

# The VicHealth knowledge policy

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## Research at VicHealth

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) has a tradition of investment in public health research and the promotion of evidence-based interventions to promote the health and wellbeing of the Victorian community. VicHealth has historically used a combination of investigator-initiated research and priority-driven research to foster innovation while also shepherding the research agenda towards policy outcomes. Alongside this commitment is the role VicHealth has assumed in building capacity in health promotion and public health research.

Since its inception in 1987, VicHealth research funding has been directed at balancing three imperatives: innovation, capacity building and public health priorities. VicHealth currently invests approximately \$6 million annually in research. These investments have built significant capacity in public health research. A series of recent reviews have suggested that from 2002 to 2006, research funding at VicHealth has been successful.

There are, however, new demands on the research program, in particular the need to be able to respond to new and emerging trends, and to engage in effective knowledge translation/transfer. Alongside these demands is a greater appreciation that initiatives are needed to better link research to health promotion and policy practice.

## Research and knowledge

Research is characterised as “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise applications” ([www.arc.gov.au/pdf/ACUADS\\_20Oct08.pdf](http://www.arc.gov.au/pdf/ACUADS_20Oct08.pdf)). Knowledge on the other hand is broader. Knowledge encompasses both structured inquiry and the intellectual capital latent in communities, systems, institutions and organisations (Howard 2005).

From a VicHealth point of view, knowledge comprises coherent propositions that are based on evidence and argument. Knowledge can be made more robust when evidence and arguments from different perspectives are brought together to describe and explain most convincingly what happens in the world. The VicHealth approach to knowledge therefore consists of different knowledge bases and a range of knowledge-related activities.

Academic and other researchers are driven and rewarded by providing explanations of phenomena in nature. As they primarily write for and speak to their research peers, the meaning and import of their work often needs to be ‘translated’ for a wider audience of practitioners and policy makers. Furthermore, the utility of knowledge generated from research is limited until it is ‘transferred’ into actions that benefit health.

Many publicly funded research organisations have shifted interest away from a narrow focus on research to a broader system of knowledge making, ranging across the production of knowledge through to its translation/transfer into real-world effects (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2005).

This change in focus has developed from an appreciation that there is a public policy need to put knowledge to work, that health and wellbeing emerge from complex systems based on different categories of knowledge, and a growing appreciation internationally that collaborative approaches to knowledge can produce significant outcomes (Nowotny H, Scott A & Gibbons M 2001).

VicHealth has committed itself through its imminent 2009–2013 strategic framework to collaborative knowledge processes at the level of production, synthesis, translation, transfer and evaluation to ensure better health for all.

## VicHealth as a knowledge organisation

VicHealth's approach to 'Research' is refocused in the imminent 2009–2013 Strategic Framework to 'Knowledge' (Key Result Area 4). Specific objectives within the strategic framework aim to "produce, synthesise and translate practical health promotion knowledge" (objective 4.1) and "evaluate health promotion practice" (objective 4.2).

This strengthened focus on 'knowledge' identifies an openness to support a wider range of knowledge-related activities, a wider range of knowledge types and a new set of challenges for the organisation to do more than simply fund research.

Using the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) framework (Figure 1), VicHealth is committed to funding research activity that produces results which can be used to influence decision making in a number of areas. VicHealth research funding will support research activities which in turn produce research findings. These findings contribute to the knowledge pool. VicHealth will play a key role in supporting strategies that mediate the transfer of knowledge from the knowledge pool into the decision-making processes that structure health care and the determinants of health.

## Policy principles

There are four principles underpinning the VicHealth knowledge policy.

### **Balanced portfolio**

VicHealth has an opportunity to invest in knowledge in a range of ways. With a changing knowledge landscape, new opportunities are emerging so that a wider range of portfolio investments can be achieved.

### **Building capacity**

With the development of new forms of web-based interaction (such as social bookmarking, collaborative platforms, interaction and sophisticated search technologies), building knowledge capacity can be achieved by building stronger linkages between knowledge production and knowledge translation.

### **Partnerships**

VicHealth has a long and proud history of creating change by working closely with its partners.

### **Connecting knowledge-related activities**

A core principle of the VicHealth knowledge policy is that of connecting knowledge-related activities into a coherent system. A strong system is achieved when there is a coherent collection of related components that nurture, grow and produce new ways of thinking.

