

# The Good Sports Program

VicHealth's operational model in action

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## About this document

VicHealth is an independent statutory authority that works with all levels of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and local communities to improve health in a world that is changing constantly and rapidly.

This document uses the history of the Good Sports Program to highlight VicHealth's model of working to innovate, inform and integrate new health promotion approaches in order to influence communities' health and wellbeing in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

## Introduction

VicHealth is the world's first health promotion foundation, established in 1987 with a mandate to promote good health in Victoria. Since then, VicHealth's approach has shifted from informing and raising awareness to inspiring and facilitating action that enhances wellbeing.

For 30 years, VicHealth has worked with its partners to discover and implement new solutions to the health problems facing Victorians. Today, VicHealth is both an incubator of innovation and a strategic partner in health promotion.

VicHealth's current Action Agenda includes five strategic imperatives:

- promoting healthy eating
- encouraging regular physical activity
- preventing tobacco use
- preventing harm from alcohol
- improving mental wellbeing.

## How VicHealth works

To achieve the ambitious goals within each strategic imperative, VicHealth strives to take action where there is the greatest potential for health gains, to complement and add value to the work of others (rather than replicating it) and to build on progress over time.

VicHealth's health promotion model emphasises the use of a mix of actions to influence people and environments at multiple levels to effect change. This means working with, supporting and building capacity among individuals, communities, organisations and policymakers.

VicHealth's operational model is built on three pillars (Innovate – Inform – Integrate) delivered through five organisational approaches (Figure 1). VicHealth **innovates** to discover how to accelerate outcomes for health promotion, **informs** to give individuals and organisations the best information for healthier decisions, and **integrates** to help Victoria lead health promotion policy and practice. Research and evaluation are at the centre of VicHealth's work: evidence is used, created and assessed at all stages of health promotion and primary prevention practice.

