

Chief Executive Officer's report

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Jerril Rechter
Chief Executive Officer, VicHealth



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In the first year of the VicHealth *Action Agenda for Health Promotion* we have taken positive steps towards tackling our most pressing health issues by engaging people where health happens – in our homes, workplaces, online and in our communities.

Change starts with recognising a problem, and we have started some of the most difficult conversations with Victorians in the last 12 months, including those about our risky drinking culture and the public health emergency that is obesity. Engaging young people to understand why they drink to get drunk has shown us the value of a positive and non-judgmental social marketing campaign that encouraged people to talk openly. Two out of three Victorians are now classified as overweight or obese, and this will rise to 83% of men and 75% of women by 2025 if we don't change our lifestyle.

Important conversations about time spent sitting, the impacts of racism and violence against women are now happening.

Building greater connections in the community and the digital world has helped us and our partners turn unused space into communal vegetable gardens, empowered football clubs to respond to racist taunts, and put Victoria's myriad liquor licences on a digital map to support better decision making.

We kicked off our Leading Thinkers initiative to help address the world's most wicked, intractable health problems by welcoming our first Leading Thinker, Dr David Halpern of the UK's Behavioural Insights Team, to tackle obesity.

From our groundbreaking partnership with Our Watch (formerly the Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children) to sweeping changes to sporting clubs to become healthier and more welcoming places, I am extremely proud of what has been achieved in just 12 months of the *Action Agenda*.

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Operational and budgetary performance

The first 3-year phase of the 10-year *Action Agenda* has involved the alignment of investments to meet longer-term goals. Resulting from the new *Action Agenda*, an organisational restructure created two new offices reporting to the CEO – an Innovation Office and a Policy Development Office.

The *Action Agenda's* integrated themes of knowledge, health equity, and sport and healthy communities are flowing through to our work on the ground. A new Results Framework is evaluating the benefits of our investments, and we are building equity into our programs by filtering activity through our *Fair Foundations* framework.

VicHealth met all its statutory expenditure targets with 32%¹ of payments to sporting bodies and 37% invested in health promotion. More than 1300 grant payments worth \$25.5 million² were made: \$11.1 million on increasing participation in physical activity; \$3.6 million on tobacco prevention; \$3.4 million on improving mental wellbeing; \$2 million on preventing harm from alcohol; and \$1.2 million on promoting healthy eating.

Key highlights of our investments

Our largest health investments are aimed at improving the health of all Victorians with 60% supporting whole-of-population approaches to health promotion. Sport remains a top priority receiving 35%³ of our investments. Other beneficiaries were local governments, education, community, academia, arts, workplaces, media and new information technology initiatives.

To increase sport participation, \$3.5 million was invested through the State Sporting Association Participation Program (SSAPP); \$1.6 million in the roll-out of our Healthy Sporting Environments program; \$1.8 million to 742 community clubs through the Active Club Grants; and \$1.4 million in the TeamUp digital campaign to connect Victorians to casual sports and physical activity opportunities. After SSAPP, the next largest payment went to Cancer Council Victoria for the Quit program (\$3.4 million).

¹ The discrepancy between sports figures is because some of the work that occurs within the sports setting is not undertaken by sporting bodies.

² Figures rounded to nearest \$100,000.

³ See note 1.

VicHealth's water initiative aims to encourage a greater consumption of water by all Victorians.



This year, VicHealth's Active Club Grants assisted more than 200,000 members in 742 sport and active recreation clubs.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Promoting healthy eating: more people choosing water and healthy food options

With poor diet set to overtake smoking as the biggest killer in Australia, our **Seed Challenge** brought together innovators and healthy eating experts to use digital technology to improve local fresh food distribution and access. With support from The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, the two winners of the Seed Challenge have invested in online platforms to make it easier to access affordable local food. The 3000acres initiative is turning unused urban, suburban and rural spaces into food gardens, while the Open Food Network is growing an online market for farmers, consumers and independent food enterprises to connect, trade and manage their business. Online food hubs have been set up with over 40 farmers so far.

VicHealth is also supporting the **Food Alliance**, a network of health organisations, to protect food-growing areas on Melbourne's fringe, and mapping Melbourne's land capability as the city grows outwards. Another collaboration focused on young people's nutrition is the **Parents' Jury** and the Fame and Shame Awards, showing the worst and best of food advertising directed at children.

