

26 October 2012

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
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Dear Sir / Madam,

Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Federal Government's Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.

VicHealth is committed to helping to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and as part of this commitment established a focus on improving Aboriginal health as a key priority area for action across 2009-2013.

A significant proportion of VicHealth's work to address the health inequalities experienced by Aboriginal communities utilises sport as a vehicle to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes. Our work has focused on direct support to Indigenous sporting organisations in order to increase Indigenous participation in sport and building the capacity of State Sporting Associations, Regional Sport Organisations and local clubs to create more inclusive sporting organisations.

VicHealth's approach to creating healthier Indigenous communities is multi-pronged. We focus our attention on working with communities and with all levels of government. We build collaborative partnerships with peak bodies, academic institutions and community organisations to address factors which influence behaviours and lifestyles and address the social determinants of health.

VicHealth's response to the terms of reference is attached.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Sue McGill, Manager Healthy Environments

Yours sincerely,

Jerril Rechter
CEO
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

Patrons

Sir James Gobbo
Dr Nigel Gray AO
Professor Emeritus,
Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE

About VicHealth

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) was established by the Victorian Parliament under the *Tobacco Act* (1987), with a mandate to promote good health for all Victorians.

VicHealth is an independent statutory authority with a Board of Governance that is responsible to the Minister for Health. Our health promotion investments target the greatest preventable risk factors for ill health: smoking, poor nutrition, harmful use of alcohol, lack of physical activity, social and economic exclusion and UV exposure. While working to improve the health of all Victorians, we also focus on the needs of those with the poorest health by targeting many of our activities on addressing health inequalities.

Our vision

VicHealth envisages a community where:

- health is a fundamental human right
- everyone shares in the responsibility for promoting health
- everyone benefits from improved health outcomes.

Our mission

Our mission is to build the capabilities of organisations, communities and individuals in ways that:

- change social, economic, cultural and physical environments to improve health for all Victorians
- strengthen the understanding and skills of individuals in ways that support their efforts to achieve and maintain health.

VicHealth's work is largely focused on primary prevention. This work seeks to address the causes of poor health, and prevent problems from developing with the view to achieving optimal health. With 25 years experience we have proven expertise in bringing together diverse groups to influence the health of individuals and to improve the social, economic, cultural and physical environments required to sustain health. This work is underpinned by evidence generated from funding activities, research and rigorous evaluation.

Promoting health and preventing disease

Health is not merely the absence of illness or infirmity. It is the embodiment of physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Health is fundamental to productivity and to overall quality of life. Health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living and to achieve their goals (Klocker, Trenerry & Webster, 2011).

Factors influencing health and wellbeing operate at a number of levels. Numerous factors can act to increase the chances of poor health outcomes or to increase the chances of good health outcomes. These factors are often referred to as 'health determinants'. In the field of health promotion, it is common to refer to two distinct but interrelated sets of determinants: behavioural and social. Behavioural determinants refer to individual behaviours and lifestyles that impact on health (for instance, a person's level of physical activity or alcohol consumption).

Social determinants of health refer to factors embedded in social, economic and physical environments, ranging from immediate family relationships, how our communities are planned and developed, to government policies which either support or act as a barrier to health. Social determinants also include factors such as access to education and meaningful employment, and a sense of social inclusion or exclusion. Importantly, the causes of poor health cannot be reduced to a single determinant. Determinants operate at multiple levels and interact to influence positive and negative health outcomes (CSDH, 2008).

VicHealth is the peak body for health promotion in Victoria. With a focus on primary prevention and promoting better practice, we lead and advocate for excellence in health-promoting policies, programs and environments. This work primarily occurs at a state level, but also has a national focus where relevant.

Introduction

The gap in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is demonstrated by a significantly lower life expectancy for Aboriginal men and women. This is largely the result of unequal access to resources and opportunities necessary for good health

(<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Health%20Inequalities/Life%20is%20health/Life%20is%20health%20is%20life%20-%20web.ashx>).

VicHealth is committed to helping to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and as part of this commitment VicHealth established a focus on improving Aboriginal health as a key priority area for action during 2009-2013.

VicHealth has shown a deep and ongoing commitment to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities across Victoria through efforts to strengthen the evidence base for health promotion practice, significant levels of organisational investment and a wide range of programmatic initiatives.

The organisation's emphasis on the translation of evaluation and research findings into practical, outcomes focused programs has laid the foundation for a solid knowledge base and provided the opportunity to continually improve programs focused on improving the health of Aboriginal Victorians.

