

# Integrated theme: Promoting equity

Everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential.



**Health equity is the notion that everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential if it can be avoided.**

VicHealth funds research and community-based programs to tackle health inequities. To meet the needs of population groups experiencing health inequities our investments have included work in helping to reduce race-based discrimination, supporting Indigenous arts organisations and through major programs such as the State Sporting Association Participation Program.

Other work to address health inequities has aimed to influence the socioeconomic and political context by challenging dominant societal norms and values in relation to gender in order to prevent violence against women.

#### What do we know?

People who live in the most disadvantaged suburbs of major cities or in rural areas of Australia are likely to die earlier and have poorer health than the rest of the population.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people of Australia die at twice the rate of all Australians and have a life expectancy that is between 10 and 12 years less than non-Indigenous people.<sup>2</sup> Victorians with a disability are more likely to report poor health than those without a disability. Those from low-income households are more likely to suffer lower health levels than people from higher-income households.<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, these health inequities reflect persistent social inequities. By reframing the problem of the growing burden of chronic disease as a social problem, we are building a deeper understanding of this crucial fact. Where are we making things better and for whom, and how do we close the health gaps?

<sup>1</sup> AIHW 2010, *Australia's Health 2010: in brief*, Cat. no. AUS 126, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> As above.

<sup>3</sup> Turrell G, Stanley L, de Looper M & Oldenburg B 2006, *Health inequalities in Australia: morbidity, health behaviours, risk factors and health service use*, Cat. no. PHE 72, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.



“VicHealth continues to push the envelope. It is a world-class leader in demonstrating how innovative investments in the social determinants of health can move the needle on health promotion and health equity.”

#### ICHIRO KAWACHI

Professor of Social Epidemiology, and Chair of the Social & Behavioral Sciences Department, Harvard University

## FAIR FOUNDATIONS

VicHealth's *Action Agenda* outlines our ongoing commitment to health equity. To ensure that we achieve a balance in meeting the needs of groups experiencing health inequities and addressing the most upstream determinants of health inequity, we have adapted and applied the work of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health and produced an action-oriented framework to guide health promotion. *Fair Foundations: The VicHealth framework for health equity* was released in October 2013. It outlines and describes the social determinants of health inequities, and provides practical entry points for action.

The Framework is giving us clarity about what we can do in relation to our five strategic imperatives to improve health equity and close the gap in health outcomes.

An evaluation is examining the external uptake and use of the Framework alongside an internal evaluation of the integration of health equity across VicHealth's program, policy, research, evaluation and communications activities.

A range of other resources will be published in 2015, including a suite of evidence reviews, using *Fair Foundations* as a guide.

[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations)

## ENABLING HEALTH

While we know that the overall health of people with a disability is much worse than that of the general population, people with a disability have not been prioritised in the same way as other population groups experiencing inequity.

To help address this, this year we released *Enabling Health*, an evidence-based resource that provides people who work across the disability sector with relevant information and guidance on action to improve the health of Australians with a disability.

[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/enabling-health](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/enabling-health)

## LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

The August 2013 edition of the *VicHealth Letter* (Issue No. 37) explores VicHealth's work in health equity in more detail, and features interviews with leading thought leaders on this topic, Professor Ichiro Kawachi (see opposite) and Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the WHO's Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/vichealthletter](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/vichealthletter)



“The Rumbalara Football Netball Club's partnership with VicHealth harnesses the power of empowerment and sport, linked to culture and spirituality. It makes a credible and valued contribution to the collective wellbeing of Aboriginal people and our broader society.”

#### PAUL BRIGGS OAM

President of the Rumbalara Football Netball Club