



01 Promoting healthy eating

OUR 3-YEAR PRIORITY

More people choosing water and healthy food options.

WHY?

We all want a healthy diet for ourselves and our families. Most people know what makes up a healthy diet, but there is a gap in aspiring to eat in this way and the daily reality.

Eating a healthy balanced diet is not just down to individual choice and willpower. The environment in which we live influences our diet, from the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables to time pressures and cultural norms. All too often the healthy food choice is not the easiest choice.

WATER

VicHealth is committed to the promotion of water as the healthy drink choice.

The largest source of sugars in the Australian diet is sugar-sweetened drinks.¹ Research indicates that sugar-sweetened beverages play a significant role in overconsumption of energy, which is a key aspect driving obesity trends. In 2011, 12.4% of Victorians indicated they drink soft drink every day, a figure that is higher for males aged 25 to 34, with almost one in four drinking soft drink every day.²

VicHealth's water initiative

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 aims to encourage a greater consumption of water by all Victorians in preference to drinks with added sugar. This initiative also aims to improve access to fresh drinking water in a range of settings across the state by undertaking research into best practice approaches to water provision for health promotion, and by testing if water fountains are accessed more when there is the inclusion of a water bottle refill tap. Research insights will inform the development of evidence-based approaches and best practice guidelines.

FUTURE FOCUS

Our social marketing campaign to influence a switch to water from sugary drinks was launched in September 2014. Victorians are being encouraged to take the H30 Challenge: swapping sugary drinks for water for 30 days. In addition, about 60 new water refill stations are being rolled out within the City of Melbourne, located in and around tram stops, at sites where there is participation in physical activity and in high traffic public spaces.

<http://h30challenge.com.au>

¹ NHMRC 2013. *Australian Dietary Guidelines: Providing the scientific evidence for healthier Australian diets.* National Health and Medical Research Council, Canberra. See www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines

² VicHealth 2012, *VicHealth Indicators Survey 2011*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

VicHealth advocates the creation of environments and conditions that provide increased access to healthy food for all Victorians.

FOOD SUPPLY, ACCESS + CULTURE

VicHealth advocates the creation of environments and conditions that provide increased access to healthy food for all Victorians.

Healthy food needs to be available, accessible and affordable for all. VicHealth is committed to initiatives that increase the supply of and access to fruit and vegetables in Victoria.

We envisage a Victoria that embraces healthy eating, where people value, understand and enjoy a healthy diet.

The Seed Challenge

A new approach to improving local fresh fruit and vegetable supply, access and culture

VicHealth's Seed Challenge took a radical approach to a big issue: most Victorians eat less than the recommended amount of fresh fruit and vegetables. Knowing that access to good food makes more difference than health education alone to what people eat, we aimed to foster innovation and encourage Victorians to find new ways of working together, to develop new bright ideas and use digital technology to bring them to reality. By mounting a challenge, we were able to get social entrepreneurs, designers, urban architects and people with digital expertise to really think about this problem.

This year, the two winners of the Seed Challenge won \$100,000 to roll out their initiatives. The **Open Food Network** (<http://openfoodnetwork.org/>) is creating an online marketplace for small producers, allowing farmers and suppliers to connect directly with consumers with pilots in local food hubs across Victoria. **3000acres** (www.3000acres.org) is finding ways to unlock underutilised land in Melbourne – from vacant land to unused car parks – for people to cultivate their own food. They launched their website and first community garden in February.

Modelling policy interventions to protect Australia's food security

Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project

There are gaps in what we know about the impacts of population growth and emerging climate and environmental challenges on regional and national level food systems. With this in mind, a joint ARC research project between VicHealth and Professor Mark Lawrence from Deakin University with additional research collaborators is using an innovative scenario modelling approach to quantify the potential impacts of environmental challenges on Australian food availability, accessibility and affordability. The project, which runs until 2015, will make a new and significant contribution to addressing sustainability challenges to Australia's future food security.

Mapping Melbourne for land capability

Building knowledge about the uses of land in Victoria

In discussions about the long-term security of food systems in Australia, researchers, environmentalists, planners and other stakeholders frequently raise concerns about the loss of some of Victoria's most productive land due to urban expansion. The loss of highly productive areas suitable for horticulture (fruit and vegetable growing) has been of particular concern.

VicHealth funded a study by the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab (VEIL) at the University of Melbourne to improve understanding of land capability for agriculture, and initiate a system for consistent and public access to, and use of, this information. In November 2013 we released a preliminary evaluation of the project. The report will help planners and policy-makers to assess the agricultural capability of Victorian lands in proximity to Melbourne.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/land-capability

Food hubs are connecting local farmers with buyers, including cafes and restaurants.



Local food hubs

Connecting families, farms and food grown close to home

Through our Innovation Grants, VicHealth supported a 2-year demonstration project assessing the feasibility of the development of a food hub in the City of Casey. The project focused on the types of interventions required to change the scale of activity and viability of local and regional food distribution systems by considering infrastructure and systemic needs. It aimed to increase healthy eating, ensure fair prices for producers to increase the viability of local farming, and create opportunities for skill development, community interaction and new jobs. The South East Food Hub has demonstrated successful trials connecting local farmers with buyers including residential services, local restaurants and cafes, through a local distribution company and use of the Open Food Network software.

Closing the nutrition gap in Victoria

Supporting healthy eating policies for Aboriginal organisations

This year, VicHealth completed its work with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) to investigate and influence healthy eating policy and practices in Victorian Aboriginal organisations.

