

An introduction to *Environments for Health: Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*

For Primary and Community health agencies



This resource is designed for people who work in agencies that receive funding for health promotion from the Primary Health Branch of the Department of Human Services. It provides an introduction to *Environments for Health: Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*, and an overview of its relationship with the *Integrated health promotion resource kit* and broader policy agenda.

Environments for Health

The framework was developed by Public Health Group in the Department of Human Services, in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Victorian Local Governance Association, local governments, and other stakeholders. *Environments for Health* was released in 2001 to guide the development of Municipal Public Health Plans by local governments. All councils are required by the *Health Act 1958* to develop Municipal Public Health Plans (sometimes referred to as the health and wellbeing plan) at three-year intervals.

What does *Environments for Health* cover?

The document is divided into two parts: the framework and the practical guide to planning. The framework includes two important features: placing public health on the agenda of local councils, and promoting health across the four environments (built, social, natural and economic).

- **Placing public health on the agenda** As a level of government, councils are responsible for a broad range of planning in their local community. *Environments for health* shows how public health should be considered in this broad context. In addition to municipal public health plans, councils have statutory requirements to develop a council plan and a municipal strategic statement, and the framework shows how these three plans should inform each other.
- **Four environments** The framework describes how existing council actions across the four environments can impact on health. The following table shows the type of council actions that can impact on health across these environmentsⁱⁱ.

Environmental dimensions	Council action areas	Example of Council interventions for the health issue—mental health
Built/physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use planning • Industrial development • Transportation • Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of urban planning features, housing, parks, roads and transport options that foster access, belonging and social inclusion
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community support services • Community safety • Art and cultural development • Library services • Neighbourhood houses • Recreation programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community building initiatives • Community facilities and support programs • Art and cultural programs
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Community economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Economic policy—for example, rural decline
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality • Waste management • Energy consumption • Parks/recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of natural vegetation to promote recreation, leisure, and 'contact with nature'

Similarities with the *Integrated health promotion resource kit*

Like the *Integrated health promotion resource kit*, *Environments for Health* focuses on partnerships, the determinants of health and the use of a systematic strategic planning frameworkⁱⁱⁱ. While the language is slightly different, the planning steps outlined in section 6 of *Environments for Health* has the same intent as the planning framework in chapter 4 of the



Integrated health promotion resource kit: both are cyclic in nature and emphasise the link between good planning and evaluation.

How does it align with your work?

Understanding *Environments for Health* can assist agencies to:

- understand the local council's role in the local community
- engage councils, create partnerships and aid the development of integrated health promotion programs
- advocate for changes within the four environments that might be outside the agency's responsibility but are an essential part of a broader plan to improve population health
- consider the broad determinants of health by using the four environments in vision setting and problem definition processes
- add value to program and evaluation planning by using the four environments
- support the development and implementation of councils Municipal Public Health Plan.

Where do I find *Environments for Health* and other resources?

- The Local Government Planning for Health and Wellbeing web site has a range of information, including recent conferences and the relationship between urban design and health. *Environments for Health* can be downloaded from: www.health.vic.gov.au/localgov. Hard copies are available by contacting the Local Government Partnerships Team on (03) 9637 4755.
- The Good Practice Program promotes new developments and creative approaches to municipal public health planning using the *Environments for Health* framework. Look at the web site for practical ways that councils have put the *Environments for Health* framework into practice.
- VicHealth's *Leading the Way* is a resource package designed to provide councillors and senior managers with information and tools to create healthier communities. It can be accessed at: <http://vichealth.vic.gov.au>.
- *Planning together: Community Health Plans and Municipal Public Health Plans* can be accessed at: www.health.vic.gov.au/localgov/commplan.htm.
- *Integrated health promotion: a practice guide for service providers* can be downloaded from: www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/resources_links/integrated.htm.
- *Measuring health promotion impacts: a guide to impact evaluation for health promotion* can be downloaded from: www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/measuring_hp_impacts.pdf.
- *Planning for effective health promotion evaluation* can be downloaded from: www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/planning_may05.pdf. Hard copies are available from the Primary Health Branch, Department of Human Services, telephone (03) 96168047.

Future plans: There are plans underway to update the two planning frameworks and introduce common language. These updates will happen as new editions of *Environments for Health* and the *Integrated health promotion resource kit* are produced.

ⁱ Department of Human Services, 2001, *Environments for Health: Municipal Public Health Planning Framework*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Wills, J., 1995, *A new public health agenda*, Australian Municipal Journal, December, p. 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Human Services, 2003, *Integrated health promotion resource kit*, www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/resources_links/integrated.htm.