

## Chair's report

**VicHealth's work and achievements for the financial year 2013–14 is the first full year of our 10-year *Action Agenda for Health Promotion*.**

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**Professor John Catford**  
Chair, VicHealth Board

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All of our organisation's energy and capacity is now being applied to the five areas where the most health gains can be made: promoting healthy eating, encouraging regular physical activity, preventing tobacco use, preventing harm from alcohol, and improving mental wellbeing.

This has never been more important – for the reality we face is stark. Nearly two in three Victorians are overweight and obese, and more of us are living with largely preventable diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, that greatly impact on our quality of life.

Poor diet, physical inactivity, smoking, risky alcohol consumption, and exposure to risk factors that cause depression or anxiety – these are the major influences contributing to ill health in Victoria and increasing the burden on the health system. Tackling these issues is the focus of the *Action Agenda*.

As the world's first health promotion foundation, VicHealth has considerable experience to draw on to support the work of the Victorian Government and our partner organisations in health, sports, research, the arts and community.

Only 12 months into our plan, we can see tangible outcomes where we are adding value to the Victorian Prevention System and complementing the work of Healthy Together Victoria. We have received significant support from the Victorian Government in a range of areas, from a partnership to prevent rising alcohol-related harms to the Premier's Active April Challenge, which encouraged Victorians outdoors in the autumn air. We are grateful to the Victorian Minister for Health, The Hon. David Davis MLC, for leading the extension of smoke-free areas, which has resulted in smoking bans on train and tram platforms, and within 10 metres of playgrounds, parks and public pools.

This year we also started a community conversation about our drinking culture, which has led to more Victorians questioning and changing risky behaviours. We are pleased that this work helped support the Government's *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013–2017* launched by The Hon. Mary Wooldridge MP.

A partnership with the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation and the Emergency Services Telecommunications Agency resulted in an online liquor licensing map. This is a valuable interactive resource for councils and agencies about Victoria's 19,000 liquor licenses.

Being active every day is one of the best lifestyles we can pass on to young people, which has inspired our *Active for Life* resource and another successful Walk to School campaign. We broke all participation records last year with over 32,000 students from more than 300 Victorian primary schools taking part.

VicHealth is taking centre stage in inspiring more of us to move for our physical and mental health. We have invested in fun and innovative ways, like the giant game of Twister at the Australian Open and a marathon 12-hour dance session at Melbourne's *White Night* festival that got tens of thousands moving.

Our Active Cities partnership with the City of Melbourne and the Department of Health helped tackle sedentary behaviour in the city's workplaces. We also continued our investment in the arts as an important setting to reach people and promote health, by supporting a range of arts projects through large and small collaborations. A good example was the popular *For You* dance floor at the National Gallery of Victoria's *Melbourne Now* exhibition.

VicHealth has always been a pioneer in pushing boundaries and we are now making better use of new and emerging technologies for health promotion. The TeamUp digital platform is connecting more Victorians to physical activity when and where they want. Our Seed Challenge online market place has linked farmers and consumers to healthy food hubs, and unlocked underutilised land in Melbourne for people to cultivate their own food.

The Art of Play (Women's Circus), funded through VicHealth's MOTION program, invites children to act, juggle and play.



This year, VicHealth also laid the groundwork for its inaugural Leading Thinkers initiative to generate fresh ideas and inspire new solutions to contemporary health issues. We have engaged Dr David Halpern, Chief Executive of the United Kingdom's Behavioural Insights Team, an expert in applying behavioural economics and psychology to deliver better public policy and services. Dr Halpern's residency will focus on obesity – a complex issue requiring innovative approaches that encourage and enable people to make healthier choices.

VicHealth continued its legacy as a leader in promoting mental wellbeing through its partnerships and research. Our work in the prevention of violence against women was demonstrated through a partnership to develop a national framework to prevent violence, with Our Watch (formerly the National Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children) led by its Chair, Natasha Stott-Despoja AM.

VicHealth's leadership in gathering and synthesising evidence in the area of reducing race-based discrimination continued with the release of a research review on the impacts of racism on young people's health.

VicHealth is deeply indebted to our partners, advocates and supporters, without whom our 10-year vision could not have progressed this far or this fast, and in so many creative ways.

On behalf of the VicHealth Board, I thank in particular The Hon. David Davis MLC, who as Minister for Health supported our *Action Agenda* and strategic imperatives at every stage, and all Members of Parliament for their ongoing support of VicHealth's work.

We have also been fortunate to have a diverse, knowledgeable and energetic Board. I would like to acknowledge the stewardship of Mark Birrell, who was on the Board of VicHealth for 3 years and Chair over the past 2 years. His many years' experience in public policy, starting with his lead role as Shadow Minister for Health in the passage of the *Tobacco Act 1987* and the creation of VicHealth, have been invaluable to the State of Victoria. Mark has made a profound and long-lasting impact on the health of Victorians for which we are all most grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge outgoing Board Members Ms Belinda Duarte, Mr Peter Gordon, Mr Neil Angus MLA, Mr Tim Bull MLA and Ms Danielle Green MLA for their service to the Board, and welcome new members Mr Nick Green OAM and Mr Stephen Walter, who are valuable additions to the team.

Together with our outstanding CEO, Jerril Rechter, and our skilled and experienced staff, we have positioned VicHealth to continue its unique role in promoting health, preventing ill health and reducing the burden of disease for all Victorians.

To our friends, partners and communities thank you for your tremendous support and willingness to work with us on new approaches in a complex and challenging environment.

I have great pleasure presenting this report on VicHealth's work and achievements.

**Professor John Catford**  
Chair, VicHealth Board

### Further reading

**Action Agenda for Health Promotion**  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/actionagenda](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/actionagenda)

**Advisory Governance Framework**  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/committees](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/committees)

**VicHealth Board**  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/board](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/board)

**VicHealth Staff**  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/staff](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/staff)

**Health Promotion Awards**  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/awards](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/awards)