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NEW TWISTS ON OLD RESOLUTIONS: VICHEALTH'S TOP 10

With 2014 on the horizon, VicHealth is putting the solution in resolution, with a unique take on some old promises many Victorians will make as the clock strikes midnight on 31 December.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said pledges to exercise more or eat more vegetables probably won't last a lifetime unless those promises turn into actions.

"Health always features high on the resolutions list because it's something that most of us have the power to change for the better," Ms Rechter said.

"We're fortunate to live in an age where we know how to lead a healthy lifestyle, but changing an unhealthy habit can be tough without support. The good news is, new evidence in health promotion and the technology at our fingertips offer all of us a way to stay on track with our health and wellbeing goals.

"This holiday season, VicHealth is suggesting alternative solutions to make resolutions stick.

Whatever your plans for 2014, we would like to wish all Victorians good health and happiness for the year to come and beyond."

VicHealth's top 10 new New Year's Resolutions

1. Get more exercise. Solution: Use your phone to work out.

We spend more time sitting down than ever before so it may not be surprising that obesity and type 2 diabetes are on the rise. Australian adults need 30 minutes of moderate activity every day to prevent a multitude of illnesses, but the way we get our daily dose of physical activity is changing. Many people no longer have time to commit to a rigid exercise schedule and participation in team sports is dropping off.

VicHealth recognised this trend and released TeamUp – a free app which acts as a marketplace for organised and 'social sport'. People who download the app can connect with others to exercise when and where it suits them to go for a walk, or find a new player for a soccer team, or train for a marathon. You can try it for a day, or discover a life-long passion. Check it out at: www.teamup.com.au or via the App Store.

2. Cut back on the alcohol. Solution: Let's talk about it.

Alcohol is so deeply entrenched in our society that getting drunk is acceptable at weddings, funerals and even baby showers. VicHealth's research shows that people struggle to abstain or go easy on alcohol in a social situation without having an excuse, like driving or pregnancy. Yet one in 10 of us drink before, during and after social events. Shock campaigns to stop people from drinking are missing the mark. So instead, why not broach the topic with your friends and family? Ask the question of what drives the drinking, recognise the social triggers and think about when to draw the line.

Over summer, VicHealth is running a campaign where young people aged 16 to 29-years are invited to come up with a name for the point of a night out when clear thinking becomes more drinking. You could win \$5000 for the winning name! Check out www.namethatpoint.com You can also volunteer to go booze free, blog about your experience, and get support from others doing the same via Hello Sunday Morning – www.hellosundaymorning.org

3. Give up smoking. Solution: Don't quit on New Year's Day.

This may come as a surprise, but stubbing out your cigarette at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, vowing never to smoke again isn't a clever move because the quitter usually hasn't put a support plan in place to back it up. In fact, Quit Victoria recommends smokers delay the quit date until mid-January, once the stressful holiday period has finished and the routine of the new year has been established. For support, visit www.quit.org.au

4. Eat healthier food. Solution: Shop smarter and recognise marketing spin.

We hear a lot about fresh food costing more than fast food, but this isn't necessarily the case if you shop smart. You don't have to rely on supermarkets. Many fresh food producers deliver seasonal fruit and vegetable packs that can be ordered online for a very reasonable price.

At the supermarket, deciphering the baffling Daily Intake Guide system can leave you wondering whether an item is actually healthy or not. Is it low in salt or high in salt? How much fat is too much? There's now an app which can help decipher the food puzzle. Try the George Institute and Bupa's [FoodSwitch app](#). This little gem lets you scan the barcode of any product to tell you at a glance, using a traffic light system, whether an item is green, yellow or red for fat, salt and sugar. Go for green most of the time and you're on your way to a healthy diet.

5. Make more friends. Solution: Volunteer.

More than 1.5 million Victorians volunteer. Volunteering is not only good for the community, it's healthy for individuals and a fantastic way to meet like-minded people. The VicHealth Indicators survey of 20,000 Victorians found people who volunteer are generally happier than people who don't. In 2006–2007, the value of work contributed by volunteers to not-for-profit institutions in Australia was estimated to be \$14,598 million (ABS 2009).

Volunteers gain a lot from giving. Work experience, valuable skills, personal satisfaction and new friendships and support networks. Research shows volunteering can alleviate depression, increase satisfaction with life, lower the frequency of hospitalisation and boost a person's ability to cope with illness. For ideas on how to get involved go to: www.volunteer.vic.gov.au

6. Improve relationships with family and partners. Solution: Make time for regular shared meals.

An analysis of the VicHealth Indicators statewide survey of 20,000 people this year found one of the simplest ways to strengthen relationships with your loved ones is to have a sit down, TV and device-free meal with your family as often as you can. The benefits are surprising: when families eat meals together, they eat healthier food. The health benefits for families that share a meal at least five times each week include less tobacco and alcohol use, and fewer depressive symptoms.

7. Become more cultured. Solution: Find art that moves you.

Victoria is fortunate to have a full calendar of cultural events throughout the year and even more fortunate to have a thriving arts culture that welcomes people from all backgrounds and of all abilities. Art is so much more than learning a few dance steps or picking up a paintbrush.

Dance, singing, creating, collaborating and performing are excellent for mental wellbeing, expanding social networks, allowing our inner-most thoughts to be expressed and also getting more physically activity.

VicHealth's MOTION program is currently taking place across regional and metropolitan Victoria, with a whole host of arts activities specifically designed to get people moving while creating something special. To see how you can get involved go to www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/motion Via this project, VicHealth has created a huge LED light up dance floor at the National Gallery of Victoria's Melbourne Now exhibition this summer. Check it out at <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/melbournenow> VicHealth is also supporting a mass participatory dance event, *I Could've Danced all Night*, at the White Night Melbourne on 23 February.

8. Stay focused at work. Solution: Get up and move.

Most of us know that lack of concentration is the number one productivity killer at work. Many Victorians now spend the majority of their day sitting at a desk, staring at a computer. Doing this for long periods at a time can quite rightly make us weary.

Unfortunately the evidence shows sitting for long periods is a major risk factor for Type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular disease, regardless of the exercise you do outside of work hours.

VicHealth recommends getting up every couple of hours and walking around the office. Walk to see a colleague instead of emailing, hold standing or walking meetings, take the stairs instead of the lift or stand up when you're on the phone. It's better for your health and getting the blood flowing will help you to focus on the task at hand.

9. Give something back to society. Solution: Become an active bystander.

Over the past two years, VicHealth has surveyed thousands of Victorians about how far they would go to help someone who is being sexually harassed or racially abused. Overall, people want to help but when it comes to stepping in, they are still hesitant. We need to overcome this hesitation if we're ever going to put an end to violence against women and racism.

Next time you see someone being harassed because of their race on a train, say something or report it. When a sexist joke is being told at the pub, tell your mates that it's not fair. The more we call people on this behaviour, the more it becomes socially unacceptable.

10. Stress less. Solution: Reassess your work load.

Job stress and a bit of pressure on the job can be helpful to help you meet deadlines, but if it's persistent and severe, it can have negative impact on your mental wellbeing. Employers have a responsibility to look after the wellbeing of their staff, and it's not just OH&S. We know job stress costs the Victorian economy \$730 million every year in lost productivity and the bulk of that loss is to business, so there's a financial incentive for reducing stress at work.

If you employ staff, make sure they have a balanced workload and all of the resources and support they need to do the job well. Check in and ask how they're doing. If you have a stressful job, speak to your boss about what's generating that stress and how you can work together to help manage it. Many larger companies offer free Employee Assistance Programs.

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