

Primary Care Partnerships

Promoting healthy communities



Partnerships are the key

As populations around Australia grow and age, the pressure on governments to maintain and improve health and human services is becoming sharper and more immediate.

It's not simply an economic imperative. Keeping people healthy and strengthening their communities is critical to improving their quality of life. A more effective primary health care system is central to achieving these goals.

The Victorian Primary Care Partnership Strategy, initiated in 2000, has demonstrated that these goals are achievable and that when providers work in partnership they can respond to people's needs more effectively. Eight years on, there is strong evidence that this collaborative approach is leading the way in health reform and expanding beyond primary health.

Victoria's partnership strategy is working

The Primary Care Partnership Strategy has led to the development of 31 Primary Care Partnerships among more than 800 health services and agencies across Victoria. These partnerships typically include hospitals, community health services, local government, aged care assessment services, women's health services, community drug treatment services, local ethno-specific health services, mental health services, disability services and Divisions of General Practice. The partnerships are growing and engaging with non-health agencies, including police, schools, and community and welfare groups, providing a comprehensive response to local needs.

While driven by the vision of the Victorian Government, the partnerships operate at a local level. Their strength comes from the fact that they're community based—local partnerships meeting local needs.

Communities across Victoria are experiencing the benefits of better health outcomes through the efforts of Primary Care Partnerships.

'Health Promotion has taken off in this area and it is largely due to the leadership of the Primary Care Partnership.'

(Focus group participant)¹

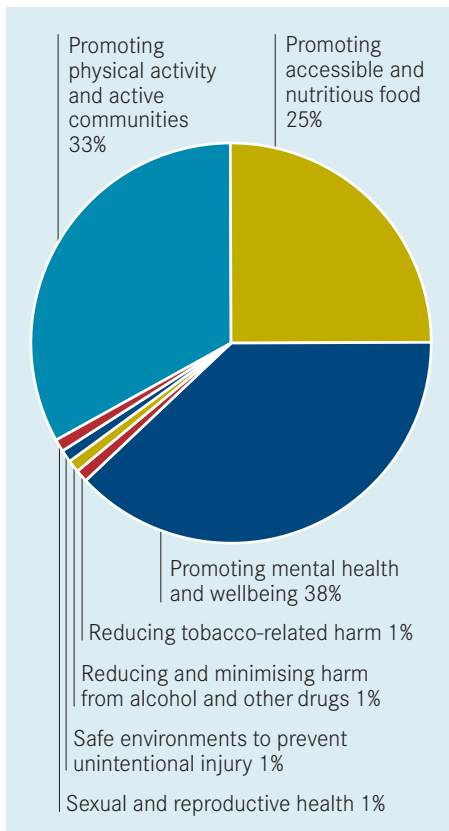
An integrated approach to health promotion

Primary Care Partnerships have established partnerships between community-based agencies that work together to plan and implement shared health promotion programs. This 'joined-up' approach harnesses the resources and effort across agencies to tackle priority health and wellbeing issues. It is an approach that has proven successful in Victoria and overseas².

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Integrated health promotion involves agencies with common target groups, such as young people, and goals, such as addressing mental health issues, coming together to plan and carry out shared programs that use a mix of interventions. It also considers the broad determinants of health such as people's environments and social circumstances.

The graph below shows the range of health promotion priorities chosen by Primary Care Partnerships for 2006–2009.



Integrated planning has facilitated a more strategic population focus for health promotion work...it is producing better outcomes for citizens'.

(Focus group participant)¹

Responsiveness to community issues

All communities are different. Each has its own unique set of circumstances, with different populations, demographics, and health and care needs. This is why Primary Care Partnerships are made up of local organisations working together for the benefit of their communities.

For example, two Primary Care Partnerships in the west of Melbourne have been working on meeting the local needs of people with a refugee background. The partnership involves a range of local, regional and statewide agencies, all aiming to improve the accessibility and coordination of services for people with a refugee background. This work has resulted in reduced duplication of services, increased understanding of referral pathways, improved coordination of services and integrated approaches to health promotion interventions.

