

5 May 2021

Consultation response: National Preventive Health Strategy

Vision

Do you agree with the vision of the Strategy? Please explain your selection.

- Strongly Agree

The strategy vision acknowledges that best practice prevention activities go beyond early intervention and should be inclusive of targeting risk factors and the broader causes of poor health and wellbeing. The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) strongly supports the introduction of good policy to support health outcomes so welcomes this recognition of the influence that other factors, such as policy and supportive settings, can have for population health.

Aims

Do you agree with the aims and their associated targets for the Strategy? Please explain your selection.

- Agree

The VHA agrees with the aims and targets although notes that targets are aspirational. We are strongly supportive of the 4th aim ('investment in prevention is increased') and welcome the inclusion of this specific aim of supportive funding to align with the strategy purpose. However, further clarity is needed relating to how the 5 per cent the vast majority of prevention funding is provided through existing health promotion programs via the Department of Health and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, so further clarity is required to ensure that this 5 per cent increase occurs across all levels of the total health expenditure. Moreover, what constitutes as 'preventive health' needs defining so that all relevant initiatives can be included in the expenditure.

Principles

Six principles are included in the Strategy to underpin the Framework for Action by 2030. The principles are designed to guide implementation and strengthen current efforts. They are outlined on page 8.

Do you agree with the principles? Please explain your selection.

- Strongly Agree

Yes the VHA agrees with the principles outlined and particularly welcomes those related to *multi-sector collaboration, enabling the workforce and community engagement*.

The healthcare sector alone is not responsible for supporting optimal levels of health and wellbeing, so recognition of the role that other sectors and collaboration can have is welcomed. This was most recently evident in Victoria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks where sectors such as emergency services, local government and housing supported the health sector with outreach and testing activities.

The emphasis on community engagement aligns with requirements for healthcare providers to partner with consumers and demonstrate how organisations ensure a participatory approach to healthcare is reported under the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards.

Whilst supportive of enabling the workforce to embed prevention across the health system, further clarity is needed to understand how this will occur. We are in agreement that several areas of healthcare can include preventive practice; however, further research needs to be conducted to articulate how and when the health promotion continuum and activities, such as the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion action areas, are addressed by different

areas of the health sector. Further support is also required to ensure professional development is accessible to enable the workforce. The VHA currently delivers several capacity building initiatives and would welcome the opportunity to support and deliver prevention education to the health sector. Finally, whilst we agree that prevention can and should be included across the health system, we recognise that there is an existing health promotion workforce with specific expertise in prevention that should also be acknowledged. Please see the Australian Health Promotion Association Practitioner Registration initiative for more information.

Enablers

Do you agree with the enablers? Please explain your selection.

- Strongly Agree

The VHA strongly agrees with the enablers outlined and particularly welcomes reference to:

1. Leadership, governance and funding
2. Prevention in the health system
3. Partnerships and community engagement
4. Information and health literacy

The VHA does, however, reinforce that any advisory or governance mechanism introduced needs to ensure alignment with states and territories to ensure consistency at all levels of government.

We strongly agree that prevention in the health system is vital and specifically highlight the role community health services have played for many years in Victoria supporting health promotion initiatives.

Do you agree with the policy achievements for the enablers?

- Agree

The VHA agrees with the policy achievement aims for the aforementioned enablers, but again reinforces the need to recognise community health's long history in supporting prevention in Victoria. Further to this, any regional prevention frameworks would need to align with and avoid duplication of existing Victorian policy such as the State Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023, local government municipal public health and wellbeing plans, primary care partnership integrated health promotion plans and community health integrated health promotion plans. Further definition is also required to clarify what constitutes 'long term' prevention funding as prevention funding has historically been quite short in nature – usually spanning 1-5 years, targeted at lifestyle behavioural programs or social marketing campaigns. While social prescribing has merit, further investigation is needed to explore uptake, associated outcomes and how and where it can be imbedded in our health system.

In the wake of the 2020 bushfires and current COVID-19 pandemic the VHA also welcomes the 7th enabler of preparedness and its focus on climate change. We also welcome applying a health lens to relevant policy via the introduction of health impact assessments and the development of a national health literacy strategy and a national consumer engagement strategy. The latter, in particular, will need strong consultation with the health sector to ensure it aligns with current policy and practice.

Focus Areas

Do you agree with the seven focus areas? Please explain your selection.

- Agree

The VHA agrees with the 7 focus areas articulated and their alignment with highest burden of disease and notes recognition given to how policy and environments can influence these areas.

Do you agree with the targets for the focus areas?

- Agree

The VHA agrees with the specified targets although notes that the immunisation targets are silent on aims associated with adults and influenza & COVID-19 related vaccines. The targets associated with protecting mental health also need further expansion as they currently only relate to suicides and would benefit from further specific aims aligning with associated policy

Do you agree with the policy achievements for the focus areas?

- Agree

The VHA agrees with the policy achievement aims for the focus areas, however further clarity is required regarding the achievements associated with protecting mental health. We welcome recognition that community cohesion and social connectivity are vital to supporting mental health, but further detail is needed to explain how this may be achieved.

Continuing Strong Foundations

Do you agree with this section of the Strategy? Please explain your selection.

- Agree

The VHA is pleased to note the value of partner agencies is recognised in the strategy but again calls for further definition of 'healthcare systems' to allow for community health services to be explicitly included.

Feedback

Please provide any additional comments you have on the draft Strategy.

The VHA welcomes the development of the National Preventive Health Strategy and in particular its commitment to increasing long term, sustainable investment in prevention. We do, however, recommend further work is completed to ensure that national policy aligns and supports state-based approaches to prevention. We strongly agree that preventive practice should be embedded across health systems, but the experience and expertise of health promotion practitioners should be recognised and provide guidance across the health sector relating to varying roles and types of activities.



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