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VICHEALTH HOSTS VICTORIA'S FIRST 'LEADING THINKER'

Leading author, academic and the Director of London's Behavioural Insight Team Doctor David Halpern, will tour Victoria for the next two weeks to focus on developing behaviour change initiatives with VicHealth's key partners, including the State Government and NGOs, to combat obesity in Victoria.

He joins VicHealth for a series of site visits, public talks, and meetings with high level policy makers and health experts, as the health promotion agency's first Leading Thinker, under its [Leading Thinkers Initiative](#). The initiative will connect international thought leaders with senior policymakers and key local experts to focus on the most complex of health promotion problems, in this case, obesity.

In 2012, the Victorian Health Monitor survey of 3,653 adults showed 38 per cent were overweight and 24 per cent were obese. In just over a decade, it is estimated that nearly three-quarters of the Australian adult population will be overweight or obese.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said VicHealth has always researched, tested and evaluated best practice in health promotion. She says the new Leading Thinker initiative is being delivered in the VicHealth spirit of innovation and provides a different perspective to what she calls our most 'wicked problems'.

"We need to look at how and why people make decisions and investigate whether we can make changes to the world around them to help make the healthy choice the easy choice," Ms Rechter said.

"To do this, our Leading Thinker Dr David Halpern, will be working with us to investigate how a behavioural insights approach can promote health, particularly in addressing obesity in Victoria."

Doctor Halpern will use his first visit to think about how 'nudge' strategies used in the UK could be applied to Victoria. He will return to Victoria again in 2015, as part of his two year role.

"Australia, and Victoria in particular, is seen as a world leader in a number of public health developments and campaigns, from smoking, to skin cancer, to promoting healthier lifestyles more generally," Dr Halpern said.

"Meanwhile, the UK has been pioneering the application of the latest behavioural science thinking to public policy challenges.

"If we can bring this thinking together, we should be able to do something amazing – and that will hopefully have an impact, and capture imagination and interest, not only across Australia, but across the world."

Dr Halpern will be speaking at the Behavioural Insights and Wicked Problems Forum at the Wheeler Centre for Ideas at the State Library on Friday 5 September; from 9am to 1pm. Attendance will be complimentary for journalists. Call VicHealth media Jane Gardner on 0435 761 732 jgardner@vichealth.vic.gov.au

About 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.