## Our operational model

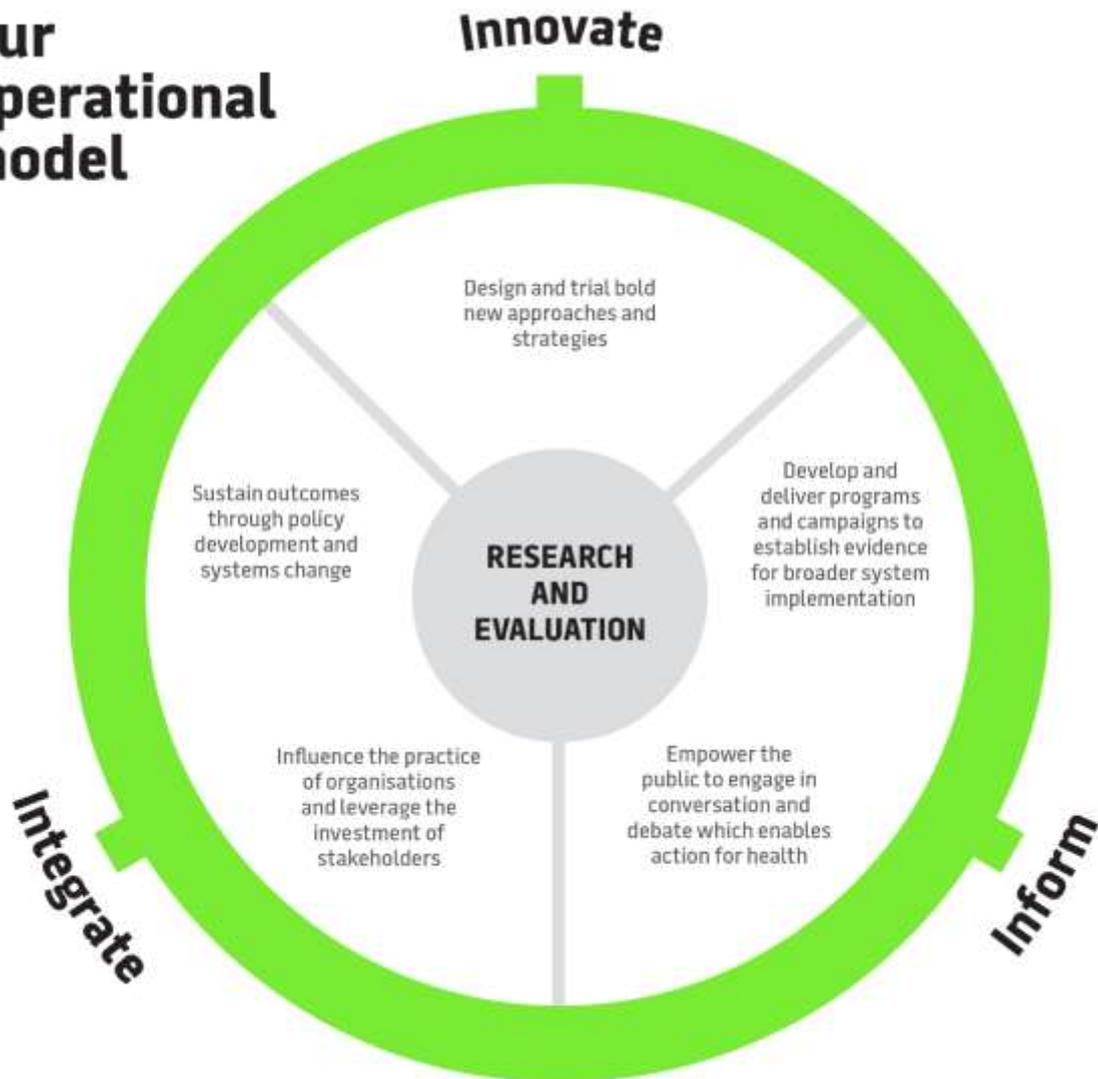


Figure 1: VicHealth's operational model

### Focus on innovation

Innovation is embedded in VicHealth's operational model, organisational structures and funding criteria. VicHealth seeks to discover and support great ideas that show the best promise for improving as many lives in Victoria as possible. In particular, it aims to:

- commission, trial and evaluate cutting edge interventions
- weave digital technology into its work
- fund pioneering research
- look outwards for the best insights from other sectors.

VicHealth's culture of innovation has enabled it to be a catalyst for – and early adopter of – new health promotion approaches. The organisation strives to use its unique position in Victoria to identify solutions that have the potential to advance health promotion in ways that are not always possible through government organisations or healthcare providers.

***“For VicHealth, innovation means discovering how to accelerate health outcomes for Victorians”***

## Case study: the Good Sports Program

### Background

Millions of Australians are involved in community sporting clubs. However, the club setting can be associated with high levels of risky drinking and significant potential for alcohol-related harms.

The Good Sports Program is a free, national accreditation program for community sporting clubs that focuses on alcohol management as a way to influence the drinking culture within the club context. The Program was developed by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation to:

- reduce high risk drinking
- reduce alcohol-related problems such as drink-driving, violence and assault
- change the behaviour of players, supporters and members of community sporting clubs
- increase the viability and impact of sporting clubs in their communities.

The Program enables community sporting clubs to progress through three levels of accreditation:

**Level 1:** compliance with liquor licensing and smoke-free laws, signage and minimum responsible service of alcohol (RSA) training

**Level 2:** responsible alcohol management through RSA training for all bar staff, provision of food if alcohol is served, provision of non-alcoholic drink options, safe transport practices and removing drink promotion options

**Level 3:** development of alcohol management and illicit drug policies.

VicHealth provided the original funding for the Good Sports Program pilot and has contributed to its success and long-term sustainability by applying its **innovate – inform – integrate** operational model as outlined below.

### Innovate

In 1997, VicHealth entered a funding partnership with the Alcohol and Drug Foundation to help sporting clubs develop policies reflecting a responsible attitude to alcohol. The Good Sports Program evolved from this partnership. A pilot, fully funded by VicHealth, was undertaken in 2000 and the program was formally launched in Victoria in 2001.

Rollouts in other states followed, supported by additional funding from all levels of government. The Good Sports Program is now Australia's largest and longest-running health initiative in community sports. As at 2017, it had worked with more than 8000 community sports clubs across the country, and it continues to grow. It was, and remains, a unique model of accreditation in the sporting sector internationally.

Innovation and continuous improvement have been vital to the success of the Good Sports Program, and remain important elements of ongoing program management, as detailed below.

***“The Good Sports Program is now Australia's largest and longest-running health initiative in community sports”***

## Inform

VicHealth, as primary funder of the Good Sports Program in its early years, used its expertise and influence to inform the ongoing development and expansion of the program. One key mechanism for this was periodic reviews (see box) that shaped how the program was funded and managed. VicHealth's feedback helped ensure that innovation remained an ongoing part of the process, while an emphasis on research and evaluation drove continuous improvement, long-term sustainability and, ultimately, measurable community outcomes for the program.

Three key examples of this evaluation and feedback loop are described below. They show the ways the VicHealth operational model strengthened the program and contributed to its growth and sustainability.

### 1. Academic rigour

The 2007 program review recommended that the Good Sports Program seek academic partnerships to ensure that future evaluations were more rigorously focused on measuring impact and outcomes.

As a result of this review, a research project funded by the Australian Research Council brought together the experience of the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, the University of Newcastle, Hunter New England

Population Health and Deakin University to undertake the first randomised controlled trial of the Good Sports Program.

The trial was run over a four-year period and involved 88 community football clubs in New South Wales. It provided sound evidence that participation in the Good Sports Program reduced risky alcohol consumption among club members and alcohol-related harms both within and outside of the club, particularly in rural and regional areas.

More than 20 peer-reviewed journal articles relating to the Good Sports Program were published between 2000 and 2016. These studies have provided strong academic evidence that the program works, and have been vital for obtaining funding from other stakeholders (including state and federal governments and commercial investors), which has enabled the program to continue, evolve and expand its reach.