A significant proportion of VicHealth's work to address the health inequalities experienced by Aboriginal communities utilizes sport as a vehicle to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes. Our work has focused on direct support to Indigenous sporting organisations in order to increase Indigenous participation in sport and building the capacity of State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies and local clubs to create more inclusive sporting organisations.

Health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians

Health is often described as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (World Health Organisation 1978, p. 1). The view of health by Aboriginal people is often much broader than this definition and is something that connects all aspects of life. It involves the social, emotional and cultural well being of the whole community (National Health Strategy Working Party 1989, p. 1).

WHO defines health promotion as the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health (WHO, 1986, The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion). Put more simply, health promotion involves taking action to address the factors that impact on health, which in the case of Aboriginal health involves a broad range of social, emotional and cultural factors.

Health promotion is central to improving Aboriginal health, with its foundations in empowering individuals and communities to exercise control over factors that affect their health and lives. Empowerment, the ability to determine outcomes and the opportunity to exercise control are particularly important factors to consider when working with Aboriginal communities.

There are four main preventable chronic conditions experienced by Aboriginal people and these conditions are some of the biggest contributors to the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians (Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2009). These chronic conditions include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and mental illness. VicHealth's work is centered on addressing the underlying causes and risk factors of these conditions as a method to prevent physical and mental ill health before it occurs.

To action this prevention work, VicHealth works in partnership with Indigenous peak organisations, State Sporting Associations, Regional Sports Assemblies and local clubs. Funding is provided to support action which increases opportunities for Aboriginal Victorians to participate in physical activity, as well as building the capacity of sporting organisations to create healthier and more inclusive places.

Sport as a vehicle for improving outcomes for Indigenous people

Sport can provide a point of cohesion, commonality and pride to Aboriginal communities and can be an essential ingredient for their political and cultural survival

(http://www.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/375741/2005_CRCATH.pdf).

Importantly, it is not just participation in sport that can improve outcomes for Aboriginal communities, but ownership and involvement in the structure and organisation of sport are vital to ensuring sport truly has the capacity to positively contribute to Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

Active, visible participation 'on the ground' in competitive, structured and regular sport can work towards addressing high levels of physical inactivity within Aboriginal communities. So too can the development of opportunities to participate in unstructured, non-competitive physical activity and recreation based activities. This is particularly important for women and girls within Aboriginal communities who may not be comfortable or for reasons of time, affordability and/or interest, be able to participate in structured sporting competition. There is an opportunity for State Sporting Associations to broaden the choice of activities available to Aboriginal women and girls to ensure the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities of their choice become available.

Much of VicHealth's current work with State Sporting Associations involves building their internal capacity and readiness to be more inclusive and welcoming of Aboriginal communities. The work facilitated and funded by VicHealth is designed to highlight areas within State Sporting Association organisational governance and representation that may be better structured to include a range of underrepresented communities in decision making roles, including Aboriginal Victorians. VicHealth's work to strengthen governance and inclusion at the State level will assist the Victorian sport sector to more actively include Aboriginal individuals and communities and in turn, strengthen and broaden the contribution of sport to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Victorians. In this way, sport's role broadens from providing an opportunity to be physically active to also providing engagement in decision making, empowerment over outcomes and genuine opportunity for operational involvement.

VicHealth's work to build the capacity of State Sporting Associations to become more equitable and inclusive of Aboriginal Victorians is built on a solid basis of evidence and evaluation translated into a practical and accessible set of tools, resources and best practice initiatives. An opportunity exists to support more research; both evidence and intervention based, across sport, health and government sectors that clearly articulate the link between sport and well being outcomes for Aboriginal communities and that provides evidence for what constitutes success in this space.

Everyone Wins is VicHealth's leading online resource that addresses equity, access and inclusion in sport from participation through to governance levels (http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Physical-Activity/Sport-and-recreation/Everyone-Wins_clubs.aspx). **Everyone Wins** provides an easy to navigate, on line portal to sport specific information from around Australia and was built through a partnership with leading thinkers from Victorian sport, the Australian Sports Commission, the research community and practical program deliverers. Hundreds of tools and resources are collected on the **Everyone Wins** website providing a one stop shop for sporting organisations to build and improve accessible and inclusive practice. All resources and tools were developed jointly, including those designed to include Aboriginal Victorians in active decision making and participation opportunities in sport. Aboriginal specific resources were created in partnership with the Indigenous Sport and Recreation team at Sport and Recreation Victoria, local community representatives and Indigenous academics. **Everyone Wins** ensures the role of sport continues to meet the needs of Aboriginal Victorians by making sure best practice activities, tools and resources are shared throughout the Victorian sporting community.