The project engaged a mix of metropolitan, regional and rural Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and Aboriginal Early Childhood Services. Using a community development approach, with tailored localised health promotion resources, healthier foods and drinks were provided to staff, children, clients, community members and other visitors to these organisations.

The success and learnings from this pilot project have enabled VACCHO to continue its work to support healthy eating policy and menu development with Victorian Aboriginal organisations.

VicHealth is leading a comprehensive approach to salt reduction in Victoria.



SALT

VicHealth is forming collaborative partnerships to implement salt reduction strategies.

Salt reduction is one of the most cost-effective strategies for reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases. Victorians on average are eating high-salt diets, well above the recommended levels. VicHealth is committed to implementing salt reduction strategies that result in a 30% relative reduction in average salt intake across the Victorian population.

Strengthening the case for state action on salt reduction

Public awareness of high salt diets as a health issue is limited and the chronic nature of the exposure is normalised in Australian diets. Studies show that the Australian population intake of salt is consistently and significantly higher than recommended levels, with the latest Australian data showing mean adult daily intake around 9 grams. About three-quarters of salt intake is from processed foods that are often commonly not viewed as high in salt, including bread, cereals and spreads such as butter or margarine.

VicHealth is working in partnership with The George Institute for Global Health, the Heart Foundation (Victoria), Deakin University and the Victorian Department of Health to lead a comprehensive approach to salt reduction in Victoria including a public awareness campaign to support individual and community behaviour and attitude change.

VicHealth is committed to looking for the solutions to the challenge of obesity by working with a range of partners across diverse settings.

Multifaceted interventions are required to halt and reverse the rise in overweight and obesity in Australia.



OBESITY

VicHealth supports action to halt the rise in obesity by focusing on creating the conditions that help people to make the healthy choice, to encourage them to eat more healthy food options and less energy-dense, nutrient-poor food, and to move more every day. VicHealth is committed to looking for the solutions to the challenge of obesity by working with a range of partners across diverse settings.

Past trends and future projections of overweight and obesity

This year we released highlights from 9 years of research by world-leading obesity expert Associate Professor Anna Peeters, while she was a VicHealth research fellow (2004–13). Obesity is without a doubt one of the most significant and complicated public health emergencies we now face as a society. There is no easy fix but Assoc. Prof. Peeters and other researchers have contributed to understanding obesity in Australia, giving us more insight into how to create better strategies to combat it.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/obesity-trends

Reducing inequalities in overweight and obesity

In Australia there has been no analysis of the health implications of the unequal distribution of obesity, nor of the extent to which social inequalities in obesity may widen, nor of the potential effect of obesity prevention and management strategies on this health divide. Assoc. Prof. Peeters' continuing work with VicHealth (undertaken as part of a joint Australian Research Council Linkage Project) has focused on each of these critical questions. The research has shed light on the alarming obesity trends and modelled the extent to which obesity prevention initiatives will widen or narrow these inequalities.

FUTURE FOCUS

In addition to a number of publications, a research forum in November 2014 transferred this knowledge to policy-makers, researchers, health professionals and others interested in combating the problem.

PARTNERSHIPS

Working with the Department of Health

VicHealth continued to complement and build upon the Victorian Government's *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011–2015* and initiatives to fight chronic disease and improve health and wellbeing.

Healthy Together Victoria, for example, involves all levels of government, peak organisations, schools, workplaces and communities to create opportunities for eating healthier and being more active. (There are a number of areas where VicHealth is aligning its work with this initiative, for example Be Active p. 28 and Victoria Walks p. 31.)

The Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise encompasses a range of initiatives being undertaken by the Victorian Government in partnership with local government, business, industry, health professionals and communities. A new Healthy Food Charter will provide the foundation for the Enterprise and will ensure consistency of healthy eating messages across initiatives.

Working with coalitions

The Food Alliance, funded by VicHealth and hosted by Deakin University's Food Policy Unit, engages in advocacy and research into food systems and related policy recommendations. This year it established the Victorian Food System Network, which draws together individuals and organisations working in food system initiatives to ensure coordination and to amplify their impact. The Know Your Food Bowl infographic received strong media attention, and was an innovative project financed through crowd funding.

The Parents' Jury, financially supported by four key health groups, including VicHealth, is an online network of parents taking action to improve food and physical activity environments for children. Its annual Fame and Shame Awards continue to showcase the worst and best of food advertising directed at children, and its Healthy Checkouts campaign aims to increase the number of checkouts free of junk food in Australian supermarkets.

The Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC), bringing together a group of leading public health agencies, and with funding from VicHealth, continued to raise important issues about the need for policy solutions to respond to the escalating levels of obesity, particularly in children. This year the OPC was actively involved in the Project Committee for front-of-pack nutrition labelling on foods, with the June announcement that the Health Star Rating system would be implemented signifying a great outcome for consumers in being able to make healthier food choices at a glance.

This year, VicHealth supported coalitions in business planning to help them achieve viability and sustainability, in recognition of the important role they play in making healthy food choices the easy choices in Victoria.

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

During the year, VicHealth was represented on numerous committees, advisory bodies and working groups that shape healthy eating policy and practice in Victoria, including:

- Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise
- Victorian Oral Health Promotion Advisory Group



“The benefits of affluence bring the bane of modern avoidable disease in their wake. As the mortality from tobacco declines we see the morbidity from obesity rising and turning into mortality. How much should we interfere? Solutions depend on data and VicHealth has a unique charter to provide this.”

DR NIGEL GRAY AO

Former Cancer Council Victoria Director