

VIC HEALTH

LETTER



OLDER PEOPLE

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OLDER WORKERS

GARDENING FOR WISDOM

CROQUET FOR THE YOUNG AT HEART



Older People

Older people are one of five key population groups that VicHealth will target with health promotion activities over the next three years, as part of *Strategic Directions 1999-2002*.

Australia's population is ageing and this trend is expected to continue for at least the next 50 years. By 2051, 24% of the population is expected to be over 65 years of age. This ensures the United Nations principles of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity, as part of the International Year of Older Persons, will resonate strongly for years to come.

VicHealth was overwhelmed with interest from the public when we released the Positive Wellbeing for Older People Grant Scheme last year. VicHealth and the Department of Human Services jointly developed the \$500,000 scheme to enhance and maintain the mental and physical health of people aged over 55 as part of the United Nations International Year of Older Persons.

The 39 projects funded by the scheme include special events and cultural activities across the State that aim to recruit older people and address the issues of isolation, loneliness and inactivity.

VicHealth believes in celebrating healthy ageing. These grants represent our continued investment in promoting the wellbeing of older people throughout 1999 and beyond.

While we do acknowledge the reality of becoming older, we must no longer assume that older necessarily equals frail or forgetful and that older people have little to contribute to society. Older people can offer enormous knowledge, experience and enthusiasm through participation in community life.

Not only does society benefit if we embrace older people in this way, but older people themselves experience improved mental wellbeing by forming stronger social connections and through improved community involvement.

Bridging the divide between the young and the old is important as the proportion of older people in Australia continues to grow.

At this year's presentation of our Excellence in Health Promotion Awards, there was rapturous applause when Dalys Sergeant, representing the Council on the Ageing, asked all guests over 50 to stand up and cheer 'positive ageing'. The entire room responded to her enthusiasm and so did we, by presenting Australian Coalition '99 Victoria - Council on the Ageing our award for Health Promotion in the Community.

This edition of VicHealth Letter looks at the contribution many of our projects make towards promoting better physical and mental health for older people across Victoria.

Dr Rob Moodie
Chief Executive Officer

Older People

Older people are one of five target population groups for VicHealth in its health promotion activities.

Living Longer

The world population is ageing, with the number of older people in the world set to nearly double to about one billion by 2020.

The gains in life expectancy since the 1960s are particularly concentrated among the middle-aged and older population. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare attributes these gains to dramatic declines in death from causes such as cardiovascular disease. Their most recent report shows that between 1968 and 1992, age-adjusted death rates from cardiovascular disease declined by 56% for men and 55% for women.

International comparisons of the life expectancies at age 65 for Australia and other countries by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show Australian women aged 65 years have the sixth highest life expectancy in the world.

Life expectancy at age 65 for Australia and selected countries, latest year (years)

Country/year	At age 65	
	Males	Females
Australia (1994)	15.7	19.7
Canada (1993)	15.8	19.9
Chile (1995)	15.0	18.1
France (1993)	16.2	21.0
Germany (1994)	14.7	18.4
Greece (1994)	16.2	18.5
Hong Kong (1994)	17.2	21.4
Ireland (1992)	13.6	17.3
Israel (1993)	16.0	17.9
Italy (1992)	15.1	18.9
Japan (1994)	16.7	21.0
Malta (1994)	14.9	17.4
Netherlands (1994)	14.8	19.1
New Zealand (1993)	15.0	18.6
Norway (1993)	14.8	18.8
Philippines (1991)	12.3	13.7
Poland (1994)	12.7	16.4
Russian Federation (1994)	10.4	14.6
Singapore (1994)	15.2	15.3
Spain (1992)	15.8	19.6
Sweden (1994)	16.0	19.8
Switzerland (1994)	16.1	20.5
United Kingdom (1994)	14.7	18.4
United States (1993)	15.3	18.9

Sources: WHO 1994, 1995, 1996; UN 1997; ABS 3302.0, 1997b.

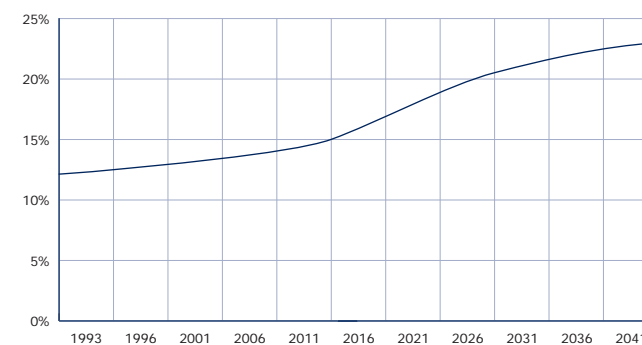
The number of Australians aged 65 years and over is projected to increase to 13.8% in 2011, to 17.3% in 2021 and 20.3% in 2031. Of all the States and Territories, Victoria has the second greatest number of older people. Victoria's growth rates for the aged have far exceeded the growth rates for the total population over the past two decades. In 1996, 26.7% (or 1,205,569) of Victoria's total population were 50 years and older.

In the early decades of the next century the proportion of Victorians aged 80 years and older will be most significant. In 1976, one in six people aged 65 years and older were aged 80 and over; by 1996 this had increased to one in five; and by 2016 it is projected to be one in four.

It is estimated that by the year 2016 a quarter of Victoria's population will be over 80 years of age. This has enormous implications for program delivery and future policies affecting older Victorians.