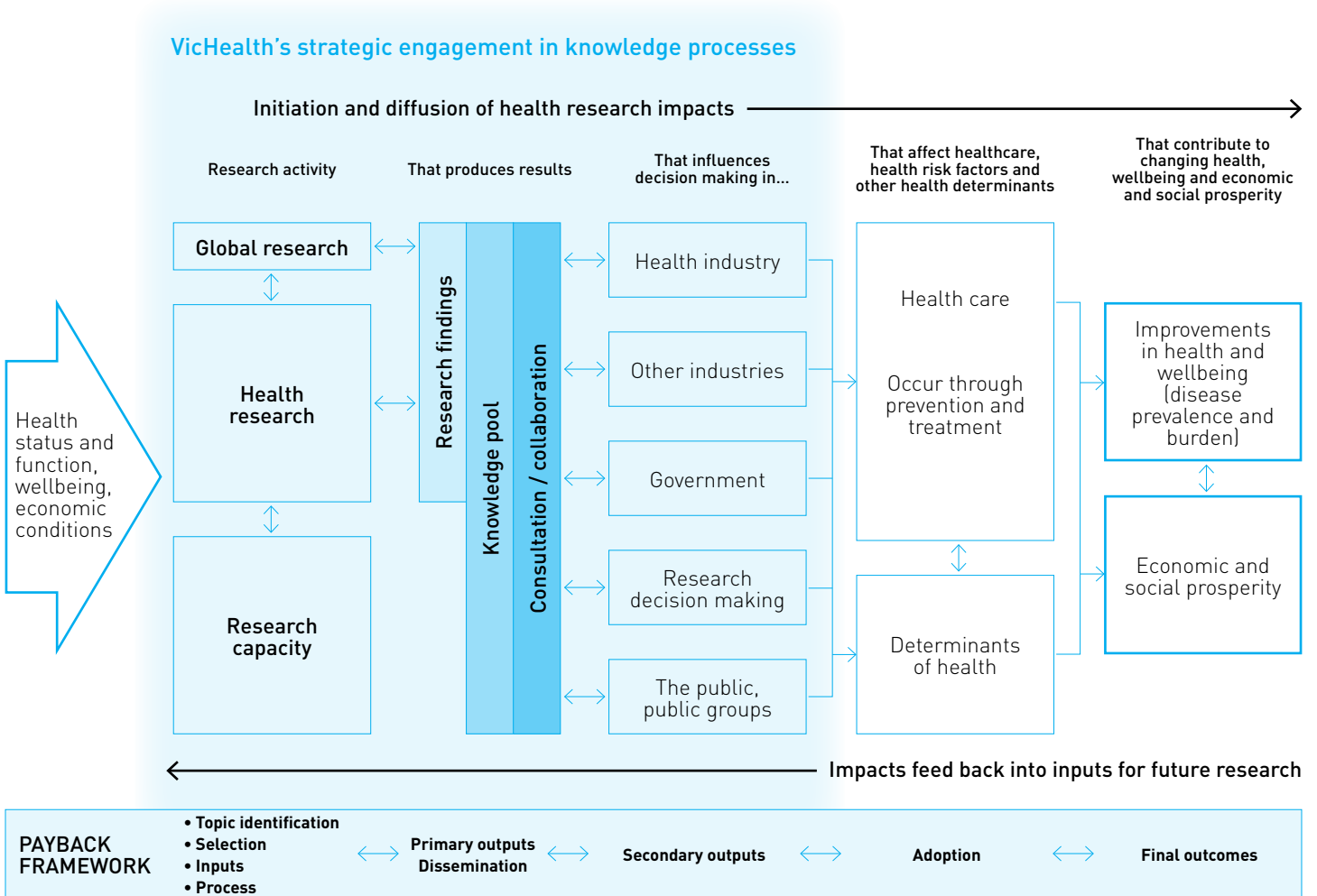


Figure 1. Framework logic model of health research progression to impacts. Adapted from Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (2009, p. 59).

