

Victorian Healthcare Association

Population Health Planning Framework

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

This section addresses the guiding principal of working in partnership. The specific roles and activities of established partnerships are discussed during the stages of the population health planning process

What is a partnership?

A partnership is two or more organisations or communities that make a commitment to:

- work together on something that concerns both
- develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda
- generate joint action towards agreed targets

Why are partnerships important for population health planning?

A population health planning approach recognises that improvements to health and wellbeing require action by all sectors of society. As such, partnerships with community and stakeholders from different sectors are essential for population health planning and for collaborative action on the social determinants. Partnership development is also important for building the capacity of regions and organisations to undertake population health planning, (refer to 'Capacity building' section). The specific partnership with the community is discussed in the 'Working with community' section.

Benefits of working in partnership

While partnership activities can be resource-intensive, the benefits have been demonstrated to outweigh the costs. Through partnership with each other, organisations can accomplish more by:

- Having a greater mix of skills and knowledge
- Sharing common concerns, information, skills, and resources
- Influencing decision-making
- Avoiding duplication of effort or gaps
- Adopting a more comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing health issues
- Achieving greater gains than by working in isolation

What does a partnership need in order to work well?

Partnership implies the sharing of decision-making, risks, power, resources, benefits, and burdens. A successful partnership should **bring value** to each organisation by enabling them to be coordinated and more effective in meeting population health needs.

Implicit in the concept of partnership are expectations of a degree of interdependence between the organisations and people involved over a designated period, or long-term.

Many funding bodies now specify the forming of partnerships as a condition of funding, recognising the synergistic benefits that can be derived from these relationships.

Potential partners

According to the National Public Health Partnership Planning Framework (2000) the following questions are helpful in selecting potential partners:

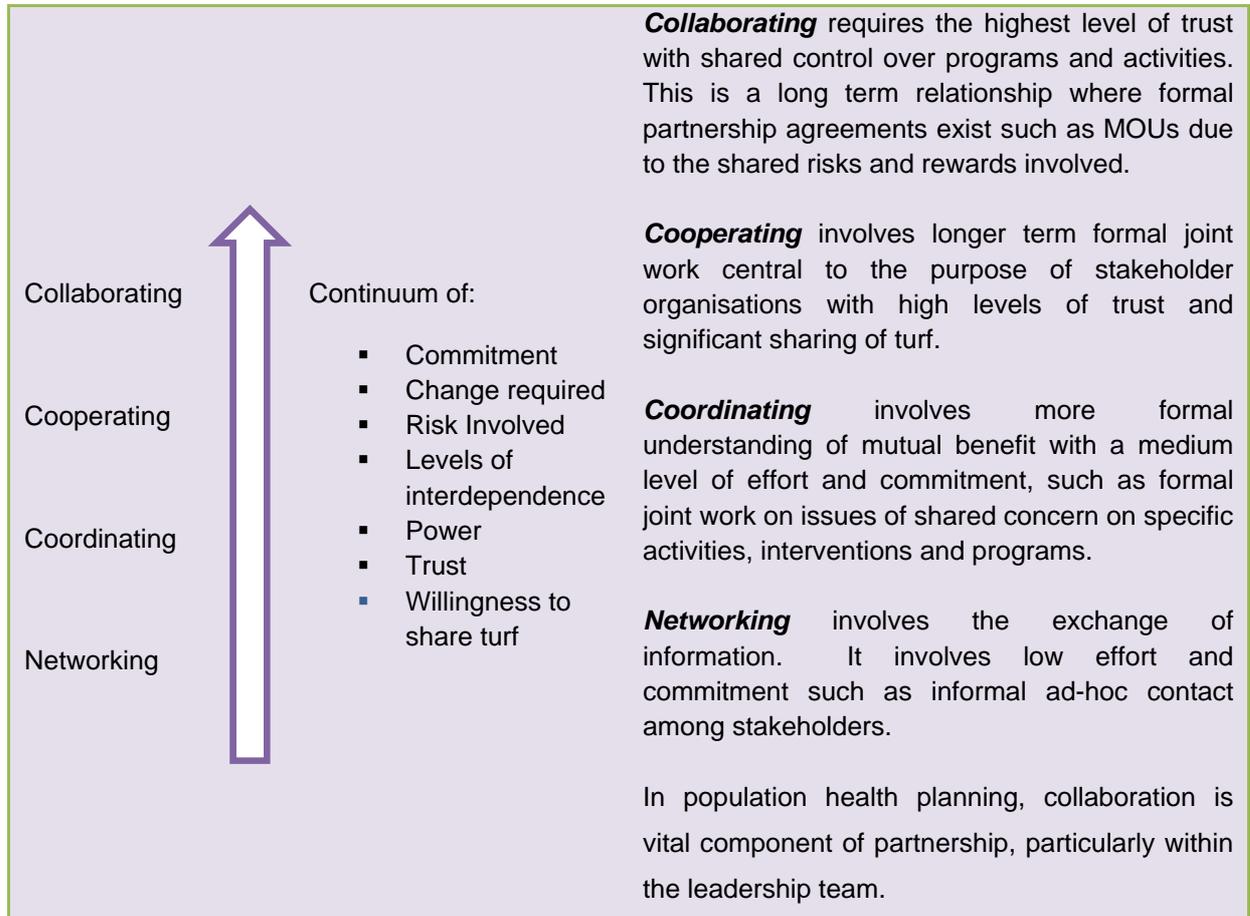
- Who might be affected by the health issue, the determinant of health, and any intervention which may address/manage them?
- Who has useful information and knowledge?
- Who has managed similar issues or challenges?
- Who has expressed interest in being involved?
- Who might be reasonably annoyed if not involved?
- Who is going to be involved in implementing any intervention?