In 1997, contributions to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing showed that life experience, geographic location, economic and social status, ethnicity and physical health all played a significant role in determining the quality of life of older Victorians. Report findings showed each of these factors influenced the ability of the groups to age positively and contribute to or participate within our society.

Projected percentage of the population aged 65+ in Victoria



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994



A study by the Department of Human Services entitled *Creating a Victoria for All Ages, an Action Plan for Older Victorians* highlights population changes in particular groups, including Kooris and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Plan states:

- The proportion of Kooris aged 65 and over will increase only marginally over the next few years, but there will be a considerable growth in the 45-64 age group with a projected 11% of the indigenous population expected to be in this age group by 2001.

A Statistical Summary

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census Data

Number of older Victorians 65 years and over	525,424
% of older Victorians 65 years and over, as a percentage of the Victorian population	12%
Estimated number of Victorians aged 65 and over living in the Melbourne area	360,409
% of the metropolitan population aged 65 and over	11.5%
Estimated number of Victorians aged 65 and over living in regional Victoria	164,273
% of the rural population aged 65 and over	13.35%
Estimated number of older Victorians aged 65 and over born in non-English speaking countries	118,450
% of Victorians aged 65 and over born in non-English speaking countries	21%
Estimated number of Koori and Torres Strait Islanders aged 50 and over	2223
% of Koori and Torres Strait Islanders aged 50 and over as a proportion of the Victorian population	0.18%
% of older Victorians 65 years and over who live in residential care such as nursing homes and hostels	8%
% of older Victorians aged 65 and over who live in their own home, either owned or being purchased	77.5%
% of people aged 60 and over who live in public rental accommodation	3.2%
Number of older Victorians receiving a Commonwealth Age Pension	429,632
Number of Seniors Cards issued	680,000
% of older Victorians who hold a Seniors Card	93%

Older People (cont.)

- The proportion of older people born in specific non-English speaking countries will increase rapidly during the early decades of the next century, to be followed by sharp decreases. These groups are considered more vulnerable to isolation than people born in English speaking countries or in Australia due to language difficulties and geographic dispersion of some language groups.
- The proportion of single older women living in rural communities is expected to increase as the population ages, as research shows rural men aged 65 years and older have a death rate 61% higher than the age-standardised rate of rural women.

Older people are major consumers of health care, and as the population continues to age and life expectancy increases the prevention of illness and disability through promotion of healthy lifestyles and behaviours will become increasingly important.

Encouraging healthy behaviours such as physical activity, healthy eating, responsible drinking practices and a reduction in the proportion of Victorians who smoke will lead to significant long-term savings in health costs for the State, but more importantly will improve healthy ageing.

Recent studies of older people show they have access to more personal and social resources than previous older generations. Health promotion activities mean they are far more aware of how to achieve good health, for example, by not smoking and leading active lives.

The *Health Status of Older People Project* report, funded by VicHealth, is based on a survey of 1,000 older people in Melbourne. The project, led by the Lincoln Gerontology Centre in collaboration with the National Ageing Research Institute, aims to identify ways in which older people themselves, facilitated by public policies, can improve their health.

It found that a large majority of the older people surveyed had a positive outlook on life and maintained physical and social activity. The study also found older people were more aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles than younger people.

When respondents were asked what made a person healthy five basic health ideals emerged:

1. Physically fit or being physically active
2. Not being ill
3. Socially or functionally able (perform normal roles including being socially active, hobbies, travelling, working and taking care of one's own needs)
4. Psychologically fit (positive outlook, being relaxed, happy and able to cope with life)
5. Behaving in a healthy way (healthy eating, sleeping habits, not smoking, low alcohol consumption)

According to the report, the meaning of 'health for oneself' was predominantly expressed in terms of wellbeing, in particular having a positive outlook, being unstressed and happy (67%).

Health Related Actions

The Health Status of Older People Project also found that most had carried out light physical activities such as walking, housework or gardening during the survey period. Social activity was generally higher for women than men and for those at relatively younger ages.

The project indicated more health promotion and education is needed to improve eating patterns for older people. Less than half of the older people surveyed reported daily consumption of fruits, vegetables and milk products. Less than one-third of respondents met the Heart Foundation criterion for 'acceptable' body mass.

Very few of the older people were current smokers, as most men had given up and most women had never smoked.

Five percent of older people were categorised as 'unsafe' drinkers according to the National Health and Medical Research Council recommendations.

References:

Health Status of Older People Project Preliminary Findings from a Survey of the Health and Lifestyles of Older People
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Creating a Victoria for all Ages: an Action Plan for Older Victorians
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Department of Human Services, 1999.

Older Australia at a Glance
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Office for the Aged in the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1997.



'Community singing has changed people's lives. Some of the older people have said they are singing songs and doing things that they never thought they would be able to do and they just love it.'

Singing For All Ages

Since February 1998 the walls of Crib Point Community House have been shaking with good musical reverberations from a crew of local troubadours who get together each week for a good old-fashioned sing-a-long.

Ranging in age from eight to eighty, the Ageless Singers wind their way through a repertoire of old-fashioned and modern tunes, sometimes in key, sometimes not.

'We write songs up on a blackboard and we just go for it,' explains Coordinator Fay Thomas. 'Anything from the turn of the century songs to the latest hits and anything in between. The rules are: you don't have to have talent and anyone can sing in their own pitch and their own style. The main aim is have a lot of fun, to sing and make yourself feel good.'