# Components of the policy

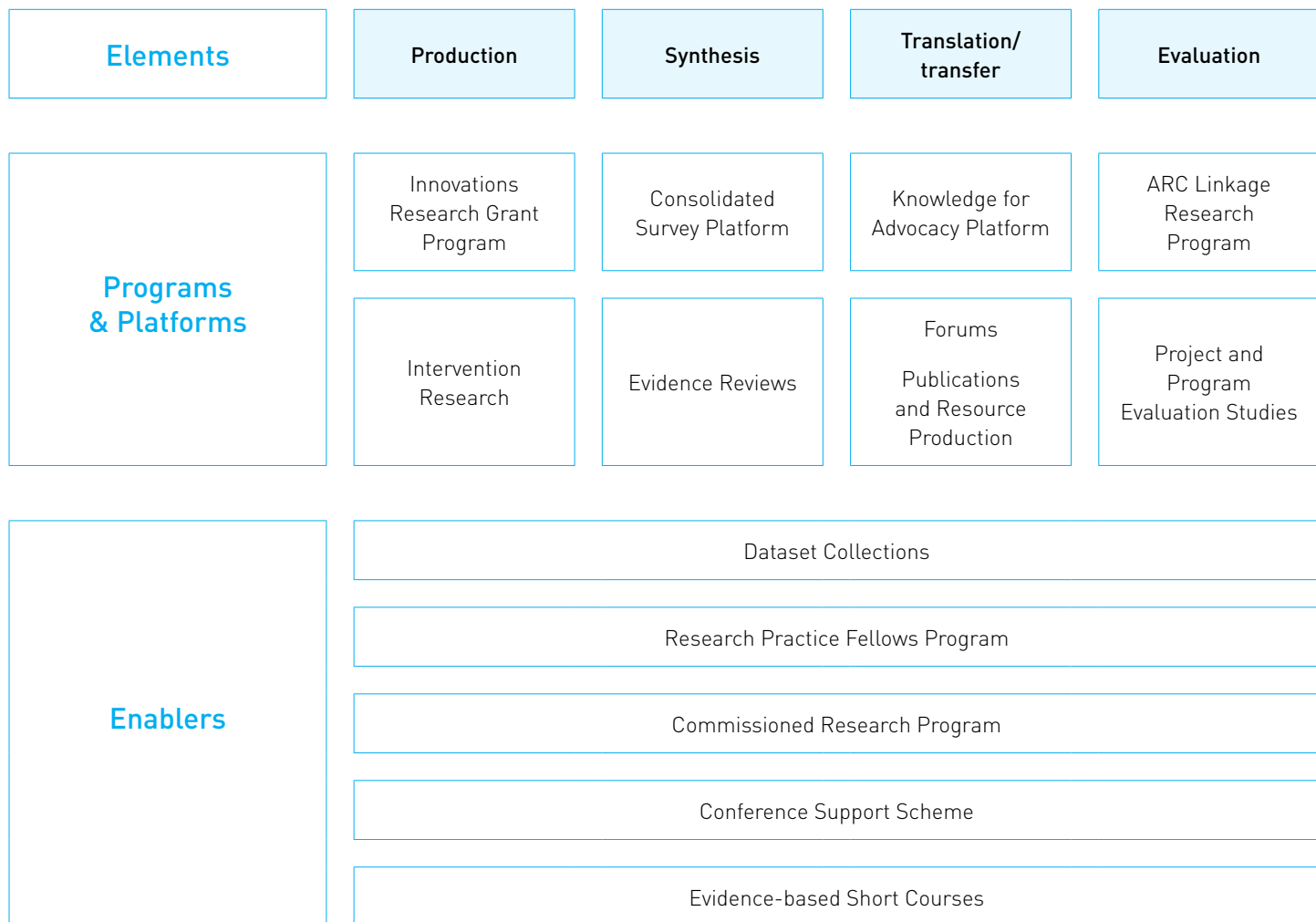


Figure 2. Elements, programs/platforms and enablers of the VicHealth Knowledge Policy.

## Elements

### **Production**

Knowledge production is the structured creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings.

### **Synthesis**

Evidence syntheses summarise research evidence on specific topics to assist decision makers in the development of policies.

### **Translation/transfer**

Substantial improvements in innovation and practice in healthcare systems can be found when knowledge is understood and transferred between normally separate groups of people.

### **Evaluation**

VicHealth supports a range of evaluation approaches such as the program logic framework, concept mapping, and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Planning and Evaluation Framework.

## Programs and platforms

### **Innovations Research Grant Program**

Investigator-initiated research provides excellent opportunities to develop creative questions, test new ideas and explore previously untested approaches. The innovations research grant program will support two-year projects up to a total of \$200,000.

### **Intervention Research**

A prime goal of VicHealth intervention research is to transfer public health research knowledge to health promotion policy and practice in diverse fields such as community wellbeing, Indigenous health, violence against women, alcohol and tobacco consumption and environments for health.

