



5 November, 2004

Dr Robert Hall
Director Public Health and Chief Health Officer
Department of Human Services
GPO Box 1670N
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Dr Hall

RE: Review of the Health Act 1958

Your letter to the RACP Dated the 27th August 2004 asking for comment on the current review of the Health Act 1958 has been passed onto the Victorian Committee for the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine to provide comment. The documentation has been circulated to fellows of the AFPHM (RACP) within Victoria and the following comments have been provided:

1. Renaming it as the Public Health Act would be a good idea, and would better reflect the name and purpose of the new Act. Public Health as terminology is better recognised by the community than it was in the 1950s or 1980s.
2. There should be a role for the Act to address inequalities in health and wellbeing of disadvantaged communities, but the issues relevant to these disadvantages are multifactorial and involve multiple sectors, eg education, housing, employment etc. Some sort of legislation that actively supports public health partnerships may be appropriate.
3. Assist in protecting public health and preventing disease, illness, injury, disability and premature death - and assist in reducing health inequalities of disadvantaged communities would be appropriate as statements of intention.
4. The Secretary should have wider powers for the Secretary to establish data bases, registers and other collections of public health information and that these powers should allow for secondary uses of that information for appropriate and approved scientific research. Eg Use of the information to assess health research questions that arise out of the systematic collection of information, ie secondary uses of the data, for purposes that are public health related. That is the ability to follow chronic morbidity in the community from a public health perspective should be enhanced by broader powers to allow data follow up for research purposes.

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5. There is a strong case for keeping the legislative requirement for Medical Officers of Health for Councils. As the documents says, this has worked well and dropping it in place of other 'non-legislative' options will undermine the importance of medical input into this level of public health and councils will look for cheaper and less highly qualified advice.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rodney Fawcett', written in a cursive style.

Dr Rodney Fawcett
Chair Victorian Committee AFPHM (RACP) Victoria