After receiving funding under VicHealth's Positive Wellbeing for Older People Grant Scheme, the Ageless Singers have been on tour three times across Victoria, visiting other Neighbourhood Houses to promote community singing.

The funding has also enabled the group to produce a kit entitled *How To Set Up Community Singing* which has been sent to over 300 Community Houses across Victoria. It contains a set of guidelines for community singing facilitators, detailed notes on the process of setting up a community singing group and examples of advertising used to recruit new crooners.

'We're trying to get Community Houses to offer community singing as part of their program,' says Fay. 'The aim is to mix the age groups. It's not just for old people and it's not just for young people. It's for the community to break down those barriers of age segregation. And it's just gorgeous because the older people are teaching the younger children all the old songs.'

On average, 25 people turn up to Crib Point Community House each week, not only to sing, but also to enjoy the benefits of stress relief, laughter and the new friendships formed as a result of the group coming together.

'Community singing has changed people's lives. Some of the older people have said they are singing songs and doing things that they never thought they would be able to do and they just love it. People travel 15 to 20 kilometres to come to our singing group and they come from all over, not just Crib Point.'

The project also aims to promote the advantages of Community Health Services and Neighbourhood Houses working in partnership to meet local community needs. In small towns like Crib Point where the centre comprises only a couple of shops, Neighbourhood Houses play a vital role in providing a central social focus for town inhabitants.

When visiting other Community Houses, the Ageless Singers introduce themselves and explain about their background before launching into a series of tunes involving the audience. To date, the group has visited over 19 community houses across Victoria, with most enthusiastically agreeing to incorporate singing into their range of activities on offer.

For more information about the Ageless Singers or to obtain a copy of the How To Set Up Community Singing kit contact Fay Thomas on (03) 5983 9888.

Community Houses

Focusing On Older People

'Community Houses are terrific places for people to do adult education, recreation and hobby courses, as well as finding support and social groups of people with similar interests.'



Within every older person is a belly dancer just waiting to come out. Well, maybe not everyone. For others it's a calligrapher or a french polisher, a pencil sketcher or a Tai Chi enthusiast.

Community Houses, or Neighbourhood Houses as they are commonly known, can offer a huge range of activities for people of all ages. But as Maureen McConnell, Networker for the Community Houses Association of the Outer Eastern Suburbs (CHAOS), points out, older people in particular can gain an enormous amount of stimulation and sense of community from participating in activities run by the houses.

'Community Houses are terrific places for people to do adult education, recreation and hobby courses, as well as finding support and social groups of people with similar interests,' says Maureen.

'But our research has shown that we really need to promote ourselves more. Often older people are simply unaware of what we have to offer or are unable to participate because of commitments with caring for grandchildren or relatives with disabilities.'

With funding from the Positive Wellbeing for Older People Grant Scheme, Maureen is coordinating a project involving 31 Community Houses across the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne that aims to get older people more involved in Community House activities.

'By looking at the problems older people have in accessing the venues and identifying ways of increasing participation levels, we hope to make more older people aware of the opportunities Community Houses can offer,' says Maureen.

In the first part of the project, research worker Susan Powell visited the 31 houses involved in the project to establish an understanding of participation by older people by interviewing volunteers, coordinators, and participants. Additionally, she met with council officers in each of the five local government areas to discuss ways of making the houses more effective, particularly for older people.

On the basis of these findings, the second phase of the project recently began. This has involved a series of resource and training sessions designed to engage older people already involved with a Neighbourhood House in the CHAOS network to promote their house to other people in the target group.

'People forget that older people have really good skills to contribute, and that is something we really want to promote,' says Maureen. 'Some of the people in the group have done marketing and promotional work and suddenly they are reminded of their own capabilities, they just need a bit of support and facilitation.'

Seven 'Come and Try Days' have been planned to showcase activities at 14 different Neighbourhood Houses and learning centres in the CHAOS network, beginning on 14 October at four houses in the City of Whitehorse.

Activities on offer will focus on staying active, good health and, most importantly, having fun. Visitors will have a choice of participating free of charge in talks by local health practitioners, as well as a number of classes such as yoga, line dancing, genealogy using the internet, lead lighting, relaxation and furniture restoration.

For more information contact Maureen McConnell on (03) 9879 8834.

'Since promoting the *Active for Life* message and recommending the adoption of a number of policies promoting no smoking, sun awareness, healthy food and low alcohol consumption, most bowling clubs have made major changes in their catering and health promotion practices.'

Bowling For Good Health

Lawn bowls is an old person's sport? 'An old concept,' says Bill Sorraghan from the Royal Victorian Bowls Association (RVBA).

'We've just had a stand at the Royal Melbourne Show and the number of younger people that approached us wondering how they could get involved in the sport, particularly teenagers between the ages of 14 and 16, and was astounding,' says Bill.

With a rapidly growing membership of around 70,000 enthusiasts in Victoria alone, lawn bowls is fast gaining recognition as a stimulating recreational pursuit for both the mind and body.

For up to four hours per game, lawn bowls demands concentration, technical skills and most importantly, keen hand-eye coordination for a good steady bowl.

But as Bill is quick to point out, just because bowls is becoming popular with younger generations, older people should not be discouraged from taking up the sport, especially since 62% of people over 65 years are failing to engage in regular physical activity.

