



Connecting the Dots – Creating solutions for lasting change

This module covers:

Impact Stream

- Big picture thinking for better solutions

Implementation Actions

- Understanding systems thinking approaches
- Actioning new systems thinking approaches

Overview

In this module, Deakin University's Systems Capacity Building Team will work with fast-track councils to deliver training and continuing support and guidance for the use of systems thinking approaches in community engagement. This process is designed to complement local health and wellbeing plan development, as well as ongoing community-led action.

Systems thinking is an approach used to tackle complex problems. It looks beyond individuals and events and into the wider, interconnected set of causes that have driven problems to where they are today. By focusing on the problems' drivers – and, most importantly, how they are connected to and influenced by one another – you can develop a more holistic perspective and design better actions.

What are the benefits for Council?

Councils will learn how to apply systems thinking, in practical terms, to health issues facing the community. These methods can be flexibly applied across a range of health issues and population groups in addition to children and young people – who are the intended cohort for this project.

Councils will learn how to facilitate a participatory systems thinking workshop process with participants from the local community. They will draw on concepts and practises from systems thinking to help their community develop a shared vision of the local drivers of children and young people's health and wellbeing and agree on the highest-priority policy and program options for action.

Throughout this module, fast-track councils will be supported by a network of Deakin regionally-based systems thinking advisors, each of whom is assigned to a small cluster of councils to maximise support. Advisors will assist with the delivery of the training content of the module, and provide significant experience and expertise on the use of systems thinking methods in a local government context.

Regular engagement with the Systems Thinking Advisors is important for successfully completing this module. It will also facilitate opportunities for councils to connect with and learn from other fast-track councils participating in the VicHealth Local Government Partnership.

After completing this module, councils will be able to use systems thinking as a framework to investigate health issues facing their communities, both internally and when consulting with community members. Councils will also learn how to monitor, identify and refine actions taken to improve community health over time.



Impact Stream: Big Picture Thinking For Better Solutions

Implementation Action 1: Understanding systems thinking approaches

This implementation action requires councils to enhance their understanding of and build capacity and capability in systems thinking approaches.

Intended outcomes

Outcomes that will result from this intervention include:

- familiarity with the fundamental concepts of systems thinking, including system mapping, feedback loops, non-linearity, and unintended consequences
- understanding the application of systems thinking concepts to the practical examination of complex problems
- understanding the practical application of systems thinking to community engagement and action planning
- emerging understanding of how to design and tailor participatory systems thinking workshops with community participants based on a given problem, objective, and population
- confidence using the STICKE software platform to build system maps
- understanding the alignment between current team skillsets and roles required to facilitate systems thinking workshops
- emerging understanding of the alignment between the concepts and practical methods of systems thinking and how it is relevant to local government.

Intervention – Develop systems thinking facilitation capability

Councils are required to action the following:

- Establish a core team to lead and deliver the systems thinking work for council. Ideal representatives include council staff overseeing Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan or integrated plan development and those working on child and youth health, and community engagement and/or development.
 - At least 5 members of the team must have capacity within their role to lead the logistics and facilitate participatory workshops with the community.
 - Inclusion of some non-council staff in the team is encouraged (where there are relevant strategic relationships with partner organisations) to collaborate with council on the delivery of health and wellbeing actions.

Intervention cont.

- Participate in the first part of the capacity building workshops: Foundations in systems thinking and facilitation. These can be delivered to fast-track councils as either:
 - a one-off, face-to-face 2 day intensive unit, alongside one or 2 other partner councils at a mutually agreed location, or
 - a series of twice-weekly, 2-hour seminars delivered over approximately 5 weeks.
- Work as a core team and meet as required outside the formal ‘foundations’ sessions to solidify skills learned and progress initial planning and scoping activities.
- Regularly engage with Deakin’s regionally based Systems Thinking Advisors who will provide support and guidance on:
 - questions arising outside of the scheduled ‘foundations’ sessions
 - any necessary preparations ahead of the next phase of the module
 - general advice and support
 - applying the systems thinking workshop learning outcomes and processes relevant to local government.

Minimum deliverables

To complete this action, councils will have:

- identified and recruited a local team of at least 5 people to attend the ‘foundations’ training
- ensured their ‘foundations’ attendees have been present at all scheduled sessions (in person/ online)
- provided log-in details and activated STICKE accounts for all members of the council team
- produced worksheets for the initial planning of the participatory systems thinking workshop, including problem framing, facilitation team membership and likely participant group.

Implementation Action 2: Actioning new systems thinking approaches

This implementation action requires councils to draw on their increasing capacity in the use of systems thinking approaches to engage their community in a process to understand and prioritise actions intended to improve children and young people's health and wellbeing.

Intended outcomes

Outcomes that will result from this intervention include:

- applying a systems thinking approach to prioritising, delivering and monitoring community-informed action
- strategic use of council resources to support and encourage community-driven action, alongside direct implementation of community-informed actions
- ongoing consideration of how systems thinking approaches may be adapted to complementary priorities within council that may strengthen work with children and young people
- co-learning with other participating councils, with a focus on generating new practises, and sustaining capacity for systems thinking internally and across councils.

