## Exploring Boundaries, Expanding Horizons – Ecological Challenges to Health Promotion

**Monday 25 July 2005**
**VicHealth**

**Present**

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| Ms Ali **Barr** | VicHealth |
| Ms Dee **Basinski** | VicHealth |
| Dr Catherine **Bennett** | The University of Melbourne |
| Prof Valerie **Brown** | Australian National University |
| Mr Paul **Burgess** | Menzies School of Health Research |
| Dr Colin **Butler** | Australian National University |
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| Ms Maree **Davidson** | Davidson Consulting |
| Dr Shyamali **Dharmage** | The University of Melbourne |
| Dr Louisa **Flander** | The University of Melbourne |
| Dr Sharon **Friel** | Australian National University |
| Mr Jose Roberto **Guevara** | Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology |
| Mr Nick **Higginbotham** | University of Newcastle |
| A.Prof Pierre **Horwitz** | Edith Cown University |
| Mr Timothy **Moore** | Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation |
| Ms Sam **Moskwa** | HealthPact |
| Dr Anne **Neller** | University of the Sunshine Coast |
| Ms Sue **Noy** | Environment Victoria |
| Ms Monica **O'Dwyer** | VicHealth |
| Ms Rinske **Poulier** | Department of Sustainability and Environment |
| Ms Caroline **Sheehan** | VicHealth |
| Dr Mardie **Townsend** | Deakin University |
| Ms Glenda **Verrinder** | La Trobe University |

## General notes from the day

- An understanding of health and ecology requires being familiar with systems theory:  An important part of this is understanding systems as "whole-archies" as well as hierarchies.

- Language is important in finding a way forward:
    o In defining problems, solutions and underlying concepts (e.g. using 'ecosystem health' rather than 'environmental health').
    o We need to find common language instead of inventing new words.
    o We need to limit jargon → use simple language that all can understand.

- How do we create a synthesis across sectors?
    o Bridging the environment camp and health promotion camp requires cross sectoral training with sharing of ideas and issues.
    o We need to identify and acknowledge strengths across sectors and share them i.e.:
        ⇒ Health sector- strengths in behavioural change.
        ⇒ Environment sector - strengths in community/ group activism.
    o There is a risk of dividing people into environment or health camps - some don't see the link to either sector as important.

- It is useful to think about how other cultures construct health.  The concept of health is sometimes seen as intertwined with environment.
    o "Healthy country, healthy people" - Indigenous perspectives of health in terms of the connection to land

- Cultural shift is possible, but in determining how to achieve it we first need to map the 'cultural landscape':
    o How do we get all people to view themselves as land carers?

- We need to have broader sectors involved. Identifying connections and opportunities for collaboration depend on:
    o How you view the issue.
    o How you are connected to it.

- We may need to reframe the problem as a human and social problem not an 'environment' problem – i.e. the environment would be not be a problem if human behaviour was not causing problems.

## What are potential connections between the environment and health sectors?

- Environmental challenges require whole, transformational, open-ended solutions:
    o We need to engage holistically and not view "the environment" as a separate bit of work.
    o It should not be about creating a 'new' discipline, but giving people a new responsibility they can contribute to.
    o The structures we work in keep us separate so we need to learn a common language.

- There is a danger in limiting this connection to two sectors, as it needs to be owned by all sectors:
    o All portfolios of government
    o Business
    o Consumers
    o Community

There are obvious contributions health promotion can make:
    o Health promotion can contribute to a broader agenda
    o How can we keep what we have in health promotion but also extend our reach?
    o How are we training people in health promotion?  How are ecological models and concepts incorporated?
    o Are there opportunities to acknowledge, highlight and extend upon what we are already doing?

## What is our vision?

- We need to be able to foster 'strategic epiphanies' about environmental sustainability:
    o in government;
    o in corporations; and
    o in the community.

- We need to subvert/ get past the vertical hierarchy of power, resources, etc. that hamper solutions:
    o We need to investigate how to set up a system that can work across divides.
    o We can support virtual disciplines, virtual communities of interest outside of these structures.
    o We can work out how to apply theory on complex adaptive systems to what we do.
    o Is it useful to view ecology as a subversive discipline?  As a test-case for new ways to work which overcome bureaucratic barriers and find solutions to complex problems?
    o Potential for an Australian health promotion foundation?

- We need new types of disciplines - uniting <u>transdisciplinary spaces</u>-supported by organisations and resources
    o How can they be encouraged to be formed?

- We need a different way of arguing our point to be able to overcome sophisticated resistance to the way we want to go:
    - We need to couch it in terms that it is in the interests of government and corporations to look at issues from an ecological perspective.
    - We need to be creative and do things differently.
    - It is important to seek an angle/different angles to appeal to different interests.
    - We need to explore some of our assumptions about governments, corporations and those we think may oppose our view ("If we play by their rules we will lose", "They are more sophisticated than us", "Their game is fearsome", "We have to work with them but without them")

## Which groups and initiatives do we need to engage with?

- Who are the sectors we should be working with?
    - Environmental/land managers
    - Agriculture sector
    - Forestry sector
    - Power generation sector
    - Transport sector
    - Lobbying groups who try and influence all of the above

- Who are possible partners?
    - VCOSS and state bodies
    - Union movement
    - Industry groups - recycling
    - The insurance industry represent an unlikely partner

- What are existing opportunities?
    - The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* theme
    - The current interest in and momentum in triple bottom line reporting/ social and environmental benchmarks and indicator projects represent a policy opportunity at local government level

- What lessons are to be learnt from other initiatives? i.e.
    - Neighbourhood renewal and partners in that project – challenges in trying to link social and environmental foci.
    - Responses to obesity and the influence of doctors → who will be our advocates?