As sponsorship coordinator for the RVBA, Bill has been responsible for implementing the *Active for Life* message throughout the State and in this time has observed substantial changes in bowling club practices. For as much as bowls is loved for its sporting attributes, the social aspect offered by the game has long been a drawcard for players, with clubhouses the preferred domain for post-game celebrations and meetings.

'Since promoting the *Active for Life* message and recommending the adoption of a number of policies promoting no smoking, sun awareness, healthy food and low alcohol consumption, most bowling clubs have made major changes in their catering and health promotion practices. People are now using sunscreen diligently, more often than not beer on tap is low alcohol and spirits are hardly being sold at all. Most clubs are now non-smoking and we have seen menus offer much healthier fare,' says Bill.

This season, with help from Arthritis Victoria, Bill will be pushing for the inclusion of warm up sessions before every game. With the cooperation of each of the clubs' coaches the warm up sessions are aimed at reducing the risk of injury. A new drive to encourage players to consume plenty of fluids while playing will also be implemented because recent research suggests that players can become dehydrated when playing bowls in the heat.



For the past nine years, VicHealth, in conjunction with Arthritis Victoria, has seen the *Active for Life* message take centre-stage in the bowling world through its sponsorship of Victoria's biggest Mixed Pairs Tournament, as well as a statewide open day for individual clubs.

Early next year, the RVBA will track down the best green of the State for the final of the Mixed Pairs Tournament. Attracting around 1,800 teams of mixed pairs from 570 clubs across the State, the tournament offers prize money for the place-getters and sectional winners.

Also coming up on 24 October, RVBA will head a statewide Open Day involving most individual clubs. With coaches on site the open day will offer a perfect opportunity for people who have never played bowls to have a go and pick up a few tips from more experienced players.

For more information on the statewide Open Day or the Victorian Mixed Pairs Tournament contact the Royal Victorian Bowls Association on (03) 9819 6177.

‘The whole workforce needs to be sensitised to the issue of ageism,’ says Sue, pointing out that the organisations losing older employees are losing the skills, knowledge and experience that go with them.



Older Workers

An Invaluable Resource

Once upon a time, retirement may have been a liberating and optional experience, with a traditional celebratory gold watch send-off into a greatly cherished stage of life.

These days, people have been known to arrive for work only to be escorted to the door, presented with a carton containing their belongings and told to not come back tomorrow. Sound unbelievable?

‘Not at all,’ says Sue Hendy, Education Officer for Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria. ‘In fact, the scenario is becoming more and more common, with some older people experiencing redundancy up to four times during their working life.’

‘Just as sexism and racism exist in the workforce, ageism is on the increase as myths about younger people being more creative and enthusiastic than their more experienced counterparts remain entrenched in our social beliefs,’ says Sue.

‘While companies continue to downsize, older employees are finding themselves the most popular targets for staff cut-backs, and the trend is increasing. The consequences of this sudden transition into unemployment, whether voluntary or not, can impact heavily on a person’s sense of self and security, especially since work is generally the central defining factor in the way we structure our lives.’

‘Even though people may choose to retire, a sense of being unwanted can still exist. People are being made to feel unwelcome at work, not being invited to meetings they should be and not being valued for their contribution,’ says Sue.

‘In a sense there is this subtle push to leave the workforce at 55, even though there is no compulsory retirement age. The prevailing workforce attitude to people around this age is, “Oh they’ll be retiring soon”, even though life expectancy continues to increase.’

‘Sue says that when people do end up leaving their job, it is quite common for them to experience a sense of personal loss or grief as they are unsure of their future and how to manage it.’

As a guest speaker at an organisational health workshop, ‘Mining for Gold – Older Workers – An Invaluable Resource’ hosted by VicHealth in April this year, Sue introduced the issues faced by older workers departing the workplace. A joint initiative of VicHealth’s Partnerships with Healthy Industry and COTA, the workshop provided a forum for discussion of various ways people can make this transition easier, detailing the courses and services on offer at COTA.

Also speaking on the day, Neil Stevenson, Consultant with Ernst & Young, and Carol McCabe, from McCabe Consulting, examined research, policies and strategies in the area of maintaining and retaining older employees, as well as the prejudicial and cultural attitudes that exist and how these can be eliminated.

‘The whole workforce needs to be sensitised to the issue of ageism,’ says Sue, pointing out that the organisations losing older employees are losing the skills, knowledge and experience that go with them.

As Education Officer at COTA, Sue coordinates a broad range of services to assist people making the transition from the workplace to retirement. Held over several months, COTA offers a 16-session program that provides financial and life-skill advice, with a focus on lifestyle planning, as well as connecting participants to services available in the community.

For more information on the range of services available at the Council on the Ageing contact Sue Hendy on (03) 9654 4443.

As a community resource, CERES offers gardens, recreational facilities and education programs specifically relating to environmental matters such as energy consumption, waste management and conservation.

Gardening For Wisdom

Ten Elders from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds recently presented their visions for the future and change.

As part of an Honouring of Elders ceremony at the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies’ (CERES) Spring Planting Festival, the speakers presented an individual critique of our society, followed by some personal advice on how things could be different.

Other activities held on the Centre’s open day and during the Planting Festival included planting and gardening in the CERES nursery, mosaic and scarecrow making, and Tai Chi and yoga classes, as well as musical and dance contributions from the Brunswick Women’s Choir and folk singers Fay White and Judy Small.

