

14 December 2020

Office for Youth
Department of Premier and Cabinet
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne VIC 3002

To whom it may concern

Re: Consultation on the Victorian Youth Strategy

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation regarding Victoria's new Youth Strategy (the Strategy).

As the state's health promotion foundation, we have a strong commitment to improving the health of all Victorians. We know that young Victorians often experience barriers to experiencing good health, and there are many opportunities to improve their wellbeing now and into the future. We see the Strategy as a key opportunity to strengthen the state's action to support young people to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

The following submission responds to the Discussion Paper for the Victorian Youth Strategy, by suggesting specific actions for inclusion in the Strategy and providing further evidence that may support its development.

Should you require any further information please contact Cassie Nicholls, Senior Policy Advisor, on cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au or 03 9667 1317.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sandro Demaio
Chief Executive Officer

VicHealth submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy consultation

December 2020

Overview

VicHealth commends the Victorian Government for leading the development of a statewide Youth Strategy (the Strategy). In collating the evidence outlined in the Discussion Paper, the Victorian Government identified the key areas in which young people's lives can be improved now and into the future.

Given the strength of the discussion paper, this submission focuses on providing practical actions that can underpin the Strategy. We have focused on our key imperative areas (mental wellbeing, healthy eating, physical activity, alcohol and tobacco), as well as the underlying determinants of health, such as education and employment.

We have presented these actions in the table below as a set of recommendations, and have indicated which outcome/s they apply to. In the final section, we provide a number of additional sources of evidence that may support development of the Strategy.

The actions we have recommended are based on the strong evidence available on young people's health and wellbeing, which we have built alongside our partners working in this space. It is informed by our direct engagement with young people, including through the VicHealth Youth Advisory Panel, and youth peak organisations, such as our work with the members of the VicHealth COVID-19 Mental Wellbeing Working Group.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further with the Victorian Government, particularly on how we can support the delivery of the Strategy.

VicHealth's vision for young people's health and wellbeing

VicHealth's vision is a Victoria in which every young person is able to reach their full potential for mental and physical health and wellbeing. By working with young people and our diverse partners, we aim to create the environments and conditions that increase the resilience and social connections of young people aged 12–25, to support them to be safe from harms to their health, and to promote healthy attitudes and choices now and into the future.

As young people enter their teens and early twenties, they begin a phase of life that is full of transitions and new beginnings. When navigating this life stage, young people interact with the people and places that can provide them with the vital components of a healthy life: positive family relationships, a sound education, strong social connections, respectful intimate relationships, meaningful work, enjoyable leisure activities and a healthy lifestyle. These components can provide the foundations for a fulfilling adulthood, in which young people not only enjoy good health, but in which they flourish and can bounce back from life's adversities.

For these reasons, the promotion of young people’s mental, physical and social wellbeing needs to be a core pillar of Victoria’s Youth Strategy. This is particularly important at this point in time, as health promotion efforts are needed to reduce the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and secure young people’s future. Victoria needs a clear plan and strengthened investment in evidence-based promotion and prevention programs. These need to occur across a range of settings, and be supported by strong public policies, increased research and improved monitoring. Prevention efforts undertaken during adolescence and young adult period, supported by prevention initiatives across the lifespan, can ensure young people can flourish now and throughout their lives.

VicHealth’s recommendations for actions within the Victorian Youth Strategy

Outcomes

The numbers in the outcome/s column of the table below refer to the following outcomes outlined in the Discussion Paper:

1. Victorian young people are healthy and well, mentally and physically
2. Victorian young people actively participate in learning, education and training
3. Victorian young people are economically active and contribute to the economy
4. Victorian young people are connected to culture, community and civic life
5. Victorian young people are safe, experience equality of opportunity and are treated fairly
6. Government, community services and the youth sector are accessible, appropriate and coordinated, and respond to young people’s evolving needs

VicHealth’s recommended actions

Outcome/s	Action
Overarching recommendation	
All	All of the Strategy’s outcomes (particularly outcome 1) should include a strong focus on primary prevention – that is, action to prevent ill health from occurring in the first place. This involves promoting positive influences for health and reducing negative influences. Primary prevention action creates the conditions in which good health can flourish – from better public policy and healthy urban environments, to more inclusive and respectful communities. This complements the efforts of partners in the wider health system, such as those working in early intervention to identify people at risk of or showing emerging signs of ill health, and those that treat mental or physical illness.
Mental wellbeing	
1	Develop a dedicated Young People’s Mental Wellbeing Plan (for Victorians aged 12–25) that is co-designed with young people to help prepare them for the future. This plan must be underpinned by evidence and theoretical frameworks that acknowledge young people’s developmental stages, intersectionality and equity.
1, 6	Establish ongoing participatory approaches that bring together young people and people with technical and process expertise to inform design and delivery of activity

