

Exploring Boundaries, Expanding Horizons - Ecological Challenges to Health Promotion

When: Monday 25 July 2005
09.00 am to 5.00 pm

Where: Seminar Room
VicHealth
15-31 Pelham Street CARLTON 3053
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VicHealth is exploring links between human and ecosystem health and their significance for the future of health promotion. The purpose of this is to propose options for future action by VicHealth.

As a first step in this process we are convening a round table of interested persons to explore ideas on health and ecology and identify issues of common interest and concern. We hope this may feed into further collaboration.

The Forum

This forum is ostensibly about concepts of ecosystem health and the challenges these pose to current health promotion paradigms.

We would like to go a step further in applying this and ask:

- What does this mean for health promotion infrastructure, funding and governance?
- How does this in turn impact on health promotion policy, programs, education and training and research?

In essence we hope this will be a visioning exercise: what does a refocus on environmental determinants of health mean for the long term vision of health promotion - the who, what, why, where and how of health promotion in 2010 - 2015?

Background

The health risks from human assaults on ecosystems inform government policy on the environment and health (Parkes, Panelli and Weinstein, 2003; WHO, 1992; WHO, 2003; Chivian, 2003). Although local environmental hazards to health have traditionally received more attention than the ways in which natural ecosystems exert positive influences on human health and wellbeing (Neller, 2000; McMichael, 2002), international policy on the environment and health is now focusing on health sustainability in relation to the wellbeing of global "life support systems". Key conceptual themes in these developments include:

- The health of the human population and the environment, both local and global, are inextricably intertwined.
- The world's environment is changing as a consequence of human activities in ways that pose risks to our current high standards of health

- Biophysical and socioeconomic environments of humans interact within an ecosystems context.
- Linkages between human and ecosystem health need to be understood by viewing them as components of a complex system with:
 - multiple spatial and temporal scales
 - nested hierarchies of environments
 - inherently complex interrelationships among environmental components and influences
 - feedback loops between environments providing self-organisational capacity and functional emergent properties

VicHealth wishes to explore how these theoretical developments impact on the practice of health promotion and national and state policies on health and the environment. In order to effectively address human wellbeing health promotion, public health and environmental health need to adopt a wider ecological health approach, which focuses on the broader and more distal links between the health of ecosystems and human health.

The Format

The morning of the forum will consist of a number of presentations on concepts of ecosystem health and the challenges these pose to current health promotion paradigms. How do emerging understandings of ecological health, accompanied by a growing awareness of ecological crises, change the way we think?

We ask presenters to please leave enough time in their twenty minute time slot (ten minutes or so) for ideas to be pulled out and tossed around by participants and tagged for further discussion in the afternoon.

The afternoon will consist of workshopping how these changes in thinking translate into action in the way we might undertake health promotion in the future. What does this mean for health promotion governance, policy, infrastructure and funding and what are flow on effects for health promotion programs, education and training and research?

We have deliberately left the topics of the afternoon workshops open so that participants can determine how best to focus the discussion in the afternoon depending on what comes out of the morning. We can either have two or four separate discussion topics. If we can't agree on how to proceed (re foci or format of discussions) we can revert to some of the topics listed below. We would like the forum to be interactive and dynamic and to meet as many of the needs of the players around the table so are keen to incorporate your suggestions on content and format.

Format: Exploring Boundaries, Expanding Horizons - Ecological Challenges to Health Promotion

Morning: Exploring Boundaries, Expanding Horizons			
	Topic	Individual	Organisation
09.00	Welcome		
09.20	Presentation	Dr Glenn Albrecht	University of Newcastle
09.40	Presentation	Prof. Val Brown	ANU
10.00	Presentation	Dr Colin Butler	ANU
10.20	Presentation	A.Prof Pierre Horwitz	Edith Cowan University
10.40	Morning tea		
11.00	Presentation	Dr Anne Neller	University of the Sunshine Coast
11.20	Presentation	Ms Glenda Verrinder	LaTrobe University
11.40	Presentation	TBC	
12.00	Wrap up of the morning's presentations Identification of foci for after lunch workshops		
12.30	Lunch		
Afternoon: Meeting Ecological Challenges to Health Promotion			
	Group 1	Group 2	
1.30	Topic a	Topic a OR Topic b	
2.10	Feedback to group	Feedback to group	
2.30	Topic b OR Topic c	Topic b OR Topic d	
3.10	Feedback to group	Feedback to group	
3.30	Afternoon break		
4.00	What next – discussion of potential collaborations/ directions and individual actions		
5.00	Close		

Potential topics for afternoon discussion

- Implications of the mornings discussion for governance, infrastructure and funding: cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary approaches to overcoming governance barriers.
- Implications for health promotion policy, programs, education and training and research: eg
 - The boundaries and expertise of health promotion: specialist verses generalist endeavor
 - How we understand, define and research health and health promotion
- The currency of policy models and frameworks: sustainable development, health impact assessment, social and environmental benchmarking, Healthy Cities

- Corporatism and consumerism – new frontiers for health promotion?
- Moving forward:
 - Matching technical and political problems and solutions
 - Identifying broad directions for how challenges to the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of health promotion may translate into sectoral and organisational change.
 - Human and organisational agency: big picture, little picture → striking a balance

Some ideas to explore

1. Challenging health paradigms

- Challenges to/ expansion of existing health paradigms – eg the application of systems thinking and chaos theory in health promotion.
- Humanism in health promotion: challenges posed by environmental crisis
- Compatibility/ synchronicity between health and environmental paradigms – potential for functional goal sharing and collaboration
- Challenges to economic hegemony – social progress, power and diversity
- Indigenous models of pathways to health
- The evidentiary basis for the link between health and ecology
- Evidence and action: defining problems and creating solutions
- Heuristic models for social ecological systems.

2. Exploring policy mechanisms

- Sustainable development policy as a macro policy framework for health
- Further exploration of the role/ effectiveness/ influence of the health sector in formulating sustainable development policy (persuasiveness of health argument and resonance with mainstream – health as a social utility verses intrinsic value (eg aesthetics) of natural environments?)
- Health and environment impact assessment
- Social and environmental indicator reporting linked to governance mechanisms and policy platforms

3. Governance mechanisms in health and ecology

- Cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary approaches to overcoming governance barriers.
- The role of international organisations
- National, state and local government capacity and roles
- The public health and health promotion associations
- The role of NPHP and enHealth

4. Defining and skilling the ecological health workforce

- Traditional professional approaches in environmental health (EH, HP, PH)
- Workforce gaps
- Opportunities for health promotion specialisation in the workforce
- Identifying generic health and ecology skills
- Sharing specialist expertise
- Developing training opportunities
- Redefining activism and advocacy

5. Some other challenges: urbanisation, corporatism and consumerism.

- The built environment as part of ecosystems: revisiting Healthy Cities.
- Private sector “free marketing” and public sector “social engineers”: consumers and citizens
- The corporate citizen: co-opting private interests in support of health
- Risk identification and communication in ecological health
- Mismatching technical and political problems and solutions?
- Think global, act local: linking environmental policy and behavioural change.

References

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