Intervention – Systems thinking community workshops

Councils are required to action the following:

- Participate in the second part of the capacity building process: Workshop preparation and delivery support. This will be delivered online as weekly-to-fortnightly 2-hour seminars scheduled alongside the delivery of systems thinking community workshops.
- Work as a core team of facilitators to formally progress plans for, and deliver systems thinking community workshops. Workshop plans should refer to the support and guidance delivered through the 'prep and support' seminars, and outline contact with Systems Thinking Advisors.
- Deliver participatory systems thinking workshops with a group of community participants to develop a system map of children and young people's health and wellbeing, and identify corresponding priorities for action. The workshop series includes 3 sessions held about 3 weeks apart:
 - Workshop 1 (2–3 hours) – 10 to 25 community leaders. Objectives: Introduce the project and develop the initial system map.
 - Workshop 2 (2–3 hours) – 10 to 25 community leaders. Objectives: Further develop/refine the system map; discuss existing actions and areas requiring new or further action; discuss key sectors of the community to engage ahead of next workshop.
 - Workshop 3 (3–4 hours) – Up to 100 diverse community members. Objectives: Introduce and discuss the system map with new participants; review key insights and feedback loops; collaborative discussion and prioritisation of actions to support children and young people's wellbeing.
- Support and guide action (directly and indirectly based on community capacity and need), following the conclusion of the community workshops.
- Collate information about the progress of known emerging and ongoing actions, using the functionality made available through STICKE.



Intervention cont.

- Regularly engage with Deakin’s Systems Thinking Advisors who will provide support and guidance:
 - insights on actions being developed and tracked in STICKE
 - connecting with other participating councils working on similar actions or strategies
 - establishing communities of practise and co-learning opportunities (from late 2021/ early 2022)
 - designing and developing further systems thinking activities with the community that may guide or align additional council or community-based action
 - applying systems thinking to local government.

Minimum deliverables

To complete this action, councils will have:

- facilitated 3 participatory systems thinking workshops with community participants
- finalised a system map representing community perspectives on the local drivers of children and young people’s health and wellbeing
- collated the prioritised list of community-identified actions to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- identified an approach for prioritised actions to be embedded into one or more relevant local planning process, such as Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan action plan, supplementary Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan document, council strategic plan or other similar planning document
- identified clear roles and responsibilities within the council team for ongoing monitoring of known actions and capturing information in STICKE.

Extra Resources

The VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool is designed to help organisations develop a clearer understanding of the range of purposes of collaborations, reflect on the partnerships they have established and focus on ways to strengthen new and existing partnerships.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool

Systems thinking worksheets, tools and resources will be made available directly to fast-track councils through the training.

We would like to thank our development partner for contributing and co-authoring this module:





Community of Practice support for Connecting the Dots – Creating solutions for lasting change

Councils completing this foundation module will have opportunities to share with, learn from and support each other through their systems thinking capacity building and workshop delivery.

Fast-track councils will be offered community of practice opportunities concurrently in 2 formats:

1. Regional communities of practice

Regional communities of practice will be delivered periodically by Deakin University’s regional Systems Thinking Advisors, after the ‘foundations’ and ‘prep and support’ sessions have concluded.

The purpose is to offer opportunities for council teams to share their experiences and challenges with other council teams, and to support co-learning and sharing of successful ideas and strategies.

The exact number and composition of the communities of practice will be developed in response to feedback from the council teams throughout the year. Efforts will be made to align the communities of practice with existing regional networks where they exist.

Community of Practice lead agency	Deakin University – Systems Thinking Advisors supported by VicHealth as required
Format	Online video conferences through Zoom, including peer-to-peer discussion, breakout activities, presentations and other content identified as useful in consultation with council teams
Frequency	Monthly–quarterly (to be negotiated with council teams)
Focus	Practical delivery of the Connecting the Dots module
Local government participants	<p>Required: Systems Thinking Leads</p> <p>Optional: Other members of systems thinking training or relevant delivery teams (including community health or similar partners)</p>

2. Victorian fast-track councils foundation community of practice

This community of practice will be offered to all fast-track councils to support the initiation of the VicHealth Local Government Partnership throughout 2021. The purpose will be to bring together and share experiences about the Leading the Way and Connecting the Dots foundation modules from across Victoria, as well as provide an opportunity to look at topics related to the initiation of the VicHealth Local Government Partnership more broadly and the development and adoption of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans 2021–25.

Community of Practice lead agency	VicHealth with expert partners
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online video conference, supported by peer-to-peer discussion and sharing through Microsoft Teams • Recorded brief presentations or case studies • ~ 60 to 90 minutes
Frequency	Every 2 months
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VicHealth Local Government Partnership initiation • General sharing related to foundation modules • Link to the planning and adoption of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans 2021–25 • Program updates
Local government participants	<p>Required: Funded Project Officer, Local Government Partnership Project Lead</p> <p>Optional: Key staff involved in the delivery of the Local Government Partnership</p>

Further Information

Stay up to date with the VicHealth Local Government Partnership.

Visit: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/programs-and-projects/local-government-partnership

For further information or enquiries, contact our Local Government team at lgp@vichealth.vic.gov.au or phone on 03 9667 1333.



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VicHealth is committed to health equity, which means levelling the playing field between people who can easily access good health and people who face barriers, to achieve the highest level of health for *everyone*.



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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.