Outcome/s	Action
	under the Young People’s Mental Wellbeing Plan. This should include meaningful representation from groups that experience greater barriers to good mental health and those with lived experience.
1, 2, 3, 4	<p>Undertake action to address young people’s loneliness and social isolation, given their problematic levels (which have increased further as a result of coronavirus), by focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connecting young people with each other and with other generations • (re)connecting young people with education and training • (re)connecting young people with employment and within workplaces • support to strengthen connection of Indigenous young people to Country and culture • support to strengthen the connections of new arrival and refugee young people to their local communities • social health as much as mental and physical health.
1	<p>Reduce the negative representation of young people in Australian media.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> Missing: Young people in Australian news media (Foundation for Young Australians 2020)</p>
1	<p>Reduce systemic discrimination experienced by young people through development of a statewide strategy, including implementation of a social marketing campaign, evidence-based projects and policy measures. This includes a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • racism • gender discrimination • discrimination against LGBTIQ Victorians
2, 3	<p>Support teachers and parents to better integrate and utilise existing social and emotional curriculum (such the continued statewide rollout of Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships) across schools.</p>
1, 5	<p>Build workforce capacity to engage on issues related to masculinity and health to help recognise and challenge harmful attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours. This requires a focus on people who work with men and boys – such as teachers, sports coaches and social workers and across sectors related to violence, bullying, sexual harassment prevention, mental health and substance use.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> Unpacking the Man Box: What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men’s behaviours and well-being? (Jesuit Social Services & VicHealth 2020)</p>
1, 3	<p>Strengthen Youth Peer Support programs by structuring them into a quality assured, competency-based, trained and paid workforce of young professionals.</p>

Outcome/s	Action
Alcohol	
1	<p>Introduce new standards to protect children and vulnerable people from alcohol advertising and promotions. This includes prohibiting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alcohol advertising in spaces used by young people, such as on buses, bus stations and at sports grounds and other facilities • alcohol promotions that encourage people to buy excessive quantities of alcohol products, such as discounting of 50% or more • inducements to buy alcoholic products. This includes promotions that require the purchase of a minimum amount of alcohol or a minimum spend on alcohol to receive a discount. <p><i>Further information:</i> Harmful advertising and promotions of alcoholic products (Alcohol Change Vic 2020)</p>
1	<p>Undertake a more comprehensive and systematic approach to ensure that liquor license holders are checking IDs at the point of sale. Targeted action should focus specifically on communities with a greater concentration of young people, schools and liquor licenses.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> The Smart Generation program to prevent underage alcohol use in Knox (Communities That Care Knox 2019); On-demand alcohol delivery services and risky drinking (VicHealth 2020)</p>
1	<p>Invest in programs co-designed with young people to denormalise risky drinking and create environments and practices in support of low-risk drinking.</p>
1	<p>Strengthen investment in comprehensive digital media literacy training among young people aged 12 to 17 years old and their parents, highlighting the tactics that the alcohol industry and other groups use to target their marketing.</p>
Tobacco	
1	<p>Continue and strengthen a sustained commitment to tobacco control public education campaigns to drive further reductions in smoking among young people. This should be done at levels known to be effective in preventing uptake, with a dose of 800–1000 target audience ratings points per quarter.</p>
1	<p>Introduce a retail licensing scheme in Victoria as a mechanism to better monitor and enforce provisions in the <i>Tobacco Act 1987</i> (Vic). This licensing scheme should also include the sale of e-cigarettes, given the increased rates of use among young people, including those that do not smoke tobacco products.</p>
1	<p>Currently the Department of Health has a service agreement with the Municipal Association of Victoria to administer funding to councils to provide specific tobacco education and enforcement across the state. Councils can also participate in the Cigarette Sales to Minors program which provides additional funding for test</p>

