

## EDITORIAL

# Innovate, Inform, Integrate: VicHealth is transforming to meet innovation and the new health promotion challenges

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Many readers of *Health Promotion International* will be familiar with the story of VicHealth which I have the pleasure of being custodian of as the CEO. A world-first health promotion foundation, VicHealth was established as a Statutory Agency by the Victorian Parliament in 1987 following an unparalleled public health advocacy effort. VicHealth was the first health promotion body in the world to be funded by a tax on tobacco with a legislative mandate to promote health in the state of Victoria, Australia (VicHealth, 2005).

As we near the 30 year anniversaries of both the Ottawa Charter and of VicHealth—it is timely to reflect on what health promotion *practice* looks like in 2015. How has practice changed and developed over this period with a range of new challenges and opportunities? How do we make sure we are ready for the next 30 years? VicHealth's new strategy presents a case study of some new thinking and approaches and why we need to develop new types of partnerships.

VicHealth's origins were firmly in the sponsorship space. In 1988, VicHealth commenced the buyout of tobacco company sponsorship from sport and arts events and health promotion messages including QUIT replaced tobacco advertising (VicHealth, 2005). This move signalled the commencement of an unprecedented effort in tobacco control in Victoria and Australia, which has seen extraordinary success in reducing the impact of smoking. The rate has halved over this period to less than 13% of the population (AIHW, 2014).

While the focus on tobacco control and sport remains (as mandated by the Victorian Tobacco

Act 1987), our work today encompasses a broad spectrum of health and wellbeing priorities. It addresses sensitive and difficult issues, provides a focus on disadvantaged Victorians via the organization's health equity lens and applies a range of health promotion actions to maximize the potential for effective and sustainable health improvement in the Victorian population.

Ensuring organizational readiness for the 10-year period commencing in 2013 was a key driver in the development of the VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion 2013–2023 (VicHealth, 2013). Acknowledging that significant change rarely occurs within the course of a few years, the Action Agenda was a deliberative move from the four-year strategic planning cycle previously adopted by VicHealth to a 10-year vision.

We sought input to this vision from people at all levels nationally and internationally—government leaders, health professionals and industry leaders, community members, leading thinkers and the VicHealth Board and staff to identify the big challenges and opportunities ahead of us. We also asked these actors, whose expertise and insight extended across a range of sectors, to help us reimagine and redefine our organizational model so as to equip VicHealth to truly be a health promotion organization for the next decade.

During the first two years of implementation of the Action Agenda, we have spent considerable time and effort testing and refining this model, built on three actions—Innovate, Inform and Integrate. The model underpins the way we approach our work and challenges the organization

to clearly articulate and be accountable for our unique contribution to health promotion in Victoria, nationally and internationally.

The change process associated with the introduction and implementation of the new model has not always been easy. Some of VicHealth's partners, admirers and staff members have at times struggled to see the organization that they know and love within the parameters of the Action Agenda. However, without change in a world that is constantly changing health promotion runs the risk of being left behind. As the powerful forces that make unhealthy choices the easy choices for populations right across the globe engage with dramatic transformations in digital technology and social media for example, so must health promotion. We must find a way to bring together health promotion as defined in the Ottawa Charter with new ways of thinking about the challenges of better health and of greater health equity.

The Action Agenda is structured around five key areas of focus, or strategic imperatives. Each imperative has a 10-year goal and related evolving three-year priority, outlining the long- and medium-term vision for VicHealth's work within each strategic imperative (see Figure 1).

This year, we have developed the VicHealth Action Agenda Scorecard. The Scorecard is the system used to track our progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the Action Agenda, our 10-year vision for championing the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. The overarching vision for the Scorecard is 'One million more Victorians with better health and wellbeing', pointing to the scale of the change we are aiming to achieve through implementation of the Action Agenda. The VicHealth Model describes our approach to implementation. It comprises three equally important actions that encompass our work. These are as follows:

- Innovate: drive bold new ways to address our health priorities
- Inform: instigate action and broaden our impact
- Integrate: embed interventions into Victoria's prevention system

Across these three actions, we have defined five key approaches which more specifically describe our work and which we measure our performance against—via the new VicHealth Action Agenda Scorecard. These approaches are as follows:

- (1) Develop and test innovative methods and partnerships to achieve behavioural and/or environmental outcomes
- (2) Deliver programmes and campaigns that establish effective approaches with target groups and/or settings
- (3) Engage the wider public in conversations and public debate around health
- (4) Influence the practice of organizations and leverage the investment of stakeholders.
- (5) Sustain outcomes through policy development and systems change.

