

## VicHealth investments for reducing health inequalities

**VicHealth is committed to reducing health inequalities. Health inequalities are disparities in health status (such as rates of illness and death or self-rated health) that result from social and economic influences that are avoidable and unnecessary. In addition to ensuring that grant programs target health inequalities, VicHealth has also developed specific projects aiming to redress the health inequality gap.**

The VicHealth 2006 – 09 *Strategic Plan* identifies targets to:

- ❖ Build knowledge to improve capacity across sectors to address health inequalities
- ❖ Engage in advocacy to reduce health inequalities
- ❖ Develop projects and programs to address health inequalities
- ❖ Explore operational options for reducing health inequalities.

**While a range of factors have been found to be associated with inequalities, the most significant and persistent include:**

- **Level of education**
- **Occupation**
- **Income**
- **Employment status**
- **Area of residence**
- **Disability**
- **Refugee background.**

**Ethnicity and gender are also factors that may contribute to and compound health inequalities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians experience some of the greatest inequalities due to entrenched systemic barriers across the socioeconomic factors listed above.**

### Capacity-building

#### ***Victorian Health Inequalities Network***

The Network comprises representatives of key non-government organisations and researchers to foster partnerships and collaborative activity between health researchers and those responsible for policy and program development in other relevant sectors. The purpose of the Network will be to improve capacity in Victoria to translate findings from research pertaining to health inequalities into policy and practice. Four policy roundtables will be held in 2007 to identify policy opportunities to address health inequalities.

#### ***Refugee Education Partnership project***

This project consolidates and sustains VicHealth's past investments through the establishment of a State Wide Advocacy, Policy and Networking Project for Refugee Students. This project has produced a report on the education needs of young refugees in Victoria, and is working towards implementing policy alternatives across education organisational systems, language development, transitions between education and employment, recovery from trauma and support for refugee families.

Research

### ***Victorian Local Government Community Wellbeing Indicators Project***

This project has engaged with Victorian local governments to develop a common framework for selecting and developing indicators of community wellbeing. A common core set has now been developed, along with locality specific indicators, to measure progress on key social, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of health for priority setting, planning, monitoring and advocacy at the local level. This work is now auspiced by The McCaughey Centre (the VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing). A range of regular updates will be provided based on local government areas, and particular population groups. Resources to assist communities and governments use the indicators in community engagement and planning will also be developed. A website has been established at: [www.communityindicators.net.au](http://www.communityindicators.net.au).

### ***Australian Health Inequities Program***

VicHealth is a contributing funder to this multidisciplinary population health research project which addresses social and economic determinants of health and aims to increase understanding of the complex social, economic and environmental factors that contribute to health inequities and to improve policy, program and practice designed to reduce these inequities.

### ***Connecting Communities To Government***

This project will identify the social connections and linkages within and between communities and local government to build supportive social networks and improve citizen engagement, with an emphasis on marginalised groups. It is operating across Manningham, Knox, Port Phillip and Maribyrnong local government areas.

### ***Pathways to Inclusion***

This research will consider how participation in local community groups and institutions promotes social connection. Specifically, it will explore how social connection builds local social resources and define the pathways through which it impacts on mental and physical health.

### ***Understanding Victorian Women's Experiences of Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion***

This project will investigate women's choice to terminate pregnancy and to determine effective strategies to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Tony's work at the centre

Settings: workplace

### ***Integrated, community-based approaches to health promotion for Victorian blue-collar workers.***

Research to investigate, implement and evaluate interventions addressing the parallel patterns of high behavioural health risks and the adverse working conditions among low status workers.

### ***McCaughey Centre: work research program***

Through funding to the McCaughey Centre (the VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing), VicHealth invests in research into the relationships between working conditions and health behaviours; integrated occupational health and workplace health promotion interventions; systems approaches to job stress; and analysis of changing patterns of work, and their impacts on working conditions, health, and wellbeing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

***Developing sustainable Aboriginal Health research practice.***

Project to implement and evaluate an innovative program of research reform that will improve ethical, relevant and sustainable research practice in Aboriginal health, build research capacity and ultimately lead to improved health.

***Onemda***

The Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit is an integrated academic program in Aboriginal Health focusing on research, community development; and teaching and learning.

New arrivals/ refugees

***Off to a Healthy Start***

This 5-year ethnographic study will describe the social contexts and determinants that promote mental and social wellbeing for newly arrived refugee youth and their families during the settlement process. Broader contextual factors that facilitate or hinder wellbeing will be assessed at the level of the school, family and community.

***Masculinities & the Health of Young Refugee Males From Southern Sudan***

This project will research how notions of masculinities can help in analysing the health issues of young males from Southern Sudan in Melbourne. The research will analyse how masculinities intersect with gender, class, race, ethnicity, age and culture to impact on the physical and psychological wellbeing of these young (under-25s) men.

Children and young people

***Health, development & wellbeing of young children in Victoria***

Review of epidemiological data on the health, development, and wellbeing of young children in Victoria; and the evidence base for effective public health interventions in childhood. This will include development of evidence-based strategies, in partnership with communities, to address child health inequalities.

***Promoting the Mental Health of Children Living in Low Income Families***

The overall aim of this fellowship is to build a cutting edge, innovative research program in the field of mental health promotion, with a focus on child health inequalities. This includes development of a mental health framework relevant to children from low income families and trial of intervention activities across metropolitan and rural areas of low socioeconomic advantage.

***Intervening Early: Young People, Families and Community***

Early intervention programs for vulnerable young people and their families are currently divided between governments and across service sectors, resulting in replicated services and significant service gaps. Research will provide an evidence base to support the development of cross-sectoral, early intervention policies and services for this marginalised population.

***Adolescent Problem Gambling: Risk & Protective Factors Informing Prevention***

Research designed to influence service provision and policy formation related to problem gambling and youth mental health.

Community Interventions

***Indigenous School-to-work Project Shepparton/Mooroopna***

This project, led by Gambina, a Koori Economic Employment Training Agency, enhances mental health and wellbeing and reduces inequalities through ensuring continuity between school, training and the workplace as a means of achieving employment for Indigenous youth.

***Ambassador Newspaper***

This award-winning project – managed independently by the Horn of Africa Communities Network – has established a community language newspaper to reduce inequalities by strengthening communities, cultural identity and communication. 5,000 copies of the newspaper are produced monthly and distributed widely across Victoria in over seven languages. This project is currently focusing on consolidating its viable business model to ensure its independence and sustainability beyond establishment funding.



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