Outcome/s	Action
	<p>purchasing activities. To further reduce smoking among young people, this program should be targeted to communities with high concentrations of schools, young people and tobacco retail outlets with a further focus on areas of high disadvantage.</p>
<p>Healthy eating</p>	
<p>In addition to the following, VicHealth supports the recommendations provided in the Obesity Policy Coalition’s submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy consultation. Their submission provides further detail on the evidence and strategies underpinning these recommendations.</p> <p>Many of these recommendations are taken from A healthier start for Victorians: A consensus statement on obesity prevention (Healthy Eating and Active Living Roundtable 2019). Please see the consensus statement for underlying evidence and specific strategies.</p>	
1	<p>Protect young people from unhealthy food and beverage marketing in Victoria in public spaces and events. This includes prohibiting advertising, promotion and sponsorship in publicly owned and managed places. Priority should be given to areas around schools, children/young people’s sporting events and activities, and public transport.</p>
1	<p>Protect young Victorians from digital marketing of unhealthy food and beverages. This requires advocacy for effective regulation at the national level to ensure young Victorians’ personal information, including any data collected about them online, is not collected, used, or disclosed for the purposes of marketing on unhealthy food and beverages, and national level protections on digital media to ensure that young people will not be exposed to unhealthy food and beverage marketing when they are on digital platforms</p>
1	<p>Protect young Victorians from unhealthy food and beverage marketing on TV, radio and in cinemas, via reforms to Victorian cinema marketing and advocacy for national TV and radio advertising reforms.</p>
1	<p>Introduction of mandatory, enforceable policies, tied to funding, to reduce the availability and promotion of unhealthy food and beverages, and ensuring there is a greater availability of healthy food and beverages, at schools and sporting and recreation centres where a significant proportion of users are young Victorians.</p>
1	<p>Support broader Victorian efforts to address obesity, such as the Victorian Childhood Obesity Strategy, by extending its remit to include young adults up to the age of 25 years.</p>
1	<p>Engage and support local communities to develop and lead their own healthy eating initiatives. These should be community-based and focus on local areas or population groups with the highest rates of overweight and obesity.</p>
1	<p>Implement a statewide public education campaign to encourage healthy eating. This should focus on population groups with the highest rates of overweight and obesity.</p>

Outcome/s	Action
1	Develop and mandate a whole-of-government healthy food procurement policy. This should incorporate the Healthy Choices guidelines and apply to all publicly owned and managed facilities and settings, with a focus on those that young people frequent.
1	Increase the scope of and strengthen compliance with the School Canteens and Other School Food Services Policy. This should take a whole-of-school approach, be reflected in the curriculum, and be backed by a monitoring framework.
1	Develop and mandate a whole-of-government healthy food procurement policy. This should incorporate the Victorian Healthy Choices guidelines and apply to all publicly owned and managed facilities and settings.
1, 3	Undertake initiatives to address food insecurity among young people, particularly given recent research has found that young people are experiencing food insecurity at a higher rate as a result of COVID-19. Action must reinforce the need for economic security and efforts to lift people in this age group out of poverty. This should be supported by regular statewide monitoring of food security in the Victorian Population Health Survey (disaggregated by age group).
1	Advocate at the federal level for a health levy on sugary drinks, given the high rates of consumption among young people and their contribution to chronic disease risk. <i>Further information:</i> Policy brief: The case for a health levy on sugary drinks (Obesity Policy Coalition 2019)
Physical activity	
1	Engage and support local communities to develop and lead their own physical activity initiatives. These should be community-based and focus on local areas or population groups with the highest rates of overweight and obesity or who experience greater barriers to participating in physical activity.
1, 3	Recognise the importance of sport as a setting for the promotion of health and wellbeing through sustained and significant investment at the social, competitive and elite level. As well as physical health benefits, participation in quality sport experiences can provide a sense of belonging, as well as improve employment skills like leadership and confidence through administrative and coaching and officiating roles.
1	Invest in initiatives to increase sport and active recreation participation for communities experiencing greater barriers to good health, such as young people living in rural and regional areas, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with disabilities, and young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. This includes continued support and capacity building for organisations such as Regional Sport

