

Participation in citizen engagement

Indicator overview

VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

Introduction

Broadly, citizen engagement refers to a range of activities and affiliations undertaken by people within their communities. These activities can include (but are not limited to) an individual's ties to professional and political associations, church organisations, volunteer associations and service clubs (Viswanath et al. 2006). The involvement of citizens in a community allows for their engagement in decision-making processes, and is essential for the development of appropriate policies and decisions in government, the private sector and the community (Reddel and Woolcock 2004). In democratic societies, individuals are able to participate in decision-making at a community level, and local government processes are relatively transparent and accountable (Reddel and Woolcock 2004).

Health benefits

Citizen engagement has the potential to engender constructive networks and relationships in a variety of settings particularly where there are common or shared interests in relation to a 'burning issue', a shared vision or agreed outcome (Carpini et al. 2004). Those engaged with the democratic process can feel empowered, as they have increased personal political efficacy and feel more in control of their futures (Carpini et al. 2004). Together these factors contribute to improved population health outcomes (Baum et al. 2000). The importance of citizen engagement has been well documented by researchers, with a number of studies highlighting the relationship between the health of individuals and participation at the community or neighbourhood level (Woolcock 1998, Woolcock and Narayan 2000). For example, social cohesion, which refers to social characteristics such as trust, reciprocity and participation (Stafford and McCarthy 2006), is thought to influence health in three ways:

1. In communities where individual trust is high, people are more likely to participate in local activities and events and have close social ties that encourage healthy behaviours (Kawachi and Berkman 2000).
2. Access to health services is greater in societies that are more equal and have transparent democracies (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).
3. A greater capacity to mobilise and advocate for health-related resources exists in societies where individuals and groups are able to readily act (Kawachi and Berkman 2000).

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Find out more

Opportunities for social connection, VicHealth.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Publications/Social-connection/Opportunities-for-social-connection.aspx

Social connection, arts and new media, VicHealth.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/socialconnection

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