Other issues are common to all communities. For example, problem gambling is a common community issue. The Victorian Department of Justice is investing in Primary Care Partnerships to deliver on two key action areas as part of the Taking Action on Problem Gambling Strategy. This includes ensuring more systematic approaches to the coordination of service coordination and promoting healthy communities. This includes ensuring more systematic approaches to the coordination of services and promoting healthy communities.

Prevention is better than cure

Successful prevention strategies involve interventions that improve and strengthen protective factors, such as living in hazard-free environments and being connected to strong social networks.

Prevention also involves identifying and targeting risk factors. At the local level this might include better access to fresh

Case study: Making Two Worlds Work

An example of how integrated health promotion contributes to community development is the Making Two Worlds Work project. The project is coordinated by Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation and Women's Health Goulburn North East in collaboration with a range of member agencies from Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership.

A practical and creative resource kit was developed to help local health and community agencies work effectively and respectfully with local Aboriginal consumers and communities.

Cultural awareness training has helped staff at agencies in the region understand the culture of the local Aboriginal communities and so provide more appropriate programs and services. Aboriginal artwork and images are displayed and information about local Aboriginal history and culture, protocols, key organisations and contacts is provided, as well as resources to support the agencies to work with Aboriginal consumers, families and communities.

The Aboriginal community was involved in all aspects of decision-making and more than 120 individual workers and agencies.

'We have evidence already, although it is early days, that this approach has made a difference to our community members accessing generalist health.'

Case study: Towards a healthy heart

The Towards a Healthy Heart program is an example of a highly successful prevention program in the Portland region.

This structured primary prevention program addresses the risk factors for heart disease in 'hard to reach men' within the high-risk age group of 30–60 year old industry workers. Initiated by the Portland District Health and Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership, the program involved 16 agencies including the Portland YMCA, Physiotherapy Centre, district health, the Leisure and Aquatic Centre, a range of sports clubs, local industries, local general practitioners (GPs) and Monash University.

Ninety men working in five different industries took part. By the end of the program the men's blood cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure, weight, Body Mass Index and waist measurements had all reduced, they were less depressed and anxious, and their eating was healthier. Alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking were also reduced or ceased.

Best of all, the men (many of whom did not even have a GP, or hadn't seen one in years) established a much better connection with the health system.

fruit and vegetables in public housing estates through transport to community gardens and markets, or the provision of blood pressure checks at community events to increase early detection of high blood pressure. Strengthening protective factors while trying to reduce the impact of risk factors requires a coordinated and integrated approach—this is what Primary Care Partnerships provide.

Collaboration beyond the health sector

Primary Care Partnerships not only provide a collaborative structure for health services, they also broaden the notion of partnership beyond the health sector.

As a network of health services intersecting with the non-health sector, these partnerships have the capacity to coordinate and implement broad, issue-based responses. For example, in October 2006, Primary Care Partnerships were selected by the Ministerial Drought Taskforce as a platform for delivering comprehensive mental health initiatives to respond to the impacts of drought.

This expanding partnership network has greatly benefited communities throughout Victoria by increasing the breadth, depth and diversity of services. This is particularly of benefit to smaller agencies that might otherwise struggle to link into the wider system. Belonging to the partnership provides access to a broader range of agencies and addresses a wider range of client needs.

'Having a place at the Primary Care Partnership table in each region provides the opportunity to make presentations at member meetings and create a much higher level of awareness than trying to advocate to individual agencies.'

Health agency representative



'The Primary Care Partnership Integrated Health Prevention platform has been incredibly useful for accessing agencies and agreeing policy priorities on a statewide basis.'