Outcome/s	Action
	Assemblies, active recreation groups (e.g. Scouts Victoria), Reclink, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and local governments.
1	Support schools to increase students' physical activity and physical literacy. This should take a whole-of-school approach, be reflected in the curriculum, and be supported by training and professional development.
1	<p>Continue to promote participation in social sport and recreation in particular for young women and girls through a statewide campaign.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> This Girl Can (VicHealth 2020)</p>
1	<p>Invest in initiatives to increase active transport, such as walking and bike riding, as this allows young people to move around safely with freedom. This would require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognition of walking and bike riding as an essential part of integrated transport planning, through a whole-of-government response led by the Department of Transport to develop a Victorian Walking Strategy; continue to implement the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018–2028; and ensure there is strong leadership and expertise around walking and bike riding within government • prioritisation of streets for people in residential areas, around schools and shopping strips, by focusing on funding local governments to implement high quality infrastructure; lowering traffic speeds; increasing the priority of pedestrians when crossing roads/streets; and providing a COVID-safe environment (e.g. by facilitating greater ability to social distance) • upgrading cities, regional centres and local neighbourhoods, by allowing walkers and bike riders to be separated in areas where there are high numbers of walkers or bike riders or fast-moving bike riders; allowing bike riders and drivers to be separated in areas of high traffic speed or volume; improving strategic links and key priority routes; and focusing on areas of greatest need, such as those with higher rates of physical inactivity, car dependence or low socioeconomic status. <p><i>Further information:</i> VicHealth is currently working with its partners to develop a consensus statement to support more walking and bike riding for Victorians. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this topic further as it relates to the Victorian Youth Strategy.</p>
Education and employment	
3, 4	<p>Improve local work experience opportunities and professional networks for young people through a trial program of internships delivered through local government.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> YES: Youth Employment Study</p>

Outcome/s	Action
3	<p>Scale the Youth Friendly Employer project, which aims to develop a process and assessment tool that inspires employers to become recognised for providing a positive experience for young people who are job-seeking, and a supportive environment for those working with them.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> Youth Friendly Employer Project</p>
3	<p>Undertake policy and program initiatives to support casual and part-time workers to attain secure work.</p>
2, 3	<p>Provide mentorship and programs for high school and university students through organisational initiatives to guide students and allow them to engage in different career options.</p>
Youth engagement	
All	<p>Ensure that every young person has a voice in youth and community service organisations to identify problems and find solutions that impact their health and wellbeing. This includes working with young people and peak organisations to strengthen our existing knowledge and skills in youth engagement and developing dedicated engagement platforms and mechanisms so young people can have a say about the issues that matter to them.</p>
1, 6	<p>Build greater health literacy in young people by actively involving them in developing public health messaging and initiatives to ensure that they appropriately meet their needs.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> Policy brief: Involvement of young people in messaging and decision-making (Burnet Institute 2020)</p>
Arts	
All	<p>Invest in initiatives in the arts, cultural and creative sectors to provide opportunities for young people to build diverse connections, think critically and creatively, and engage in dialogue about issues of importance in their current and future lives.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> The arts and creative industries in health promotion – evidence review (VicHealth 2020)</p>
4, 5	<p>Cultural citizenship, the right to be different and belong in a participatory democratic sense, and an ability to express this through creative or other means should be actively extended to all age groups.</p> <p><i>Further information:</i> The arts and creative industries in health promotion – evidence review (VicHealth 2020)</p>

Outcome/s	Action
Research and evaluation	
All	Invest in research to help understand the factors impacting young people’s health and wellbeing, and identify effective approaches to improve it, such as research into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systemic discrimination • the transition from education to employment • workplace health • co-design of health promotion initiatives • participation in physical activity and sport • gender inequality • online pornography and sexual imagery • digital literacy • media literacy • the social determinants of mental and physical health and wellbeing.
All	Evaluate the Victorian Government’s investments and initiatives under the Strategy to build the evidence on what works to improve young people’s health and wellbeing.
All	Inform evidence-based policy, practice and program delivery by disseminating and translating findings generated through the Strategy and share this with our diverse stakeholders in Victoria, Australia and internationally, as well as draw on their evidence to inform our research and practice.
All	Establish a <i>Victorian Youth Pulse for 12–25 year olds</i> . This would be a world-first youth wellbeing survey which would capture the state of Victoria’s young people in relation to indicators such as social connection, life satisfaction, optimism, wellbeing and self-reported health.