With nearly two-thirds of Victorians currently overweight or obese, reducing intake of excess kilojoules through drinks is one way to promote a healthier diet and improve health. VicHealth's **water initiative** (including the H3O Challenge) aims to encourage a greater consumption of water by all Victorians in preference to drinks with added sugar.

Encouraging regular physical activity: more people physically active, participating in sport and walking

Research has found that less than a third of Australians are getting enough physical activity to benefit their health.



“VicHealth has accumulated a wealth of experience and expertise, and has a culture of innovation and cutting edge research. We see VicHealth playing a key role in inspiring other countries to champion health promotion.”

DR SHIN YOUNG-SOO

World Health Organization Regional Director for the Western Pacific

We know being active every day is one of the greatest lifetime habits we can pass on to young people, yet 80% of Victorian school children aren't getting the daily hour of exercise crucial for good health.

Our month-long **Walk to School campaign**, now in its eighth year, highlights the benefits of walking to and from school for primary school aged children, while our **Active for Life** resource is designed to help teachers, sporting clubs and community leaders find new ways to integrate movement into everyday life.

A Victoria-wide **survey into parental fear** will help us develop strategies to overcome barriers to children walking and riding to and from school and within their neighbourhoods.

With obesity in Australian adults on a steep rise – costing our nation an estimated \$14 billion a year – we joined forces with the City of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Health in the **Active Cities** initiative to offer 100 ways to get Melbourne's two million city workers moving with free activities before, during and after work.

With research telling us the biggest barrier to exercise is finding the time, our **TeamUp campaign** has made it easy to connect people to more than 150 sports and activities from a casual kick in the park to a dance class. Our **MOTION** funding has supported tens of thousands of people to get physical through local arts initiatives, such as free community dance workshops and other participatory arts experiences.

Over 200,000 members in 742 sport and active recreation clubs across Victoria have been supported through **Active Club Grants**, while 73 clubs in the wider Barwon region have made sweeping changes in their operations and governance to make their clubs healthier, more welcoming and inclusive after being part of our **Healthy Sporting Environments** trial. We are also continuing to work with nine Regional Sports Assemblies to ensure that 250 clubs in regional and rural areas receive tailored support.

Smoking bans at underage sporting events will further reduce harm from smoking.



The Victorian Government tasked VicHealth with delivering an Alcohol Cultural Change Project to shift attitudes toward drunkenness among young people.



Preventing tobacco use: more people smoke-free and less harm among resistant smokers

Cigarette sales have fallen 3.4% in Australia since the introduction of world-leading plain packaging, and the **extension of smoking bans** in Victoria to train and tram platforms, public playgrounds, swimming pools and underage sporting events will reduce harm from smoking further. Next year smoking will also be phased out in all Victorian prisons. As well as continuing to support and fund the **Quit** program, VicHealth is **researching new trends** and evidence nationally and internationally to help those who find it hardest to quit.

Preventing harm from alcohol: more people actively seeking the best ways to reduce alcohol-related harm

Our **NameThatPoint** campaign exceeded all expectations in terms of exposure and engagement with young people into our drinking culture. With nearly 46,000 web visits, 140,000 views of its YouTube clips and over 1800 competition entries, the campaign asked people to name that point when clear thinking turns into more drinking. An unexpected and welcome result was that three in 10 campaign users reported drinking less alcohol as a result. The findings have shaped the second phase of the campaign.

VicHealth also joined forces with **Hello Sunday Morning** to encourage Australians to rethink their relationship with booze, and released important research with RMIT into the four **different types of drinkers** to better inform health messages. A VicHealth survey of 6000 drinkers on their attitudes towards **cider** – one of the fastest-growing alcohol categories for under 30s – has given us insights to fine tune our alcohol-harm messages.

Just how hard the task of shifting our drinking culture is was underscored by research into the impact of **alcohol advertising** during live sports broadcasts, finding half of all alcohol ads (49.5%) and fast-food ads (46%) were aired during sports programs. VicHealth also released new research on how commonly Victorians **'load up' with alcohol** before going out, between venues and after they get home.