Another of the festival’s highlights was the opening to the public of the new Garden of Wisdom. As an ongoing cooperative effort designed and maintained by several dedicated volunteers, the garden provides a special area where members of the local community can contribute to and to share in the pleasures of gardening, as well as the artistic contributions of the many cultural representatives involved with CERES.

Kiri Dewes, a Maori Elder, illustrated her perception of the cycle of life with a comparison to the fate of a seed and new growth. ‘If we listen to the Elders, we won’t lose the wisdom that brings new life to this planet,’ Kiri said.

Capturing such wisdom via the life stories and experiences of our multicultural Elders is one strategy CERES is using for the benefit of conserving past environmental, conservation and community practices.

With funding from VicHealth’s Positive Wellbeing for Older People Grant Scheme, CERES aims to increase intergenerational contact through gardening and the environment and encourage more older people to become involved with the Centre’s activities.

As a community resource, CERES offers gardens, recreational facilities and education programs specifically relating to environmental matters, such as energy consumption, waste management and conservation. Although numerous elderly people have been involved with CERES in the past, this project will be the first to directly address ways in which CERES can cater for older people specifically.

Project Coordinator Maya Ward says the CERES project aims to bridge the gap between generations by using the environment since it is an excellent medium for information exchange and an area where older people can make an invaluable contribution, especially with regard to the way environmental practices are changing.

‘Across all cultures, the garden has traditionally played an important role in bringing generations together,’ says Maya. ‘The garden is often a place where grandparents pass down their skills and knowledge to their grandchildren, and the setting where many young children first discover nature.’

Although still in the planning stage, the VicHealth grant will also support the development of a Wisdom of Elders Educational Unit for the 50,000 schoolchildren that pass through CERES gates each year.

Featuring recorded life stories and presentations of older people’s perceptions about the changing world, the unit’s focus will be on transferring the life experiences of our multicultural Elders to younger generations.

For more information on CERES project activities and the upcoming Story Circles, storytelling sessions involving Elders from the local community, contact Maya Ward on (03) 9388 1707.



Croquet

For The Young At Heart

'The new enthusiasm in the club's activities has resulted in a lot of new friendships forming between people from the town and really helped with overcoming problems of isolation and loneliness.'



'A lot of our new players have never been sporting people in their lives,' says Judy. 'But after trying the game, they love it, especially the social aspects. When playing croquet you spend hours outdoors in the fresh air in groups, discussing shots and being physically active.'

Croquet is a game requiring much concentration and application. It is often described as being akin to playing chess on grass, and involves the strategy of the croquet balls, which are directed between hoops using a mallet. Golf croquet is a less complex version and enjoyed for its social aspects as much as its sporting element. Physically, croquet is not a demanding sport, and like bowls involves walking and bending.

The grant money also enabled the club to invite two coaches, Orm Cook from Kyabram Croquet Club and George Latham, Victorian Association President, to come to hold training sessions for the new players, as well as giving some tips to the more advanced players.

'After we had the coaches visit, we were able to enter a team of new players in the section four division of the Goulburn Valley Croquet Association and to add to the section three team we already had,' says Judy.

Additionally, the funds have enabled the club to hold competition days and allowed new players to visit other clubs.

'The social aspect that the game offers has really changed people's lives,' says Judy. 'It has brought people together. Nearly all of our players are retired and on fixed incomes and many live alone. Even though this is a small town, it doesn't necessarily mean that you know everyone. The new enthusiasm in the club's activities has resulted in a lot of new friendships forming between people from the town and really helped with overcoming problems of isolation and loneliness.'

With a current membership of 34 women, the club has doubled the number of weekly meets to foster the great camaraderie that exists between players. Ranging in age from 60 to 80, the players suffer from many of the health problems experienced by older people, including heart and post-operative conditions, Multiple Sclerosis, arthritis and the lasting effects of Ross River fever (severe arthritic and muscle symptoms).

Older people and people who live in rural and remote communities such as Numurkah are among the key population groups VicHealth is targeting in its *Strategic Directions 1999-2002*, with physical activity and mental health among the major health promotion action areas addressed by the objectives.

For further information contact Judy Christie on (03) 5864 6225.

Last year, eight new members joined Numurkah Croquet Club. 'That may not sound like many, but any city or country club that suddenly had this many new members join would be overjoyed,' says Judy Christie, club member and promoter.

After receiving a grant under the Positive Wellbeing for Older People scheme last year, Numurkah Croquet Club was able to go on a recruitment drive to promote the game and entice new players from the surrounding district.

For women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, finding relief outside the home and accessing services within the community can be a difficult task.



Grandmothers

In Culturally Diverse Communities

Recent research has shown that many older women are taking on a significant caring role for their grandchildren while parents are away at work.

While this can have positive benefits for both grandmothers and grandchildren alike, the extra pressures of caring for children can compound the health issues women experience as they age.

For women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB), finding relief outside the home and accessing services within the community can be a difficult task. As well as having to overcome language barriers and the customs of a new country, limited financial and social resources can leave grandmothers in caring roles isolated and exhausted.

In response to this, Women's Health in the North (WHIN), in collaboration with the Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG), is undertaking a project with funds from VicHealth to create resource networks within two culturally and linguistically diverse ethnic communities.

Involving Chinese and Arabic communities from Melbourne's north, the project aims to increase understanding about the experience of grandmothers from CLDB who are providing a high level of care for their grandchildren, as well as acknowledging the commitment and contribution of women who take on this role.

By developing an information network to improve access to health and recreational facilities and community support services such as childcare groups, the project also aims to help grandmothers focus more on their own wellbeing and personal independence.