Health agency representative

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The benefits of integrated health promotion

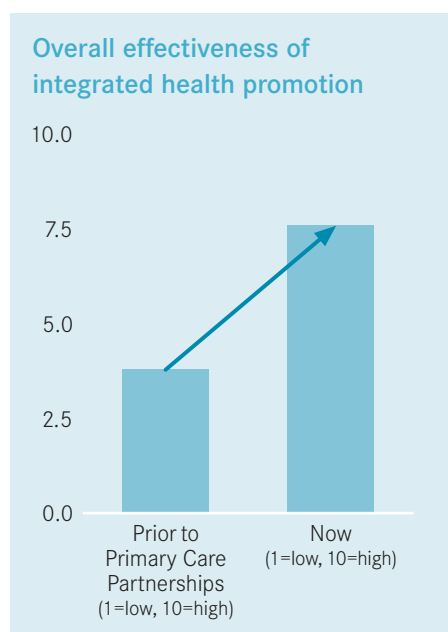
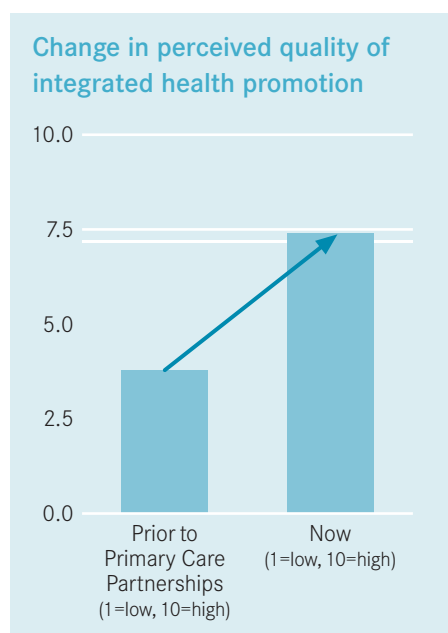
Integrated health promotion has wide-ranging benefits. It ensures agencies work together within communities and across the state, helping to make the system more effective, and benefiting the people using the health system and those working within it.

Integrated health promotion through Primary Care Partnerships creates highly developed networks that engage different sectors and stakeholders. Statewide demographic information and local knowledge allow priority issues to be identified and difficult to reach population groups to be targeted. Cross-sector and inter-agency partnerships use a common planning framework to identify, plan and implement robust and evidence-based health promotion interventions to benefit communities throughout the state.

Evaluation data¹ provides clear evidence of the success of the partnership approach to improved integrated health promotion. Key findings are that the Primary Care Partnership approach to integrated health promotion has clearly:

- demonstrated an improvement in integrated planning
- demonstrated an increase in organisational capacity for health promotion
- demonstrated economic and other benefits to member agencies
- contributed to healthier communities.

The graphs (below) show a significant increase in the overall quality and effectiveness of integrated health promotion as rated by Primary Care Partnership member agencies.



A critical success

Primary Care Partnerships have built capacity in member agencies, and are using resources more effectively. The statewide approach has created a virtual knowledge bank in relation to the health of local communities and health promotion strategies. As a result there's now a collective wealth of knowledge across all agencies.

The partnerships have also increased the span of participation in health promotion. Smaller agencies are more closely involved, and can tap into a knowledge and resource base that would otherwise be unavailable, or difficult to access.

These partnerships have built better relationships between agencies and have led to significant service system reform. Services are now coordinated more effectively. Health promotion and chronic disease management are better integrated. Continuity of care, a more responsive system, and greater efficiency are now available to consumers across the state.

1 'Partnerships for effective integrated health promotion' An analysis of impacts on agencies of the Primary Care Partnership Integrated Health Promotion Strategy'

2 International Union for Health Promotion and Education (2000), *The Evidence of Health Promotion Effectiveness: Shaping Public Health in a New Europe*, Report for the European Commission, Brussels.

Gillam, Abbott, Banks-Smith (2001), 'Can primary care groups and trusts improve health?', *BMJ* 323 14 July 2001.

Roussos S, Fawcett S (2000), *A review of collaborative partnerships as a strategy for improving community health*, *Annual Review of Public Health*, 21, pp 369-402.

Other brochures on Primary Care Partnerships are available at www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps and include:

- *Better health—stronger communities*
- *Better access to services*
- *Chronic disease prevention and management*
- *Electronic revolution supports better care*