Professor Anne Kavanagh surveyed 2334 people from 21 local government areas within 20km of the Melbourne CBD and found that it is not how close you live to a bottle shop that determines heavy drinking patterns, but the sheer number of alcohol stores in the area. In partnership with the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR) and the Emergency

Services Telecommunications Agency (ESTA), our launch of an online interactive map showing where the 19,000 **Victorian liquor licences** are will help local government make more informed decisions based on density concerns and potentially improve ambulance response times to alcohol-related accidents and injuries.

Improving mental wellbeing: building stronger approaches to resilience, focusing on young people

With young people from minority groups often the targets of racism, a VicHealth and University of Melbourne study entitled **'Talking Culture'**, by Dr Naomi Priest, looked at how primary school children in Melbourne aged 8 to 12 learn about racial, ethnic and cultural diversity and racism. It found that parents generally only broach the topic if their child raises it first, while teachers sometimes feel unqualified to discuss it. The study and the learnings from previous diversity projects will assist educators and parents in talking about cultural diversity.

Through our partnership with Football Federation Victoria, we empowered the football (soccer) community to respond and intervene safely when racism is seen or heard. The **Don't Stand By, Stand Up!** campaign, supported by various ambassadors and representatives from Melbourne Victory FC and Melbourne City FC (formerly Melbourne Heart), hopes to boot out subtle and overt forms of racism on and off the sports field.

VicHealth's **Arts About Us** program is also helping improve understanding of the impacts of race-based discrimination through celebrating cultural diversity, while we continue to support Indigenous arts through the **Victorian Indigenous Performing Arts Awards**.

Our entire portfolio of arts investments also grew with various collaborations, large and small, that continue to prove that the arts is a key way to increase physical health and mental wellbeing. Our funding of large-scale events got thousands moving, such as the **For You dance floor** at the National Gallery of Victoria's *Melbourne Now* exhibition which saw an attendance of 750,000 people.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter, Victorian Minister for Health The Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP, Our Watch Chair Natasha Stott Despoja AM and Our Watch CEO Paul Linossier.



A continued focus this year has been on eliminating the cause of violence against women by promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women, with a critical partnership with **Our Watch** (formerly the National Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children).

TeamUp at the Australian Open: former French pro tennis player Henri Leconte and TeamUp ambassadors hockey star Claire Messent and pro surfer Nikki van Dijk (right).



More guidance on where to focus government and community efforts will come from our joint work with The University of Melbourne and Social Research Centre on the 2013 **National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey**.

LOOKING AHEAD

From the obesity epidemic to binge drinking and parental fear, we have opened up important conversations about our most pressing health challenges. As we continue to build on VicHealth's 27 years of pioneering history, the next year of the *Action Agenda* goes beyond asking Victorians to eat well and do more exercise, to understanding why we're not.

Removing the barriers to better health and reducing chronic illness is a massive task, and I thank our many collaborators who are eager, like us, to take this on. As we head deeper into the *Action Agenda*, we will ensure VicHealth's legacy as a risk-taker is backed up by strong evidence that informs all our work.

I thank our outgoing Chair, Mark Birrell, for his leadership as Chair of VicHealth over the past 2 years. Mark leaves us to take up a new role as Chairman of Infrastructure Australia. He ably steered us through our first year of the *Action Agenda* and his contribution will have a lasting impact on the health of the Victorian community. Mark has ensured that VicHealth is focused and agile, strengthening its research base and modernising its governance. Professor John Catford is Chair of the VicHealth Board, transitioning from his position as Deputy Chair. Board Member Nicole Livingstone is now Deputy Chair.

I also thank the VicHealth Board and Committees for their support, encouragement and guidance.

Instrumental in supporting new approaches has been the support we have had from the Minister for Health, The Hon. David Davis MLC, and from across the Victorian Government, members of the Victorian Parliament, other government agencies and key partners.

We work in a challenging environment where change is the only constant, and the staff at VicHealth have embraced this with great enthusiasm. I thank each and every one of them for their unwavering commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

With the complexities of chronic disease growing and the pressure for sustainable health solutions a national priority, VicHealth's unique role in health promotion and illness prevention has never been more important. We look forward to redoubling our efforts to meet the challenge.

Jerril Rechter
Chief Executive Officer

View our *Action Agenda for Health Promotion*
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/actionagenda



“VicHealth continues to be a voice of change and advocacy in combating violence against women. I consider them to be a vital partner in changing culture and attitudes on this most insidious issue.”

KEN LAY
Victoria Police Chief Commissioner