Laurencia Grant, project coordinator based at WHIN, says that the need for both parents to have paid employment, combined with high costs of childcare and cultural views on 'formal' childcare services, have led to many families depending on grandparents, in particular women, to care for the children.

'From our preliminary research we have found that due to the demands of childcare, many women are neglecting their own health and social needs by putting the welfare of their grandchildren first,' says Laurencia. 'Often this occurs at a time when women start to experience health issues related to ageing and would normally have time to focus on their own needs.'

Many women, particularly the Chinese women interviewed for this project, have only recently arrived in Australia, sometimes with the specific intention of caring for their grandchildren. Language barriers, a lack of understanding about services available and the community's operations, and small family units without back-up childcare support, all compound the problems of isolation and increased workloads.

To date, the project has engaged the services of two part-time community facilitators with appropriate language skills and cultural awareness to work with the two ethnic groups. By communicating feedback from the women, the facilitators will play an important role in identifying problems and creating solutions that are sensitive to cultural differences.

A forum planned for February 2000 will launch a *How-To-Guide* for other community workers interested in using the model to support women from other cultures who care for their grandchildren. Additionally, the meeting will address the health and social impacts of grandmothers and the health needs and issues of these women.

For more information contact Laurencia Grant on (03) 9462 3266.

PUBLICATIONS

Children of Parents with Mental Illness

Edited by Vikki Cowling

VicHealth Chief Executive Dr Rob Moodie launched the new publication *Children of Parents with Mental Illness* at the Mental Health Services conference in Melbourne.

The original research on which the book is based was undertaken by Vikki Cowling at the Early Psychosis Research Centre. VicHealth funded this research.

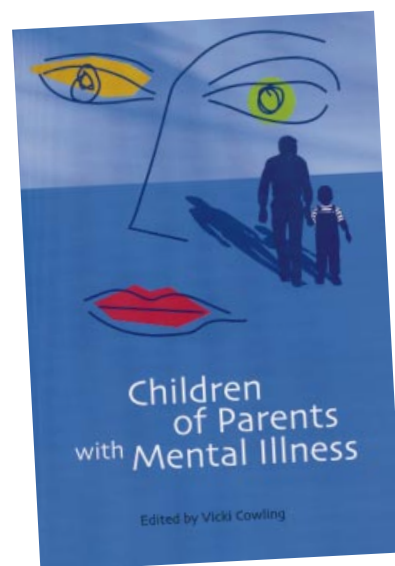
Through this initial project work, Ms Cowling discovered that while parents might receive psychiatric support, support was seldom given in their role as parents, and the effect of their illness on their children went unrecognised.

The strength of the research, and of the book, is that the voices of ill parents and of their children are being listened to. The book describes a possible model of inter-agency support and information that Ms Cowling has successfully implemented in the southern metropolitan region of Melbourne.

In launching the book, Dr Moodie said it was an important step in helping to remove stigma associated with mental illness and praised the research and the book for the direct consultation with children.

This book would be of interest to mental health professionals and those working with children and families in schools or the community.

Inquiries should be directed to ACER Customer Service, Private Bag 55, Camberwell, Vic 3124 or call (03) 9277 5656 during business hours. Cost is \$19.95 per copy plus freight/handling charges.



LAUNCHES

Smartplay

VicHealth, together with Sport and Recreation Victoria, the Department of Human Services and Sports Medicine Australia – Victoria Branch, has launched a new sports safety message, *Smartplay*.

Smartplay will become the new message used to promote sports injury prevention initiatives of the Victorian Sports Injury Prevention Program. The sub-messages of *Smartplay* are:

- WARM UP
- DRINK UP
- GEAR UP



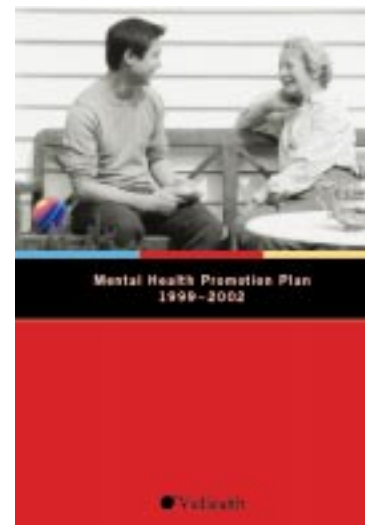
VicHealth encourages state sporting bodies to embrace the Smartplay message and develop policy that is sustainable through their club structure and that will reduce the likelihood of injury through their sport.

A resource kit has been developed for organisations to help identify and source information related to sports safety and sports injury prevention and to help identify groups that may assist them to provide safer sporting opportunities.

The resource kit provides:

- Information related to the *Smartplay* sub-messages.
- Three case studies related to different settings and issues.
- A directory of lists available, resources and key organisations.

For further information email smartplay@vic.sma.org.au or contact (03) 9654 7733.



Mental Health Promotion Plan

Taskgroup representatives from more than 100 organisations across Victoria joined Professor Helen Hermann, Director St Vincent's Hospital Mental Health Service, Dimiti Fife, Chief Executive Victorian Council of Social Services and Caretaker Premier Jeff Kennett, representing the Victorian Government, to officially launch VicHealth's *Mental Health Promotion Plan* at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, Melbourne on 5 October 1999.

The Plan includes a review of current research findings on mental health across Victoria and establishes a framework for mental health promotion, research and implementation of funded projects over the next three years.

