



Online submission to Department of Health and Human Services on the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2019–2023)

The following is responses to questions from the Department of Health and Human Services to inform the next Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2019-23).

Q1. Reflecting on the current Victorian public health and wellbeing plan (2015-2019):

a. What are the strengths of the current plan?

It is encouraging to have a State level health and wellbeing plan to provide direction and enable collaborative partnerships. The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-19 provides a useful overview and evidence of the burden of disease at the state level as well as a vision that supports equitable wellbeing for all.

The plan acknowledges the social determinants of health as a major influencer on health and wellbeing outcomes. The State Government can directly influence many of these social determinants of health, it is considered that more detail could be provided within the strategic directions to address these concerns.

Other key strengths of the Plan is the inclusion of place-based approaches to enable inequity to be addressed. Furthermore the Plan started to unpack an integrated monitoring and reporting process across government departments as well as across levels of government. This was pleasing to see and something that should be further explored to ensure the appropriate resourcing is provided to undertake it effectively.

b. What are the opportunities for improvement?

Social Determinants of Health

Currently the Plan has a behavioural and disease focus instead of focusing on the underlying causes of ill-health, the social determinants of health. State Government are in a unique position, unlike other organisations where they can directly influence the social determinants of health. This Plan should provide direction for how the other areas of state government can improve wellbeing such as transport, education, employment, housing, access to health services, income support, gender equity, justice and so on to ensure a whole of government approach.

While it is acknowledged that work around ill-health outcomes and disease is important, this should not be the primary focus of the plan.

Strategies to focus on equity

It is important that the strategies focus on providing equitable opportunities for achieving better health outcomes, striving to reduce and remove avoidable health gaps that are driven socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. At a minimum, we need to ensure that state-wide efforts do not widen health gaps for vulnerable communities.



In order to do this actions should be directed to more marginalised areas and community groups across Victoria. In addition intersectionality across community groups should be acknowledged.

Duplication

A key area that has been identified within the Plan is climate change. Climate change can have a significant impact on vulnerable communities and should be noted within the Plan. Across the sustainability sector there is already a lot of work that is happening within the climate change and adaptation space with community. This Plan should acknowledge that work and add value via articulating how the key priority areas or issues will ensure climate change outcomes are integrated within them.

Issues not included

The Plan picks up on two key issues, smoking and nutrition as these areas have the largest contribution to burden of disease as well as the most available evidence in relation to prevention. While this is important, the consultation paper acknowledges that there is limited or a lack of data in relation to gambling and social isolation. These are both key issues within community and given the lack of data and evidence based prevention interventions, these issues should be prioritised to ensure we continue to build the evidence. Social isolation has been a key issues that has been raised in the Western Region Suburban Partnerships Community Forums by the community.

Q2. It is proposed that over the next four years we focus on four of the plan's identified priorities by providing additional guidance and direction for coordinated action.

Which of the following priorities can your organisation/sector implement actions for (note: you may select multiple priorities):

a. Tobacco-free Living. Yes Hobsons Bay City Council can implement actions for tobacco-free living

If yes, tell us how. If no tell us why.

Local government monitors available data to build an understanding of local health issues and can utilise Council-led services such as Maternal and Child Health services and Youth Services to promote Tobacco-free living. However, implementation of major health programs would require additional resources.

Legislation for smoke-free zoning at local food premises, licenced clubs, sports and playgrounds, public transport stations/stops, beaches, workplaces and hospitals promote and reinforce norms towards tobacco-free living. However resourcing is needed for local government to adequately enforce smoke-free zoning and deliver community education. In the retail setting, some local governments have access to 'mystery-shopping' funded programs and are able to recruit minors to do test purchasing at tobacco retailers. Additional funding would support local government to provide educational visits to tobacco retailers regarding appropriate signage and the sale of tobacco to minors.

