



Victorian Healthcare Association

Population Health Planning Framework

INTRODUCTION

The health of populations is largely influenced by factors and conditions outside the health system. Despite significant advances in healthcare and increasing healthcare expenditure, rates of ill-health continue to rise and are compounded by an ageing population. Some groups and communities are over-represented in these statistics and consistently experience poorer health than others.

A new approach is needed to improve the health of populations, based on identifying and addressing the conditions that contribute to illness and health inequities. A population health approach to planning is endorsed by many leading health experts and provides an evidence-based option for achieving this. Population health planning refocuses activities to place greater emphasis on addressing the social determinants of health. The principles and values explicit in health promotion, (determinants of health, equity, working with community, health as a resource), also underpin population health planning. The link between health promotion and population health planning is reflected in this toolbox, which contains many references to health promotion resources.

Actions to address the social determinants occur at a population level and are most effectively addressed outside the health sector. While international recommendations for addressing social determinants highlight the importance of actions by national governments, there are opportunities for action at a community level. Health services can play a role in advocating and partnering for cross sectoral actions that may improve social determinants at a local level, (as well as coordinating complementary interventions and services to address risk factors and disease). This local action is consistent with the Victorian approach to addressing social determinants, as reflected in the Environments for Health Framework, and through mandated Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other planning frameworks.

This toolbox gives an overview of population health planning, which can occur in one local government area or across several local government areas. This resource assumes a level of understanding of conventional planning processes, and explains how this approach differs from other health planning practices. The toolbox avoids duplicating information from other sources, and instead links the reader to the relevant resources.

The role of the VHA/ project overview/ background

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) has long advocated for population health planning to improve health system design and to achieve better population health outcomes. The VHA has invested in population health planning research and a capacity building project. In 2008, research conducted with Monash University demonstrated the need for resources to educate and assist organisations to actively engage in population health planning. This toolbox and associated resources were developed over four years and are based on a literature review and extensive consultation and input from a broad range of stakeholders, including the health sector, local government and state government.

A suite of resources

VHA members are the primary target audience for these resources, which will hopefully be useful more broadly within and beyond the health sector.

Resource	Intended use
Position Statement	Developed with Monash University, this statement provides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a common definition of population health and population health planning ▪ outlines key steps and best practice principles in applying this approach
Online Learning Module	The module 'A Common Understanding' introduces the key principles and concepts that underpin population health planning, targeted at board members, managers and clinicians.
Planning Framework	The framework outlines the planning steps and guiding principles of population health planning.
Planning Toolbox	The toolbox complements the planning framework and guides organisations to use a population health approach in their planning processes.

Toolbox

The toolbox provides more information on each element in the VHA planning framework. It includes the following sections:

1. **Setting the Vision** – the overall purpose of population health planning and the case for change
2. **The planning steps** – the six key steps and practical considerations for implementation of population health planning. References, key reports, case studies, national and international tools are provided
3. **Guiding Principles** – the six underpinning principles of the planning process. These principles are also referenced in the planning steps to demonstrate how they are applied. It may be helpful for new users to begin with the 'guiding principles' for a broader understanding
4. **Summary checklist** – key points for consideration during each step of the population health planning process
5. **Glossary** of key concepts

Disclaimer: The toolbox, while comprehensive, is not intended to be a 'one-stop shop' for population health planning. The growing number of resources and literature on population health planning, much of which has been referenced in the toolbox, can provide further guidance.

Scope

The level of planning

While a population health approach can be applied to any level of planning, this toolbox supports **area based population health plans** (see glossary definition 'area-based planning'). The toolbox does not prescribe the area but instead recommends that the leadership team base this decision on:

- the local opportunities that exist for collaborative population health planning
- what is feasible
- a population size that supports collaborative, cross-sector, and effective upstream action

Area-based planning may occur at a government department regional level, (eg the integrated population health planning projects of the Victorian North and West Metropolitan Region and G21), or sub-regional level (eg, a municipality or planning area). The [Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012-2022: Metropolitan Health Plan – Technical Paper](#) identifies 10 metropolitan planning areas, (spanning between 2-5 municipalities each), based on anticipated population growth, and population size to support self-sufficiency and coordinated service delivery (DH 2011).

A population health approach emphasises collaborative, inter-sectoral planning and upstream actions, thereby **distinguishing itself from downstream health service planning using population health data**.

Inclusion of downstream actions

Downstream actions, (activities undertaken once illness has occurred), are intentionally included in the VHA population health framework. In this way, the VHA framework differs from other well-known population health planning theories and frameworks, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada's population health framework, which focuses primarily on upstream and midstream actions to address risk factors and the social determinants of health. The VHA believes that the omission of downstream actions from population health planning carries the risk of excluding many health agencies from partnering in population health planning for local actions. While recognising that action on the determinants of health is most effective outside the health sector, there is still a role for health services advocating and partnering in planning for local actions to address social determinants.

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The overall planning process described herein has been adapted from initial work conducted by Monash University for the VHA in 2010.

Endorsement

This document was endorsed by the VHA Project Steering Committee and the VHA Board in July 2012.

About the VHA

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) is the major peak body representing the interests of the public healthcare sector in Victoria. The VHA promotes the improvement of health outcomes for all Victorians from the perspective of its members, which include public hospitals, rural and regional health services, community health services, and aged care facilities.
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