Central to our ability to work in this way is VicHealth's reputation among stakeholders and regard by the general public. Without the recognition and trust of these important groups, a small organization like VicHealth would not have the necessary reach or impact to effect change. We cannot do this work alone.

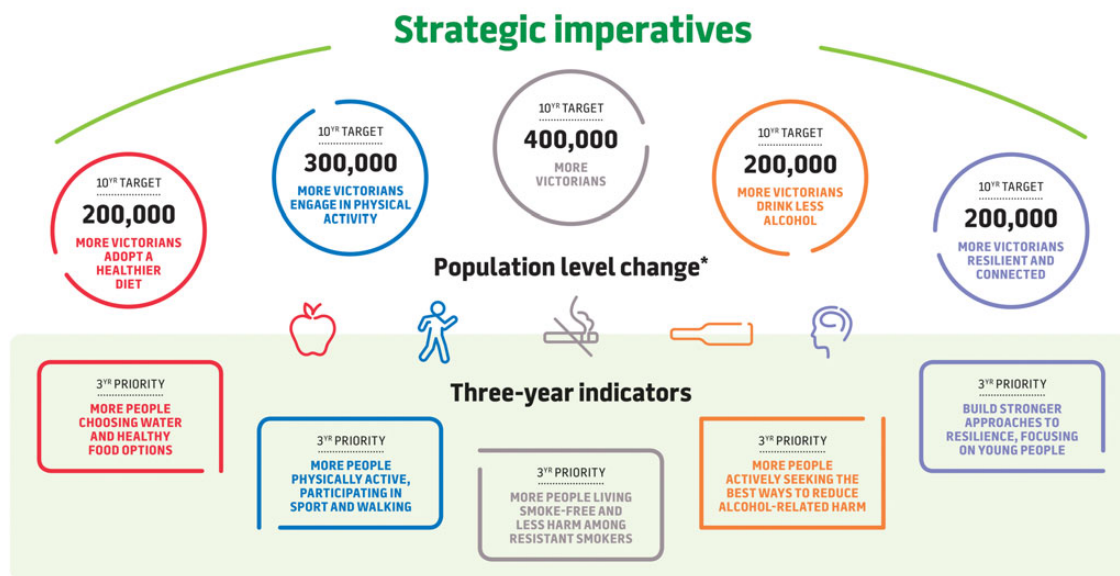
Our 'Innovate' action reflects VicHealth's capacity to absorb and manage risk. Evidence from a range of fields suggests a strong relationship between risk-taking and innovation in organizational settings (Llopis *et al.*, 2014; March and Shapira, 1987). VicHealth has always been an organization that tests ideas and strategies that are promising but yet unproven and supports exploratory endeavour. Through progressive research and rigorous evaluation we are able to build the evidence base for health promotion and disseminate this knowledge to policy makers and practitioners.

The innovation-related approach, *Develop and test innovative methods and partnerships*, describes the extension of VicHealth's traditional pioneering role, as well as today's increased focus on drawing on cross-sectoral knowledge and cross-sectoral partnerships to translate the best insights from other sectors into health promotion.

Our innovation-focused work explores the possibilities that the rapid development of new and emerging digital technologies presents for health promotion. New models of social entrepreneurship also have considerable relevance for health promotion, and we are integrating these approaches in our interventions to enhance the prospects of long-term sustainability in activities that have traditionally been seen as requiring government funding. A new Health Equity Incubator is currently in development which will support the exploration of solutions to the 'wicked problems' that drive health inequities by a new cohort of health promoters,

# ONE MILLION MORE VICTORIANS WITH BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING

VicHealth's Action Agenda Scorecard is the system used to track our progress towards achieving targets set in the VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion, our 10-year vision for championing the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. The 10-year population level targets are for the period July 2013–June 2023, and the three-year indicators are for July 2013–June 2016.



**Fig. 1:** The VicHealth Action Agenda Scorecard.

drawn from a range of sectors not previously connected to our work.

Our Leading Thinkers initiative is designed to harness the expertise of international innovators to generate and provoke new thinking, inspire momentum and enable change. Dr David Halpern, Director of the Behavioural Insights Team in the UK (<http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/>), is our inaugural Leading Thinker. He has instigated a range of new initiatives at VicHealth which have challenged and advanced our thinking and influenced the practice of our partners.

