

Integrated health promotion: A better way to better health





Introduction

Communities across Victoria are now reaping the benefits of better health outcomes brought about through the development of Primary Care Partnerships.

The Primary Care Partnership Strategy, which began in April 2000, has established partnerships between many community-based agencies that work together to plan and carry out shared health promotion programs.

What is integrated health promotion?

Integrated health promotion means agencies in neighbouring areas are working together to tackle priority health and well-being issues within their own community.

This joint approach harnesses resources and effort from various organisations and directs them to greater effect by working together in smarter ways, rather than in isolation. It is an approach that has proven successful both in Australia and overseas.¹

Integrated health promotion involves agencies with common target groups, such as young people, and goals, such as increasing participation in physical activity, 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.

Agencies involved in integrated health promotion are usually primary health care agencies from within the Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs). They then work with organisations or individuals from other sectors such as schools, child care centres, police, sports clubs and retail businesses, to name just a few.

Canteen Managers Initiative – South Coast Health Services Consortium (PCP)

The South Coast Health Services Consortium is working with the staff and communities of 15 primary and secondary schools to promote the development of healthy eating habits. Through consultation, research, forums and workshops, a number of positive changes are occurring, including:

- Establishment of a mentoring service consisting of dietitians and school nurses, who are working with school canteen managers to plan healthier menus and provide ongoing nutritional advice;
- Organisation of a canteen managers' network with involvement in an ongoing professional educational program; and
- Plans for the development of a school canteen policy that reflects the importance of establishing healthy eating habits amongst school-aged children.

Initiatives, such as this one in Gippsland, will assist in dealing with the issues of obesity and the development of certain chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, in adulthood brought on by poor eating habits in childhood.

¹ 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.

What can integrated health promotion achieve?

- More people are now actively involved in programs to improve their health and well-being. In 2002, close to 10,000 Victorians took part in activities such as Tai Chi, walking and strength training groups, healthy eating programs and mental health promotions.
- A 'best practice' framework has been adopted that has substantially lifted the quality of health promotion in Victoria. This has included the implementation of action plans for health promotion setting out goals, objectives, interventions and an evaluation process as standard practice.
- A significant reduction in fragmented and duplicated effort because agencies are getting together and pooling their resources and skills to achieve a greater impact.
- More efficient and effective targeting of resources and a more transparent use of funds, which has also led to the involvement of other programs and organisations that have seen the advantages of this approach.
- Extensive research and analysis that identifies the actual health needs of communities through a range of data sources including hospital admission data and burden of disease studies. This information is then used to develop the integrated health promotion plans to ensure that resources and effort are directed to where these are most needed and will do the most good.

Evaluations have shown that the vast majority of participants in integrated health promotion programs have experienced improvements in their general well-being and self-managing their health or ill-health, as the case may be.

This 'grass roots' feedback provided to the Department on a regular basis is invaluable in monitoring the changes occurring through integrated health promotion and the wider PCP strategy and the positive impact it is having on people's lives at an individual, group and community level.

Most importantly, it means that we will soon be able to identify trends showing that through a greater emphasis on health promotion and early intervention, we can reduce the use of hospital and medical services.

Rooming House Project – Inner South East Partnership in Community Health (PCP)

The Inner South East Partnership in Community Health in conjunction with a number of community groups undertook a program in a local 30 bed community-managed rooming house where residents had a significant degree of disability and were highly transient, along with high levels of conflict, and drug and alcohol use. Staff from 11 agencies who had previously worked independently came together through the PCP platform to work together with residents to achieve positive changes, including:

- Assisting them to problem-solve and develop practical strategies to tackle issues that they identified as important to them.
- Improvement in their sense of well-being and cohesion;
- Better access to the services they needed; and
- Changes made to the living environment that also had a positive impact on the residents themselves.

Following the success of this project, more rooming houses have been involved and the potential for this program to be more widely used in other residential settings is being explored. This project is a fine example of what can be achieved through tackling the broad determinants of health and providing opportunities for a group of marginalised citizens to gain better health.



How does integrated health promotion work?

Integrated health promotion works by changing the way health promotion is planned and carried out to deliver a more collaborative approach that considers the health needs of whole communities. For integrated health promotion to be successful it requires that change be implemented to agency practice and the way agencies work together.

The Primary Care Partnership Strategy supported the formation of formalised agency partnerships and an integrated health promotion framework was developed. **This framework sets out a method for planning, implementing and evaluating according to accepted principles of best practice in health promotion.**

This framework has been well received and is now being used throughout the primary care sector as well as in areas within Public Health, Sport and Recreation Victoria, Office of Senior Victorians, Aged Care, and Problem Gambling.



Does integrated health promotion cost more?

Although initially it may be more resource intensive for an agency to plan and work collaboratively with others, this input is outweighed by the benefits of more efficient use of resources and ultimately more robust results.

What are the critical success factors?

Critical success factors that have contributed to the delivery of high quality integrated health promotion include:

- Formation of the Primary Care Partnerships as vehicles for collaboration;
- Identification of 'leaders' in agencies to advocate practice change, and strong commitment and support by agency management;
- Involvement of consumers in program design;
- Development of an appropriately skilled health promotion workforce; and
- Establishment of a common planning framework.





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What is the future for integrated health promotion?

Integrated health promotion is the principles of health promotion best practice put into action – an approach that is becoming engrained in the work done by primary health care agencies. What began in the primary care sector is already being taken up by outside agencies and organisations, and it is anticipated that this uptake will continue.

To be successful, integrated health promotion is dependent upon agencies being willing and able to form collaborative partnerships to support collective effort. Primary Care Partnerships are providing the ideal platform for integrated health promotion to develop and thrive. These Partnerships are directing resources and giving support to integrated health promotion implementation and have led the way in consolidating the approach into the ‘core business’ of member agencies.

With local evidence of the benefits of integrated health promotion continuing to build, it is clear that integrated health promotion is becoming a cornerstone for future health promotion in Victoria.

In effect, it is forging a better way to better health through better health promotion.

Further information

Additional information sheets are available on:

- Primary Care Partnerships
- Service coordination.