### **Consolidated Survey Platform**

The consolidated survey platform will integrate VicHealth survey work on the social and economic determinants of health, health behaviours and attitudes to health-related issues and knowledge gaps. Results from the survey platform will be made accessible to a wide range of policy and knowledge users.

### **Evidence Reviews**

VicHealth funds the Cochrane Public Health Review Group, an entity of the Cochrane Collaboration, which aims to increase the quantity and quality of systematic reviews of health promotion and public health interventions.

### **Knowledge for Advocacy Platform**

VicHealth will create a supportive platform that can facilitate the synthesis and translation and transfer of knowledge between advocacy coalitions, practitioners, policy makers and researchers.

### **Forums**

VicHealth has a strong history in bringing researchers, policy makers and field practitioners together to discuss contemporary public health issues. The forums program allows opportunities for translation of knowledge across disciplines at the local, state, national and international level.

### **Publications and Resource Production**

VicHealth is committed to the development of publications and resources which translate knowledge for a policy and practice audience. Reflecting this broadening base of knowledge dissemination and translation activities, VicHealth will produce two publication series. The VicHealth *Populations, Policy and Practice* series focuses on dissemination of key findings from the VicHealth consolidated survey program and policy activities; while the *Funded Research* series focuses on disseminating technical monographs authored by VicHealth-funded researchers.

## Knowledge enablers

In addition, VicHealth will continue to develop: 1) publications relevant to the outcomes of commissioned research and evidence reviews, and 2) resources and tools which synthesise research findings for cross-sector policy and practice audiences.

In addition to report-based dissemination of research, VicHealth is committed to using multiple communication channels, such as YouTube, for the translation of knowledge into a range of knowledge products such as audio and video clips. (See <http://www.youtube.com/VicHealthMedia>)

### **ARC Linkage Research Program**

ARC Linkage Projects – Industry Partner grants have been created for organisations applying for an ARC Linkage Project grant and who wish to have VicHealth represented as an industry partner in their application to the ARC. VicHealth is interested in being an industry partner for projects that support health promotion and public health research and development.

### **Project and Program Evaluation Studies**

VicHealth continues to fund independent evaluations of projects and programs of activity through its targeted investigator-initiated research, linkage programs and commissioned evaluations.

The following knowledge enablers will be established across VicHealth program areas.

### **Dataset Collections**

VicHealth is well placed to gather, manage and act as a broker for large datasets that relate to our priority areas and those of our key stakeholders and partners.

### **Research Practice Fellows (RPF) Program**

This program of five-year funding for University and Research Institute-based postdoctoral researchers will support the development of a cohort of independent academic researchers committed to research in health promotion practice settings.

### **Commissioned Research Program**

VicHealth commissions research across its organisational units. These investments represent a more targeted approach to solving specific health promotion and public health problems.

### **Conference Support Scheme**

VicHealth is committed to continuing its support for the sharing of knowledge through conferences, interaction and information dissemination as an enabler for each of the knowledge elements.

### **Evidence-based Short Courses**

Since 2007 VicHealth has developed and consolidated a short course program designed to build the capacity of cross-sector practitioners to plan, implement and evaluate health promotion activity in priority areas. The short course program will continue to be expanded over the next four years.



## Internal governance

The *VicHealth Organisational Knowledge Base Strategy* endeavours to integrate each of the elements of the knowledge base into a coherent network of knowledge. The core principle for managing the knowledge base is the establishment and maintenance of a healthy system. This knowledge system integrates across the organisational units through performance reporting and business plan.

### **Quality and performance**

Three knowledge advisory committees have been established to ensure quality and performance in knowledge at VicHealth:

*(1) Academic Knowledge Advisory Panel (AKAP)*

The overall role of this group is to provide advice to the CEO on the strategic direction and production of knowledge at VicHealth.

*(2) Intersectoral Knowledge Advisory Panel (ISKAP)*

The overall aim of this group is to provide advice on the synthesis, translation/transfer and links between VicHealth knowledge processes and its stakeholders.

*(3) International Knowledge Advisory Panel (Int-KAP)*

The overall aim of this group is to provide advice about VicHealth knowledge investments in light of international practice.

The overarching objectives of this tripartite advisory structure are:

- (a) to broaden the expert advisory base informing knowledge policy at VicHealth;
- (b) to improve the quality, performance and strategic importance of knowledge production, synthesis, translation and transfer; and
- (c) to improve the quality, performance and strategic importance of evaluation activities at VicHealth.

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