

Department of Human Services

Public Health Branch Strategic Directions 2005–09

Looking towards a healthier future

The Department of Human Services' Public Health Branch has major responsibilities for maintaining and improving the health and wellbeing of all Victorians.

Our broad vision is to promote better health and wellbeing for all, respond to major threats to public health including epidemics and disasters and, wherever possible, prevent ill health and disability.

The health of Victorians has improved significantly over the last century with much of this success stemming from public health activity. There is no doubt that modest investments in public health initiatives deliver big returns.

The Public Health Branch is committed to a broad view of health complemented by effective action. The strategic directions outlined in this document will guide our work over the next four years. To meet these challenges our work must be based on sound science, good management and effective partnerships.



Dr Robert Hall
Director Public Health and
Chief Health Officer

The Public Health Branch

Public Health is a branch of the Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services (RRHACS) Division of the Department of Human Services. RRHACS has responsibility for the full range of health and aged care services in rural and regional Victoria as well as program responsibility for public health, aged care, primary and community health, dental health and drugs services across the state.

Our vision and mission

Healthy people—Healthy communities—Healthy future

The Public Health Branch, in partnership with communities, government and other organisations, focuses on the health of all Victorians by:

- promoting health and wellbeing for all
- preventing and minimising the effects of disease, illness and injury
- addressing inequalities and the underlying causes of ill health
- responding to public health threats and community concerns
- promoting informed decision-making through a solid foundation of research, policy and legislation.





The public health environment

The breadth and complexity of the public health environment, and of the Public Health Branch's responsibilities, present key challenges and opportunities that include:

- working effectively to shift the focus towards prevention in an environment focused on demand for curative services
- developing more effective public health interventions, and demonstrating long-term population benefits and the value of public health investments
- using regulation wisely to advance public health.

What we need to be

To achieve its goals, the Public Health Branch needs to be:

- strategic in anticipating and responding to changes in the environment
- relied upon by government and the community for our ability to monitor and respond to current and future public health needs and threats
- influential with key state, federal and local government departments and agencies
- an active partner with non-government and private sector organisations
- focused on excellence and continuous improvement
- accountable for the delivery of high quality programs and outcomes.