### ***VicHealth program reviews***

*As a condition of funding, VicHealth undertakes comprehensive evidence-based program reviews to evaluate initiatives that represent larger or longer-term investments, or are of particular strategic significance.*

*These periodic reviews, involving relevant independent external experts, aim to:*

- \* assess past performance and make recommendations for future directions*
- \* seek operational efficiencies and effectiveness*
- \* identify new and emerging key issues and trends that may represent challenges or opportunities for the program.*

*The VicHealth program review process is a unique approach to program evaluation, informed by available evidence relating to a program's performance as well as the social, economic and political context in which it operates.*

## **2. Innovation pilots**

Ongoing innovation was considered by VicHealth to be vital to the long-term sustainability of the Good Sports Program. As a direct result of the 2009 program review, a number of innovation pilots were undertaken, funded by VicHealth with an additional \$400,000 investment. Two of these are highlighted below.

### **Accelerated accreditation and additional bar management strategies (Moreland City Council)**

*The original model for the Good Sports Program required clubs to maintain each level of accreditation for a period of 12 months before progressing to the next, to allow organisational change to 'sink in' before introducing more stringent criteria.*

*However, it was acknowledged through the 2009 program review process that greater flexibility in the accreditation process could facilitate growth of the program, and clubs' engagement with it.*

*To test this theory, a pilot was undertaken to consider the implications of a shorter accreditation processes, and explore clubs' acceptance of proposed additional bar strategies (price rises and reduced product range for alcoholic beverages).*

*The pilot demonstrated that higher levels of accreditation could be achieved through a flexible and accelerated process without affecting program quality. Following the pilot, the 12-month rule was removed from the program altogether to recognise and support clubs that were ready to progress to higher levels of accreditation more quickly.*

### **Good Sports Level 3 Graduate pilot**

*The Graduate pilot was designed to investigate the concept of a new level or program for clubs who have held Level 3 accreditation for more than one year (L3+). The goals of L3+ centre on program sustainability and include*

- *retaining and engaging L3+ clubs*
- *reinforcing and extending responsible alcohol management practices and policies (including maintaining L3 Good Sports criteria)*
- *delivering sustainable economic benefits to clubs at L3+.*

*Developing a preliminary framework for the pilot involved consulting with program members and partners, auditing current services and tools available and consulting with technology providers about online program options.*

*Following this, the Alcohol and Drug Foundation secured funding from the Australian National Preventive Health Agency to run a national Good Sports Graduate Club pilot, based on the framework developed.*

*The Good Sports Level 3 Monitoring Report (L3MR) was then implemented as an online process in 2014–15, and made part of core operations from 2015–16. Moving to an online system has reduced the cost of Level 3 monitoring by 70 per cent in Victoria, and an Australian Research Council–funded randomised controlled trial is being undertaken in 2017 to test the quality of the L3+ Program and the effectiveness of clubs maintaining their Level 3 accreditation online.*

### 3. Ongoing review and monitoring

The 2012 program review highlighted the need for a review of the Good Sports accreditation criteria and ongoing monitoring of program quality.

The resulting review suggested a number of amendments to the criteria to better reflect emerging evidence and support clubs operating in varied and often complex environments. A revised set of accreditation criteria, informed by evidence and stakeholder input, has been developed for each level of Good Sports accreditation. These are currently under consideration by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, and strategies for implementation are being explored.

In order to demonstrate program compliance, integrity and quality, 52 match-day visits were undertaken by the Foundation in 2015. The ADF is currently investigating sustainable options for ongoing match-day visits both in Victoria and nationally.

#### Integrate

The third pillar of VicHealth's operational model is 'integrate'. We seek to:

- influence the practice of organisations
- leverage the investment of stakeholders
- sustain outcomes through policy development and systems change.

While VicHealth's funding was vital in getting the Good Sports Program off the ground, our operational model (**innovate – inform – integrate**) has been instrumental in guiding the program's growth and success, and has significantly contributed to its ability to attract funding from other stakeholders.

For example, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education funded the national rollout of the program in 2004. In 2008, the program was awarded \$5.2 million over four years from the Australian Government for further development. The Good Sports Program has now broadened to tackle other health promotion targets within community sports clubs, including mental health, healthy eating and illicit drug use. It engages a large and growing number of sporting clubs across Australia.

#### Conclusion

The evolution of the Good Sports Program highlights VicHealth's success in supporting innovation, fostering strategic partnerships, and launching and supporting state-level programming on a national scale.

VicHealth's funding of the Good Sports Program ceased in June 2017, following the implementation of a comprehensive step-down funding model over three years to ensure the sustainability of the program. As VicHealth withdraws from direct involvement in the program, our funds can be redirected into new areas of innovation to promote the health of the Victorian – and broader Australian – community.



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