

VHA State Election Platform 2022

Supporting care in the community

Community health services are a uniquely Victorian asset that deliver a range of services across Victoria.

They deliver primary care, allied health, dental services, prevention and health promotion programs and specialised services such as maternity outreach, and mental health services.

In addition to delivering universal health services, the community health sector focuses on improving access to healthcare for community members that are socially or economically disadvantaged, experience poorer health outcomes, have complex health needs or have limited access to appropriate health care.

Community health services know their local communities and provide tailored, integrated care in community settings that are familiar, welcoming and accessible. Importantly, they provide care that addresses [the social determinants of health](#) to stop people from getting sick in the first place.

Comprehensive healthcare is essential to disease prevention, early intervention, and chronic disease management – and community health services provide these essential services to vulnerable Victorians in a local setting.

Our community health services are delivering high-quality care and prevention programs to their local communities, but they are often challenged by short-term funding, competition with the private health sector for workers, and a lack of funded positions to deliver services.



What can government do to support community health services?

The VHA is seeking nine commitments from the next State Government to support public health and community health services across Victoria. These are:

WORKFORCE

- Enable our workforce to deliver more care
- Flexibility for a modern health workforce
- Recruit and retain healthcare workers for better care

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Maintain our hospital and community health facilities
- Upgrade our physical and digital infrastructure
- A clear and transparent infrastructure roadmap

FUNDING MODELS

- Funding reform to keep Victorians healthy and out of hospital
- Keep health funding above inflation
- A No Gap Guarantee for Urgent Care Centres

These commitments have been developed through extensive engagement with VHA members – for community health services, the VHA's monthly meeting of community health service CEOs was a key forum to gather and test priority policies.

Eight of our nine election asks are relevant to community health services and the communities they serve, with three that have a particularly strong community health focus.

Recruit and retain healthcare workers for better care



The VHA has been calling for a large-scale healthcare sector strategy and recruitment campaign to build our domestic workforce.

The most important issue facing the Victorian community health sector is supporting, retaining and growing our workforce.

Workforce shortages are one the biggest barriers to the sector's delivery of care, and the community health sector faces additional challenges. Staff shortages burn out existing staff and discourage others' willingness to work in the sector.

Sadly, we know that the pandemic has had a considerable impact on the psychological wellbeing of community health service staff in Victoria. A [recent study](#) found that about a quarter of staff reported moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress in 2021.

Community health services are also trapped in a cycle of 'boom and bust' funding. This affects their ability to plan, attract and retain staff, and deliver services that meet the increasingly complex needs of Victoria's growing and ageing population.

Community health services struggle to compete for staff

Community health services are competing against private practices and NDIS providers for workers. There is a limited pool of primary and allied health professionals to recruit from, and private providers can offer more attractive salary packages. Recruitment is a particular issue for lower income areas, Melbourne's outer suburbs and rural and regional areas.

For example, as Victoria faces a shortage of GPs, community health services would need to offer GPs a financial package that matches the private sector, despite lower profitability in the community health context.

Funding reform to keep Victorians healthy and out of hospital



We want the next Victorian Government to lead, develop and support new funding models for out-of-hospital care, with Victoria to be a leader and champion for funding change nationally.

With increasing demand for acute services, funding models need to encourage greater care in the community – so that urgent care is available to those that need it. Keeping Victorians healthy and out of hospital will lead to benefits in the long term – and community health services are best placed to provide this care.

By adequately funding community health services to deliver prevention and health promotion programs and early intervention services, the government will be helping people to manage chronic diseases at home and preventing illnesses from escalating to a point where hospital care is required.

And we need to make sure community health services are not hampered by red tape, so they can continue to do what they do best – understanding local needs, building trust with community members, and providing wrap-around health and social support in a safe and welcoming environment.

Community health services keep people well and out of hospital

In [2020–21](#), there were 556,000 avoidable ED presentations in Victoria that could have been diverted had primary or community healthcare been available.

More than 20% of hospitalisations for Victorians aged 65+ could have been prevented by appropriate care in primary health and community settings.

Community health services played a critical role in Victoria's pandemic response, helping to keep our most vulnerable community members healthy, safe, and informed.

Flexibility for a modern health workforce



We want the next Victorian Government to increase and expand Victoria's 'full scope of practice' workforce programs to ensure clinical skills and expertise are used in the most effective way.

There is a need for increased government workforce support so that healthcare staff can use all their skills to deliver better and more efficient models of care.

We need to address workforce shortages by using staff to the best of their abilities; this is often called working to 'full scope of practice' – working to the full extent of the profession's recognised skill base and regulatory guidelines.

The last two years saw the rise of flexible working arrangements across the country to mitigate workforce shortages. It is with the same spirit that we need to find new ways to create more flexibility for community health services to deliver preventive health programs and ease the burden on the acute health system.

The benefits of community paramedics in rural and regional community health settings

Expanded Scope of Practice (ESP) paramedic practitioner roles, including community paramedics, are being employed in Australia, New Zealand and Canada to reduce demand on hospital emergency departments, improve access to primary care (particularly in rural and regional areas) and to provide preventive care and support to vulnerable community members in their home or other community settings. Community paramedic models have been found to deliver significant benefits, including reduced emergency calls, cost effectiveness and positive patient outcomes.

The mounting pressures on Victoria's acute health system requires new and innovative ways to deliver healthcare. Community health services are well placed to relieve system pressures and reduce health expenditure by providing preventative health programs and care in the community.

Without these commitments from government, community health services will continue to be affected by workforce shortages, ageing infrastructure and short-term funding – with poorer health outcomes for local communities.

If you care about the health of your community, **#VoteForHealth**

If you are concerned about access to quality healthcare in your local area, take action to support community health services ahead of the Victorian election 2022.



Find out what the major parties are saying about health by following our election commitment tracker <https://padlet.com/VHA2022/voteforhealth>



Ask your local MP what they are doing to improve access to community health services in your area



Find out which local candidates are committed to keeping Victorians healthy and out of hospital



Write to your local MP to let them know that health is important to you (we've created [this handy resource](#) to guide you)



Read the VHA's full State election platform at www.vha.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/agenda-2022/

Printed/published by Victorian Healthcare Association

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