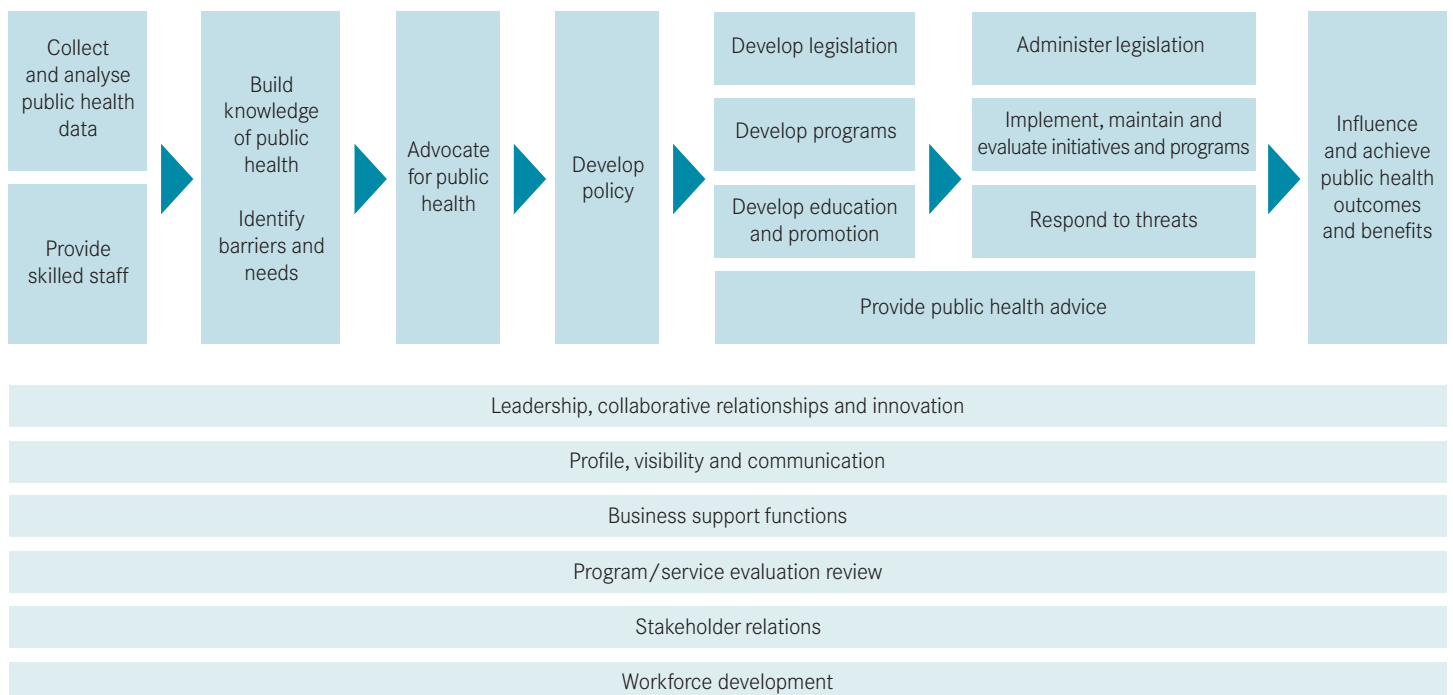
What we need to do

To be effective in its environment, the Public Health Branch needs to:

- advocate for healthy public policy
- strengthen the long-term focus on health improvements
- pursue a whole-of-system approach to prevention, health promotion and primary care
- focus on the socially disadvantaged to maximise health gains
- build and apply first-rate population data collection, health surveillance, and technical knowledge
- harness research activity and findings to inform public health action
- build common understanding of purpose across disciplines
- manage our business and resources well to ensure public health funds are well spent.

Public Health Branch

The diagram below represents the Public Health Branch's overall responsibilities. The linked sections form a chain that shows the range of work undertaken by the Branch that leads to public health benefits and outcomes. Underpinning the chain is a mix of strategic, operational and infrastructure elements needed to support the achievement of the Branch's goals.



Strategic directions 2005–09

Priorities for action	What we will achieve
Protecting the health of all Victorians	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain and increase capacity to respond to current and emerging public health risks.• Maintain and develop a high quality health surveillance system.• Review the effectiveness of key health protection programs.
Addressing health inequalities and social factors that sustain health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add to the current understanding of why some populations are healthier and suffer fewer health problems than others.• Work together with the broader health sector and those outside it to act on major factors in the social, economic and physical environments that enable Victorians to be healthy.• Improve understanding of the impact of social factors on health and wellbeing.• Be a committed partner in broad coalitions of organisations and people to take effective action to sustain health and wellbeing.
Progressing environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influence whole-of-government policy on environmental sustainability.• Ensure intersectoral cooperation and action to achieve positive relationships between sustainability and public health.
Reducing the toll of chronic diseases, conditions and injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add to health and wellbeing by increasing understanding of the interactions between the behavioural, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that underpin poor health and injury.• Translate what we know about the best ways to influence people's health and wellbeing into practical and effective initiatives through a coordinated approach to prevention and health promotion.
Promoting a good start in early life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and maintain a comprehensive child health and wellbeing surveillance system.• Contribute to action to improve the health and wellbeing of Victoria's young children.
Creating effective partnerships for health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen consultation and collaboration to achieve a better match between Public Health Branch and stakeholder expectations.• Promote changes in health outcomes through strengthened partnerships and collaborative action that use combined resources more effectively.
Building positive organisational wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support our work in the Public Health Branch through workforce development, good management and sound procedures and systems.

The Public Health Branch

Delivers

- public health policy
- legislative framework for public health
- health and wellbeing monitoring and surveillance
- communicable disease surveillance and control
- capacity building for health promotion
- management of public health risks associated with air, land, water, radiation, Legionella, chemicals, food and drinking water, and potential health impacts of major projects
- coordination of immunisation programs
- capacity to respond to emergencies which impact on public health
- ethical review of human research for the department
- policy relating to pathology services
- input to whole-of-government policy on health and medical research and development.

Funds

- cancer screening and surveillance
- capability development in public health
- chronic disease prevention
- genetics services
- health promotion
- immunisation
- programs to address the spread of blood borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections
- preparation for public health emergencies
- public health laboratories
- public health research.

Regulates

- cemeteries and crematoria
- communicable diseases notification
- cooling towers (Legionella)
- drinking water quality
- food safety
- gene technology: health, safety and environment
- HIV testing
- human cloning and embryo research
- immunisation providers
- infertility treatment programs
- pest control operators
- quarantine
- radiation safety
- refusal of medical treatment
- taking and use of human tissue.

Chief Health Officer

The Chief Health Officer (CHO) has a broad role in health protection and promotion in Victoria. The CHO monitors and reports on the health of Victorians, advises Government, is the Government's media spokesperson on disease control and

health promotion, and has various statutory roles such as the closure of food premises in breach of food safety standards.

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