

Media Release

28 April 2016

VICHEALTH'S INAUGURAL LEADING THINKER INITIATIVE SHOWS WAY TOWARDS HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Chief Executive of the UK-based Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), Dr David Halpern, will give a keynote address at the State Library of Victoria today (28 April) as part of his final week as VicHealth's inaugural Leading Thinker.

Dr Halpern's report, [*Behavioural Insights and Healthier Lives*](#), summarises the work undertaken and the learnings from his two-year residency with VicHealth.

During his residency, Dr Halpern worked with VicHealth to build knowledge in Behavioural Insights and demonstrate how the approach can result in healthy behaviour change right across Victoria.

VicHealth worked with Dr Halpern and his team to develop and implement a series of Behavioural Insights trials with a range of partners including Alfred Health, Etihad Stadium, Timboon District and HealthCare Services, the City of Melbourne and four Melbourne licensed premises.

The trials included 'nudging' people to choose healthier drinks by making them more prominent, offering incentives in workplaces to get people more active, encouraging people to drink more water in Melbourne licensed premises and sports stadiums, as well as installing water fountains with bottle refills across the CBD.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said each of the trials is showing how small changes can impact individual behaviour.

"The behaviour change we have seen so far from these trials demonstrates how powerful and cost effective a behavioural insights approach can be," Ms Rechter said.

"With Dr Halpern as our first Leading Thinker, health promotion has been propelled into new territory in Victoria. The evidence we've built so far through the trials is just the beginning of a wave of innovative approaches to promote health across Victoria, and provides a solid base for Behavioural Insights to be applied by governments, the corporate sector and not for profits to improve the health and wellbeing of Victorians into the future."

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During his work with VicHealth, Dr Halpern also introduced the proposition of applying behavioural insights to produce a community-driven blueprint for action on obesity, which resulted in Australia's largest deliberative forum, [Victoria's Citizen's Jury on Obesity](#) taking place last year.

Dr Halpern described the Citizen's Jury as effective and decisive.

"The Citizen's Jury provided a great avenue for VicHealth to consult deeply with the Victorian public and develop a sense of public acceptability on a range of policy options, which is important to create enduring policy," Dr Halpern said.

"It suggests that governments and businesses may often misread the public position, notably on action to address obesity."

"While obesity was a focus of the residency, we also looked at the implications for behavioural insights for reducing alcohol consumption, increasing water consumption, encouraging exercise, improving mental health and reducing disadvantage."

"We have worked with VicHealth to demonstrate the use of psychology to effect behaviour change in place of introducing laws and taxes. The residency has proved a powerful learning experience for both organisations that I hope will benefit Victorians and the wider community."

"VicHealth works on such a wide range of health issues, which has provided us with so many opportunities to explore and apply the latest behavioural science research to its health promotion. VicHealth can rightly claim to be a unique health institution in how it is working to combine these approaches- behavioural science, experimentation and deep public involvement."

VicHealth will announce its next Leading Thinker later this year.

For a copy of Dr Halpern's report visit <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/behavioural-insights-and-healthier-lives>

About Dr David Halpern

Dr David Halpern is the Chief Executive of the Behavioural Insights Team. The Behavioural Insights Team is a unique company that started life within the British Government as the world's first government institution dedicated to the application of behavioural sciences.

David has led the team since its inception in 2010. Prior to that, David was the founding Director of the Institute for Government, and between 2001 and 2007 was the Chief Analyst at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. Before entering government, David held tenure at Cambridge, Oxford and Harvard Universities and has written several books and papers on areas relating to behavioural insights and wellbeing, including as a co-author of the MINDSPACE report and the Hidden Wealth of Nations. David has recently written a book entitled *Inside the Nudge Unit: How Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference*.

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