- What levers will drive the issue?
    - Concern over climate change
    - Concern over ↑ oil prices
    - → Link with transport, urban design

- Who else needs to be involved and who else do we need to understand better to make progress?

## What should we do next?

- We need to **create space** for groups to come together and learn about using:
    - Environmental concepts in health promotion
    - Health promotion strategies to generate behavioural change conducive to environmental sustainability

- This could be the creation of virtual space:
  - Use NICHE (Deakin) website. Put information on health and ecology initiatives on the *Human Health and Nature Clearinghouse* at http://www.deakin.edu.au/hbs/hsd/research/niche/clearinghouse.php
  - Explore a 'virtual faculty' model such as exists in APNAC - Australian Public Health Nutrition Academic http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/pherp-innovations-2.htm
  - Creation of email discussion group – where can this be based?

- It could be the creation of space through increased interagency collaboration:
  - Look at alliances with different existing groups
    - ⇒ ENHealth is one possibility. Secretariat Karen Rogers → http://www.nphp.gov.au/enhealth/index.htm
    - ⇒ Collaboration with the PHA SIG group is another possibility Convener Liz Hanna http://www.phaa.net.au/sig/Environmental_Health/Environmental_Health.htm
    - ⇒ ECO health group in Australia is looking to establish or strengthen existing networks or establish a new one. Contact Pierre Horwitz
  - Organisations like VicHealth have a role in pulling the connection between health and ecology into its agenda and establishing networks

- It could also be the creation of professional 'head space'
  - State plan for environment/environmental education → get issues on these sorts of agendas
  - Environmental education has natural affinity with ecohealth → build understanding of next generation
  - Build complexity theory into curriculum
  - PHERP – development of curriculum that can be shared on common topics - should create one on ecohealth.

## Comments from the Feedback forms

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| **Ideas for follow up forums etc** | o Collaborative training<br>o Conceptualising space<br>o Develop a strategic framework and monitoring system<br>o Cross sectoral dialogue using sustainability as a possible framework<br>o Strategic issues<br>o Strategic partnership<br>o Email discussion<br>o Face to face follow up meeting in 1-2 years<br>o Include representatives of other government departments or other academic disciples (transport, agriculture, forestry, engineering, roads)<br>o More people in general health especially nutrition, mental health, but they will need to be educated<br>o Programming the idea of fostering / growing the space(s)<br>o Curriculum development for postgraduate education<br>o Building 'ecospace' so that it can grow and become more influential<br>o Involve environmental NGO's and industry<br>o In practical terms - useful to explore 'hooks' which could facilitate the adoption of ecosystem health by VicHealth and by government and other bodies<br>o Is the purpose to inform VicHealth to move forward or VicHealth as part of a group moving forward?<br>o Email list to float ideas? |
| **Possible themes to write up** | o Relationship between health promotion and ecohealth<br>o Planning systems<br>o Organisational structures<br>o Linking ecological thought and health promotion but perhaps where reporting on examples forms the focus<br>o Organisation<br>o Governance<br>o Conceptual planning<br>o Peer support<br>o How can health promotion and ecosystem health 'value add' and mutually contribute<br>o 'space' and wicked problems<br>o Overcoming barriers (structures, ideologies etc.)<br>o Explaining complexity in lay terms<br>o Facilitators and barriers to adoption of an ecosystem health focus<br>o Corporate Australia / globalisation<br>o Government ecological goals<br>o Ecology and health systematics<br>o Health and ecosystems are two of the most complex systems for which we have an understanding. They are therefore likely to be used as a metaphor for our understanding of the world |
| **Who is interested to be involved** | o Sharon Friel<br>o Pierre Horwitz<br>o J. Roberto Gueara<br>o Colin Butler<br>o Catherine Bennett |

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|  | o  Glenn Albrecht<br>o  Mardie Townsend<br>o  Anne Neller |
| **Other comments** | o  Link to DSE commissioner of sustainability and Prof John Fien, RMIT, Victorian Association of Environmental Education<br>o  We need better representation of Northern Australian issues and partnerships beyond VicHealth<br>o  A joint curriculum in Ecohealth to be shared nationally<br>o  Health promotion as a significant contribution to the agenda / dialogue<br>o  Don't be afraid to name the elephant,  tobacco company or behaviour in the room<br>o  The development of a philosophy and values system for ecohealth<br>o  Ecohealth as a social justice agenda<br>o  Useful to explore synergies and partnerships<br>o  Important to create real and virtual spaces for the ongoing collaboration |