Another issue that could be explored at a state level is how to promote Tobacco-free living where residents are impacted by second-hand smoking due to the proximity of activities in neighbouring



dwelling, for example smoking on balconies of apartment blocks. This is an ongoing challenge and there is not yet any guidance for how to effectively approach this issue.

b. Healthy eating. Yes Hobsons Bay City Council can implement actions for healthy eating

If yes, tell us how. If no tell us why.

There is growing public interest in local food production with community gardens and other urban agriculture (e.g. urban bee keeping, market gardens, and urban orchids) being managed by community. This comes with additional benefits such as building community networks and social capital, and improving food security. Many local governments have funding that enables them to: facilitate local food production initiatives in partnership with the community and other organisations; encourage local community to grow their own food; and provide capacity building to increase the community's skills and knowledge around food production, preparation and storage. This funding should be maintained to ensure this work can continue.

It is worth noting that key barriers also exist in the environment for healthy eating such as access and affordability of unhealthy food. Local government do not have the ability to decrease fast food outlets within a municipality. The State Government could provide local government, as the Responsibility Authority, the ability to assess fast food outlet planning applications via a health impact and cumulative impact assessment.

c. Climate change. Yes Hobsons Bay City Council can implement actions for climate change

If yes, tell us how. If no tell us why.

Local government can play an important role in responding to climate change issues. Hobsons Bay City Council has a suite of sustainability strategies, including but not limited to: the Climate Change Adaptation Plan to increase resilience and achieve a sustainable community; two Greenhouse Strategies to reach zero net greenhouse gas emissions from the community's activities by 2030 and from Council activities by 2020; and an Integrated Transport Plan to encourage active transport, physical activity, reduce carbon emissions, and reduce dependency on cars. A number of councils have also started piloting 20-Minute-Neighbourhoods, giving people the ability to meet most of their everyday needs within a 20-minute walk, cycle or local public transport trip of their home.

Climate change can also bring about a range of public health issues and emergency management events which local government, along with other stakeholders work to address. This includes responding to heat waves, floods, thunderstorm asthma and dampness in homes (e.g. mosquito management). Additionally, local government works together with key stakeholders to monitor air quality in the municipality. Councils could do more in this space if there was additional funding for infrastructure and services (e.g. to managing sea level rise, manage heat island effect, extending libraries hours during heat waves, and working with industry to decrease pollution).



d. Respond to antimicrobial drug resistance. No Hobsons Bay City Council cannot implement actions for antimicrobial drug resistance

If yes, tell us how. If no tell us why.

It is not yet clear through the consultation paper and forum what specific role local government would take for this priority area.

Currently local government is involved in some emergency management such as responding to influenza and pandemics. Medical practitioners and community health organisations may be better placed to provide community education on responsible antibiotic use and hand hygiene to prevent transmission.

Q3. Please rank the importance (from most important to least important) of the following supports that would assist your organisation/sector to implement the priorities of the next plan (2019-2023).

1. Change to the authorising environment
2. Resources for monitoring and evaluation
3. Guidance on evidence-informed practice
4. Platforms to share good practice across the sector

What other supports or resources would aid your sector or organisation?

Local government is best placed to understand community needs as well as engage with stakeholders for collaborative outcomes.

In order to do this more effectively additional project and infrastructure funding is required as well as changes to state legislation to enable council, as the Responsible Authority, to manage effective land use and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Another key gap is local level data. Currently data, if it is available, is at the municipal level and not able to be analysed at a suburb level or by key demographic characteristics e.g. gender, age, cultural background. This means that understanding community needs can be time consuming and potentially miss key population groups. It is recommended the state government further invested in data collection so a larger sample size can be analysed at a greater level.

Q4. How can we balance the need for coordinated action on specific priorities while allowing for local responsiveness?

Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans prioritise health issues relevant to the municipality, which may vary from state priorities. Councils currently work across boundaries where priorities are similar to undertake shared responses and or share resources and learnings. This is where collective action is enabled, allowing shared planning, knowledge and resources to achieve outcomes. This is currently happening across many regions, however where required, should be further supported by the State with additional funding.