYPES OF COALITIONS

Process Coalitions are defined as those in which:

- planning, programming and networking functions on broad-based interests are the focus
- longer time frames and less flexibility result
- considerable interagency administration and communications are inevitable
- output is often hard to measure

Action Coalitions are defined as those in which:

- there is a stronger results orientation
- stakeholders join forces in order to achieve a specific goal or objective
- specific events or issues which require concentrated effort are the focus, such as public policy advocacy, government lobbying, legislative initiatives or media campaigns
- shorter time frames, considerable flexibility among members and more narrowly-focused interests result
- rapid communications and fast-track decision making are of paramount importance
- output is easily measured

(Forsythe, 1997)