Member organisations that have contributed to the development of the *Mental Health Promotion Plan* include: Victorian Farmers' Federation, Rural Women's Network, Royal Children's Hospital's Centre for Adolescent Health, Jesuit Social Services, Mental Health Foundation, Victorian Red Cross, VACCHO, Koori Heritage Trust, Ethnic Youth Issues Network, Pratt Foundation, Victorian Survivors of Torture Foundation and local and state government representatives.

VicHealth's *Mental Health Promotion Plan* focuses on the needs of five target population groups, namely, older and younger people, people who live in rural areas, Kooris and new arrivals.

The Plan identifies three priority themes that reflect major social determinants of mental health:

1. Social connectedness (or a sense of belonging and/or community participation).
2. Valuing diversity and working against discrimination.
3. Economic participation (access to the money necessary to feed, clothe and participate in community life).

Research findings include:

- Socially isolated people die at two or three times the rate of people with a network of social relationships and sources of emotional support.
- Young people who are victimised are three times more likely to be at risk of having depressive symptoms when compared to those not reporting such experiences.

- People living in areas with the greatest inequalities in income are 30% more likely to report their health status (including mental health) as fair or poor than those living in areas with the smallest inequalities in income.

VicHealth will implement activities identified in this Plan by tendering and commissioning new programs and projects valued at \$4.6 million over three years. VicHealth will also continue its advocacy and brokerage role to ensure the community, organisations and government remain committed to promoting mental health.

Mental ill health is a major impairment to productivity at work, home and school. By enhancing social connectedness, reducing discrimination and improving economic participation VicHealth aims to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. The benefits of mental health promotion are many, including improvements in physical health, productivity and reduced mental ill health.

Copies of VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan and Foundation Document can be accessed on VicHealth's website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au or requested by contacting VicHealth on (03) 9345 3200.

WORKPLACE

Corporate Citizenship Symposium

VicHealth recently conducted its Annual Workplace Symposium, 'Creating Corporate Citizenship', at the Mary Aitkenhead Centre, St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne.

The half-day symposium demonstrated why Australia's 'clever corporations' are those with a strong sense of social responsibility which benefits employees, the company and the wider community.

According to Suzette Corr, Director of the Business Development and Workplace Unit (VicHealth), corporations must accept they exist within communities and their actions are increasingly being scrutinised by customers, consumer groups, media and regulatory authorities.

'If a company is perceived to be a bad citizen, customer loyalty will shift towards its competitors, employee morale will suffer and business will suffer,' says Ms Corr.

Ms Corr believes adherence to the 'triple bottom line' principle (environmental, social and economic considerations) will be a major indicator of future business success.



'We are already seeing changes in corporate spending in Australia as more businesses move to cause-related sponsorship arrangements and set up their own trusts or foundations to align socially responsible aims with strategic aims,' she says.

VicHealth's 'Creating Corporate Citizenship' symposium featured Elizabeth Cham, Executive Director of Philanthropy Australia; Dr Don Edgar, Professor for Workplace Culture Change, RMIT; Gary Cazalet, Corporate Citizenship Consulting; Ivan Deveson, AO, Consultant and former Melbourne Lord Mayor; and Charles Kovess, Passion Provocateur, Kovess International.

The symposium will be repeated by videoconference across regional Victoria later this year.

Organisational Health Workshop

On 25 November 1999 VicHealth and the Workplace Program conducted 'Creative Philanthropy - A Shared Goal'. This seminar examined philanthropy, its role in the community now and into the future and how organisations and their staff can benefit from embracing this activity.

Elizabeth Cham, Executive Director of Philanthropy Australia and member of the Prime Minister's Round Table on Business and Community Partnerships, addressed this seminar. Philanthropy Australia is a national organisation, which facilitates and supports philanthropy and provides advice and expertise to individuals and organisations.

The following issues were outlined in this seminar:

- The role of philanthropy in Australia and its future direction.
- Philanthropy from an international perspective and what can be learned.
- Planning for philanthropic activities.

Mr Gary Cazalet, Principal of Corporate Citizenship Consulting, also updated participants with the latest information from a conference held in San Francisco, 'Profitable Partnerships - building relationships that make a difference'.

INTERNATIONAL

Global Workshop on 'Building Effective Infrastructures for Health Promotion'

VicHealth conducted a Global Workshop on health promotion to examine effective ways of building infrastructures for health promotion and to establish an ongoing network of health promotion foundations and like organisations.

The workshop featured representatives from Austria, Belgium, China, Fiji, Finland, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

At the conclusion of the workshop an International Health Promotion Network was established with VicHealth acting as facilitator.

The workshop was sponsored by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Association of Health Promotion Foundations.



Swedish Study Tour to Australia

Sweden is often regarded as a model of good governance and social justice, and despite the economic difficulties of the '90s and questions regarding the sustainability of the current welfare system, Sweden is still among the healthiest and most prosperous countries in the world.

At the centre of the Scandinavian systems lie the politically strong and financially independent Municipalities and County Councils. The local authorities are very powerful in Sweden and they are responsible for the provision of basic education, care for the elderly, child welfare, social services, transportation, environmental protection, housing, roads, and other services usually the domain of the State and Territory Governments in Australia.

In order to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the system, the Swedish authorities have often looked abroad for ideas and stimulation. In the field of health promotion, Canada has traditionally been the source of inspiration. But earlier this year, due to Australia's growing reputation in health promotion, VicHealth was approached to organise and host the first Swedish Study Tour to Australia.

