

Lancet calls for removal of Howard government

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Howard Government skewered by Lancet

A PRESTIGIOUS international medical journal has launched an attack on Prime Minister John Howard and called on readers to vote against the Government at the upcoming election.

In an editorial titled Australia: the politics of fear and neglect, the UK-based Lancet said Prime Minister John Howard was risking Australia's reputation for clinical and research excellence.

"That enviable position is being put at risk by Prime Minister John Howard's indifference to the academic medical community and his profound intolerance to those less secure than himself and his administration," the editorial said.

The Lancet said Mr Howard's recent comments on immigrants with HIV were the latest example of his complacency.

Mr Howard's suggestion last week that he would consider banning HIV-positive migrants sparked anger from AIDS experts and refugee advocates.

The Lancet also censured Health Minister Tony Abbott for saying those who spoke up for indigenous health were "simply establishing politically and morally correct credentials", and criticised Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull for his stance on climate change.

"At present, Australian politicians are scoring well below their potential."

The Lancet said Australia's apparently progressive and inclusive culture belied a strong undercurrent of political conservatism that Mr Howard was "ruthlessly tapping into".

It repeated scientist Ian Lowe's comments that the present government had "gone to extraordinary lengths to silence independent opinion within the research community".

The journal advised Australian readers the election year "provides an opportunity at the ballot box to bring a new enlightenment to Australian health and medical science".

The Lancet has a significant readership throughout the world and regularly takes a stand on key medical issues. It has also published controversial estimates of the death toll during the war in Iraq.

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