

REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Desired Outcome

By 2009 we want to see improved access to the social and economic resources required for health by people in disadvantaged groups and areas

Goal

To improve the health and wellbeing of the most disadvantaged in our community

Objectives

1. Reduce health inequalities experienced by those most affected by social and economic inequality
2. Improve knowledge to understand and respond to health inequalities
3. Influence social and economic policy that has an effect on health inequalities

Background

Health inequalities are recognised as a cross-cutting theme for VicHealth with all areas of the organisation implementing potential strategies for reducing health inequalities. VicHealth's *Strategic Priorities 2006-09* describes our work in tackling health inequalities as having three elements: 1) targeting disadvantage, 2) ensuring equity and 3) influencing social and economic policy. To progress work in this area VicHealth has:

- **Funded and supported education, training and social enterprise programs** for Indigenous and new arrival communities
- **Funded and supported research designed to increase knowledge** regarding the causes of health inequalities and strategies to address health inequalities
- **Reviewed internal policies** to ensure that the most effective health promotion approaches to reduce health inequalities are implemented
- Ensured that all VicHealth grants programs **give priority** to disadvantaged populations and places
- **Explored new opportunities** to add value to social policy by reviewing policy goals and feeding back on their potential to reduce or widen health inequalities
- **Developed strong, strategic relationships** in Victoria, nationally and internationally
- **Liaised with government** regarding development of a state policy to reduce health inequalities, including participation in organising statewide consultations and providing feedback on draft government discussion papers
- **Undertaken media advocacy** to ensure that issues pertaining to health inequalities are canvassed in the public arena
- Supported development and implementation of **Community Indicators Victoria** with capacity to monitor our progress in reducing inequalities at the local level
- Funded and supported the **Victorian Health Inequalities Network** round table meetings focusing on issues relevant to health inequalities.

Future Activities

1. Development of internal systems to support and monitor Health Inequalities activity including:

- development of a report indicating models of good practice to reduce health inequalities
- integration of health inequalities performance monitoring in future strategic planning activities; and
- preparation of workforce development activities designed to enhance field capacity to design programs relevant to specific sub-populations.

2. Direct Activity

Current activity includes embedding practices to ensure that resource allocation, intervention design and evaluation activities address health inequalities goals. It is envisaged that future health inequalities activity may focus on building deliberative democracy and community advocacy to raise awareness and harness community support to address health inequalities; increase access to community/social resources; and add value to wider social policy initiatives relevant to education, employment and housing.

3. Advocacy

Advocacy activities through the media, through alliances and networking with other NGOs and researchers, and with government departments will continue, with a strong focus on links between social and economic environments and health.

4. Resource Development

Over the next three months publications will be produced including:

- Critical analysis of best practice health promotion approaches to reduce health inequalities
- Two research summaries: 1. Health inequalities contribution to the burden of disease; and 2. determinants that impact on health inequalities.

Over the course of 2008, a *Conceptual Framework* (in synergy with emerging government policy) and *Action Plan on Health Inequalities* will be developed, with guidance from VicHealth's Health Inequalities Advisory Committee. This framework will provide both an overview of VicHealth's organisational policies that reinforce a focus on tackling health inequalities as well as describe a discrete program of activity.

For further information, contact:

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