There are a number of organisations or existing partnerships that are already involved with population health planning and/or working on the determinants of health. These organisations are identified in the 'analysing the planning context' (Step 2) section as potential partners.

Once partners have been identified, their level of involvement must be decided.

Levels/Types of partnerships

Organisations may work together in different ways and at various levels. This illustration represents the various types of partnerships that may exist between organisations.



(Ref: VicHealth's Partnership Analysis Tool, 2011)

Partnership levels may include networking, coordinating, cooperating, and collaborating. Underpinning each of these is the need for strong and effective participatory consultation with all partners in the relationship. The diagram above illustrates how higher levels of partnership require increasing amounts of commitment, change, risk, power, and trust.

This continuum also shows the fluid nature of these relationships. Partners in a population health planning process may adapt the level of their commitment according to their needs, their capacity over time, and the nature of the individual agreed initiatives.

Different objectives will necessitate different partnership approaches; however the concept of **sharing** is consistent throughout.

A similar model illustrating the different levels of partnership is '[The continuum of joint effort](#)' (developed by Success Works, 2002 and included in Victorian Council of Social Service '*Partnership in Practice Guides*' 2009).



Putting it into practice

As partnerships with stakeholders and populations differ markedly, different approaches exist to guide partnership processes. Of these, Plampling and associates (2000) identified a series of important steps for engaging and establishing successful partnerships:

1. Find a shared goal which demonstrates how the partnership(s) to be implemented will be beneficial, and that gives a clear direction of what it is needed achieve for these partners to be successful.
2. Build trust gradually over time, as this will require each stakeholder or population to value the work of the others' while also providing for a clear understanding of the value of their own and the others' contributions, skills and knowledge.
3. Find a common 'currency', so that the power held by each partner or population is commensurate with the aims of the partnership.
4. Clarify the vision and objectives of the partnership, so that all partners clearly understand the aim of the partnership and processes by which it will operate.
5. Include a wide range of stakeholders, so that diversity or opinion is actively sought and encouraged.
6. Have good and appropriate communication, visibility, and transparency of decision-making, so that all partners and populations involved understand how the partnership is progressing ; and,
7. Develop the necessary human resources, structures, and processes, (such as conflict resolution and role and responsibility statements), needed to successfully implement and guide the proposed partnership.

Partnership capacity building strategies

Examples of partnership capacity building activities relevant to population health planning are given below.

Examples of strategies to build partnerships	
Shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify potential partners that have a vested interest and whose goals align with population health planning ▪ Identify the need to work together and create opportunities to collaborate on population health planning activities
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify/enhance lines of communication between organisations ▪ Create cooperative working environments through regular meetings and/or communication ▪ Develop shared agreement, such as memoranda of understanding, that define the formality of the relationship ▪ Document agreement, expectation, and commitments of all partners and tasks ▪ Review and monitor the effectiveness and the benefits and gains of the partnership

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest time to build and maintain levels of trust within the partnership Be mindful of change in the partnership relationship as the partnership matures, and be prepared to adjust functions and roles accordingly
Planning and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify resources required to develop, negotiate, implement, evaluate, and sustain the planned action Involve all parties in planning to ensure the action/intervention remains relevant to all partners Encourage reflective and critical thinking to influence the development of actions Develop an agreed way of working, dealing with conflict, and supplying feedback about results and outcomes Set aside time to review and renegotiate (if needed) planned actions
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure measurable outcomes are meaningful to all partners involved Develop evaluation methods that reflect the resources and timelines allocated
Sustained outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure partners have a good understanding of each other's organisational values, goals, and core business Ensure a sustainable network is established Regularly identify and re-evaluate the level of operation of the partnership and respect and value emerging autonomy of the partnership

Adapted from "A Framework for Building Capacity to Improve Health" (NSW Health, 2001)

Resources

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) has produced three [Partnership in Practice Guides](#) that examine the three stages of partnering: preparing to partner, commencing the partnership, and sustaining the partnership.

Two tools for evaluating the effectiveness of partnerships are:

- [New York Partnership Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool](#)

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Further reading

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