Further sources of evidence

Along with our partners at the local, state and national level, VicHealth has established a strong evidence base on promoting the health and wellbeing of young Victorians. This evidence base could be useful in the development of the Strategy. Key sources include:

VicHealth Coronavirus Victorian Wellbeing Impact Survey

VicHealth has conducted two surveys into the health and wellbeing impacts of the first and second coronavirus lockdowns in Victoria. The survey covered general wellbeing, social connection, healthy eating, physical activity, financial hardship, smoking, alcohol consumption, as well as working and home life. Young people aged 18 to 24 were included in the survey sample. Key results include:

- During the first lockdown, daily consumption of sugary drinks (50%) for young people aged 18–24 was among the highest in the state; however this dropped in the second lockdown (38%).

- During the second lockdown, young Victorians were more likely to consume takeaway food three or more times per week (8% compared to 4% for the state of Victoria overall).
- This age group were also more likely to report experiencing food insecurity during the second lockdown, which was consistent with the findings from the first lockdown.
- During the first lockdown, 17% of young people aged 18–24 were drinking alcohol at levels consistent with short-term harm, which was among the highest in the state. During the second lockdown, 11% were drinking alcohol at levels consistent with short-term harm; however, this was not significantly more than the rate for all Victorians.
- Significantly more young people aged 18 to 24 (30%) reported experiencing financial hardship during the second lockdown compared to Victorians overall (18%). However, this has decreased since the first lockdown (39%).
- Consistent with the findings of the first survey, young people aged 18 to 24 were more likely to report they had lost their job (16%) compared to Victorians overall (8%) in the second survey.
- The proportion of physical inactivity among those aged 18 to 24 was significantly lower compared to the state level in the second lockdown (15% compared to 25%), although there was a significant increase in young people aged 18 to 24 getting the recommended levels of physical activity in the second lockdown (40%) compared to the first (29%).
- They also had the highest rate of high psychological distress (23%) compared to all other age groups during the first lockdown. During the second lockdown, subjective wellbeing dropped, consistent with the results for Victoria overall, with 24% of those aged 18 to 24 reporting high scores for psychological distress.

Findings from the [first survey](#) and [second survey](#) are now available on the VicHealth website.

Burnet Institute – Coping with COVID-19: Young people’s health and wellbeing in Australia

The Burnet Institute, in collaboration with VicHealth, is conducting a study into the health and wellbeing burden that will be borne by young people as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and related responses. The study involves online surveys with young Australians aged between 15 and 29, using an initial baseline survey with follow-ups at three, six and 12 months. Burnet researchers are also conducting interviews and workshops to gather more in-depth data.

More information can be found on the [Burnet Institute website](#), with an interim report available on the [VicHealth website](#).

VicHealth & Australian National University – Evidence review: Addressing the social determinants of inequities in mental wellbeing of children and adolescents

This report provides an overview of the social determinants of inequities in mental wellbeing in children and adolescents, and provides evidence on interventions which address inequities in wellbeing. It includes a focus on interventions that promote the development of resilience, the acquisition of mental capital and the prevention of common childhood mental illness. Interventions outlined in the report focus on parenting and families, public awareness campaigns, physical activity, early childhood and education, play-based settings, the school-to-work transition, the social and physical environment, online settings, policy initiatives, governance, and dominant cultural and societal norms and values.

The report can be found on the [VicHealth website](#).

Evidence For Learning – State of evidence: Wellbeing interventions and impact on student learning

Evidence for Learning conducted a systematic review summarising the impact of school-based wellbeing interventions on student academic and non-academic outcomes. The review highlighted five key messages:

- Wellbeing interventions make a difference to student outcomes.
- Everything that schools do to support student wellbeing counts but some are more effective than others.
- To impact academic outcomes, longer programs need to be sustained.
- Disadvantaged students benefit most from tailored support.
- We need more robust evidence in Australia about program impact to identify features of effective implementation.

Information on the review can be found on the [Evidence For Learning website](#), including an [infographic summary](#) of the key findings.

Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne – Social wellbeing in secondary schools

The data for this report was collected within a larger research project investigating how individual, system and school related factors influence the implementation and impact of the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) program in Victoria.

This report provides an overview of the data related to social and relational challenges facing secondary school students. Students were engaged in focus group to identify and discuss their key stressors and challenges. Survey data covered issues such as mental health, body image, and experiences of victimisation or perpetration of gender-based violence. Taken together, the data provides a rich account of the social and relational stressors, challenges and supports that students experience in their schools and beyond.

The report can be found on the [University of Melbourne website](#).