From 16 to 27 October, a group of 18 health professionals, elected government officials and government employees responsible for the management of hospitals, policy development in the primary health sector, health promotion and disease prevention, visited Sydney and Melbourne to learn about health promotion in Australia. The tour focused primarily on the Australian Health Care System (fiscal systems, organisation management, ongoing challenges and changes) and health promotion and disease prevention in practice in Australia.

The program was highly successful and thanks to the dynamism and enthusiasm of our guests, the tour highlighted once more the enormous benefits that result from international dialogue and cooperation.

While in Sydney, the group benefited from the expertise of the staff at the Australian Centre for Health Promotion, who delivered a number of sessions on infrastructure development and capacity building for health promotion, workplace health promotion, and social marketing. The second leg of the program brought the participants of the tour to Melbourne, where key players in government and academia delivered excellent presentations on the Australian health care system, epidemiology, and inter-sectoral approaches to and evaluation of health promotion. The program was rounded up with a number of site visits which provided examples of best practice in the field of health promotion in Australia.

SPORT

SmokeFree Forum

On 19 November 1999 VicHealth conducted a *SmokeFree* sport forum at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The forum was designed to enable sporting groups to learn from the varied experiences of people in large and small organisations who have introduced smoke-free policies. Mr Eugene Arocca, a tobacco litigation expert, also discussed the latest legal opinion regarding smoking in public places.

The *Going Smokefree - a policy guide for sporting venues* kit was provided to all participants.

VicHealth supported the forum in conjunction with *Quit* and the Heart Foundation.

The Going Smokefree kit is available by contacting Quit on (03) 9663 7777.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Visiting Health Promotion Fellow Scheme

VicHealth was pleased to announce the appointment of Dr John Lynch as its second Visiting Fellow.

The Visiting Health Promotion Fellow Scheme is co-ordinated by the Research, Development and Information Unit. Fellowships are awarded on an annual basis. The scheme aims to assist with the development and implementation of VicHealth's strategic plan, *Strategic Directions 1999-2002*, and stimulate thinking within the organisation that will benefit policy development and program implementation.

Dr Lynch has a joint appointment at the Department of Epidemiology in the School of Public Health and at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. He has published a variety of research papers in the world's leading public health, medical, cardiovascular and epidemiologic journals. His scientific contributions have been recognised with prestigious awards from the American Heart Association and the International Society for Behavioural Medicine.

His research attempts to improve understanding and integration of issues in health inequalities by focusing on individual and contextual determinants of health. He was with VicHealth from 27 October to 12 November and advised VicHealth on an agenda of how to progress with social and economic determinants of health.

Dr Lynch delivered a public lecture in conjunction with Deakin University Burwood Campus on 10 November 1999.

Centre for Tobacco Control

On 16 November 1999 at a luncheon attended by United States Surgeon General Dr David Satcher, the Minister assisting the Minister for Health, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, announced the establishment of the new VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control.

The past decade has seen a substantial decrease in smoking prevalence in the broader Victorian community from 34.2% in 1983 to 24.4% in 1996. In recent years, however, smoking rates have plateaued, and although consumption per capita continues to fall, smoking rates in Victoria as a whole and in some population sub-groups remain unacceptably high.

The VicHealth Centre for Tobacco Control is auspiced by the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria's Cancer Control Research Institute, in consortium with the University of Melbourne's Centre for Public Policy, Monash University's Institute of Public Health and Health Services Research. Dr Ron Borland is the Director of the Centre.

The aim of the Centre is to contribute to the decline of smoking levels in the whole population and in particular population groups with high smoking levels. This will be achieved through research and development to identify and promote innovative ways of reducing exposure to tobacco, thus reducing the adverse health and social effects of tobacco use in Australia.

The legal, economic and social research conducted at the Centre will inform policy and decision makers of the impact of tobacco on the community in the medium to long term. This information will support current research and practice and will strengthen evidence-based advocacy.

COMING UP

Chinese Study Tour: Workplace and Community-based Health Promotion

VicHealth is organising a study tour for a delegation of 14 Chinese mid-level and senior government officials who will be visiting Melbourne from 21 November to 4 December 1999.

The tour is one of the many components of a five-year World Bank project designed to kick-start health promotion in five selected cities in China. Other components of the project include structural and policy reforms, as well as long and short-term training and capacity building within China.

The overall objective of this study tour is to examine integrated models of good practice in workplace and community-based health promotion. In particular, the group will learn about integrated strategies to promote physical activity, healthy eating, injury prevention and tobacco control in both settings. The tour will also highlight the importance of sustainability and inter-sectoral cooperation.

Australian Summer School in Health Promotion

31 January – 11 February 2000

VicHealth invites registrations for the Year 2000 Summer School in Health Promotion. The school will once again be conducted in partnership with leading Australian practitioners and academics.

The course includes workshops, lectures, group discussions and site visits, and applicants will learn the theory and practice of health promotion from experts in social and public health, epidemiology and health promotion.

Course fees are AUS\$1,950, which includes coursework and printed materials, tuition, accommodation, visits, airport transfers and a welcome dinner.

Application forms can be obtained from Tess Pryor, VicHealth on 613 9345 3224 or facsimile 613 9345 3222 or email tpryor@vichealth.vic.gov.au. Further information and the Australian Summer School in Health Promotion brochure can be accessed on VicHealth's website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