Once new methods and partnerships have shown promise through the testing phase, the work is translated to our 'Inform' action. Through the first related approach, *Deliver programs & campaigns that establish effective approaches*, we focus on establishing the effectiveness of promising programme and social marketing activity for subsequent translation into policy and practice by government and other organizations. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of VicHealth's efforts to understand and establish how to address a specific health issue in order to generate action by others is our work in the prevention of violence

against women. VicHealth's investment in a range of interventions over the last decade has seen widespread recognition of violence against women as a health issue, and been the catalyst for action by a range of health promotion stakeholders working in Victoria, as well as by state and national governments (Powell, 2014).

An important aspect of getting an issue onto policy and/or organizational agendas is having a range of voices, including those of the general public, calling for action. This relates to the second Inform-related approach; *Engage the wider public in conversations and public debate about health*. One mechanism that we use to stimulate discussion and debate about key health issues is the sharing of research and evaluation findings via various communication channels, including the media. Mainstream media provide an important opportunity to reach large numbers of people who might not otherwise engage with our messages in the course of their day-to-day lives. Social media provide a more active mechanism for engagement with the public, and therefore unparalleled opportunities not just to support better personal choice for health, but to engage with and empower

people to take social action to address the underlying determinants of health (Catford, 2009).

Another mechanism we are using to catalyse public debate about health, generate social movement for change and create an enabling environment for stronger government action is the citizens' jury. Citizens' juries have been undertaken in Australia and internationally on a range of issues, with evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the deliberative mechanism to shift public attitudes (Street *et al.*, 2014). Under the Leading Thinkers Initiative, VicHealth will hold a Citizen's Jury in October 2015 with the aim of engaging the community in a discussion and debate around potential solutions for overweight and obesity.

Victoria's Citizen's Jury on Obesity will be the largest jury of its kind in Australia, engaging 100 Victorians in a conversation about obesity. Over the course of 2 days, the jury will be presented with evidence from 'expert witnesses' from industry, government and community. These presentations will inform the response of the jury to the specific question, 'We have a problem with obesity. How can we make it easier to eat better?' This is an exciting opportunity for VicHealth to speak directly to the community about the complex issue of obesity and to understand their responses to potential solutions presented by major stakeholder groups. Our media partner will be instrumental in presenting the debate stimulated through the citizens' jury to the wider public, allowing for deeper and more complex conversations to occur.

The ultimate aim of VicHealth's work is to influence the policy and practice of organizations and governments to support sustainable change. This is expressed through our 'Integrate' action. The absolute strength of VicHealth is our partnerships. As a statewide organization we rely on partnerships in order to test and establish effective approaches to addressing our priorities, and to engage the public in conversation and debate. We also equip our partners via training and development to take knowledge created through our strategic investments and apply it to organizational policy and practice; this is captured in our fourth approach, *Influence the practice of organizations and leverage the investment of stakeholders*.

We also work with our government partners to *Sustain outcomes through policy development and systems change*. VicHealth embeds interventions

into the state government's prevention work with the aim of making long-term change. Through the activation of all aspects of our model we seek to achieve our focus on 'One million more Victorians with better health and wellbeing' by 2023. This figure provides a high level aspirational and measurable target to coordinate our efforts and articulate our success over the coming period. As we commence the process of refreshing our three-year priorities for the next triennium beginning in July 2016, we recognize some of the major challenges and opportunities ahead, as follows.

Tobacco control is likely to remain the key area for measurable population health improvement and will likely make the greatest single contribution to our goal of healthier Victorians. A long-term commitment to alcohol cultural change will also be required to capitalize upon important windows for policy reform in relation to alcohol-related harms.

Obesity continues to be a critical area for action. Increasing physical activity can contribute to reducing obesity and reductions in sedentary behaviour will be at least as significant. A potentially far greater contribution to reductions in obesity could, however, be achieved through improvements in healthy eating, particularly by decreasing consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor 'junk' foods.

A strategic focus on salt reduction will potentially yield very significant health gains in the Victorian population over a comparatively short period. Achieving our targets for population-level salt reduction would arguably outstrip our overall goal of 1 million healthier Victorians through food reformulation activities that impact the entire population.

In 2015 VicHealth certainly looks different to the VicHealth of 1987, and to the VicHealth of the 1990s and 2000s. We are now building on the successes of the past to develop a clear model for the future, recognizing that it does not and cannot provide all the answers to the complex issues we face. VicHealth's recent designation as a World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Leadership in Health Promotion sees us well placed to share this journey with stakeholders at home, nationally and internationally. As the host of Health Promotion International we also look forward to hearing from you on the road ahead.

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