Sport provides a space that offers important positive images of Aboriginal success. From positive Aboriginal role model programs using athletes to send health and well being messages to a proliferation of positive media stories, sport provides a space for Aboriginal people to express pride, culture and achievement. There is an opportunity for all sporting organisations to ensure positive role model and media portrayals are equally provided for Aboriginal women and young girls who do not appear nearly as often as Aboriginal men in the sphere of high level and community based sport. The opportunity to better utilise female Aboriginal athletes as role models and mentors across all sporting pursuits sits alongside the opportunity to involve more Aboriginal women as carers for young Aboriginal men - particularly within professional football codes. VicHealth's work and partnership with Surfing Victoria provides a stand out example of utilising the power of sport to achieve a range of health and well being outcomes including those relating to employment, participation by Aboriginal girls and women, mentoring and joint decision making. The following case study provides a snap shot of this partnership.

Case study: Surfing Victoria's Indigenous Surfing Program

From humble beginnings some 12 years ago, Surfing Victoria and key partners VicHealth, Play it Safe by the Water (Victorian Government), Sport and Recreation Victoria, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative (Geelong) and the surfing industry, have developed a program which provides opportunities for Aboriginal people living in coastal and inland Victoria to participate in the sport of surfing and so much more.

The program began with Surfing Victoria's Executive Director, Max Wells' aim to provide one young Aboriginal man with a scholarship to undertake the Level 1 Surf Coaching qualification. Max could see the potential pathway to employment that the qualification could provide. He never however, imagined that today that young man, Anthony Hume would be working at Surfing Victoria alongside Program Manager Steve Parker (another graduate of the Level 1 Surf Coaching course), to deliver a statewide Indigenous Surfing Program which engaged over 1500 community members in the past 12 months.

Members of Aboriginal community's right across Victoria participate in the Indigenous Surfing Program in a range of ways. The most obvious form of participation is of course getting on a surf board or in the water through activities such as: learn to surf and water safety programs; life saving carnivals; learn to swim classes and carnivals; satellite surf competitions and; the annual Woorangalook Victorian Koori Titles (statewide surfing carnival). In 2012, Surfing Victoria also hosted the Australian Indigenous Surfing Titles at Bells Beach which hadn't been held for the past 12 years but is now set to become an annual event again.

While surfing is an activity with significant appeal, particularly to young people, getting more people surfing has never been the primary aim of the Indigenous Surfing Program. Max describes surfing as the vehicle for a range of other outcomes including connection within the Aboriginal community and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians, increased levels of confidence in individuals, the development of role models and leadership in the community and, the provision of education and employment opportunities.

Examples of activities of the Indigenous Surfing Program which deliver these of outcomes include provision of: Level 1 Surfing Coaching courses; Surf Rescue qualifications; Resuscitation courses; VicSwim/AusSwim Qualifications; Level 2 Surf Judging Courses and; work experience programs at sport events managed by Surfing Australia such as the Rip Curl Pro. Most recently, VicHealth funding has supported the program to provide 12 month traineeships for young people to work in the surf industry and related aquatic/recreation industries.

The first trainee employed through the program completed his traineeship at Strapper Surfboards (Torquay) in September 2012 and is now employed on an ongoing basis by the organisation. The second trainee is based at Swimming Victoria (Melbourne) and will complete her traineeship in March 2013. Her employer has expressed interest in employing her post the traineeship as well. The YMCA is the host for the third trainee who commenced in mid 2012. He is a member of the Wathaurong community and is working at the Anglesea YMCA camp.

Successes such as these are the result of the long term approach taken by Surfing Victoria to the development of the program. Surfing Victoria describe the key success factors in this work as being the 'slowly, slowly' approach to building trust and relationships with communities across Victoria, program management provided by acknowledged community leader Steve Parker, partnership with Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative, the network of qualified program leaders and role models that have been developed through the program over the past decade and the willingness of funding partners such as VicHealth to invest in the program over its 10 plus year lifespan.

Sport plays a role as a vehicle to provide positive messages both to Aboriginal communities and to the wider community about the achievements of Aboriginal Victorians. VicHealth works in partnership with Regional Sports Assemblies across rural and regional Victoria to provide healthier places for underrepresented communities, including Aboriginal Victorians, to participate.

The **Healthy Sporting Environments** program is built on evidence that suggests if a sporting club is made healthier via positive and health promoting changes to its surroundings, greater opportunity for participation will flow. This program is particularly relevant to Aboriginal communities in regional and rural parts of Victoria who experience higher exposure to risk factors relating to smoking, alcohol and physical inactivity through exclusion and poor nutrition. These areas make up four of the six key components of the **Healthy Sporting Environments** program. The program brings together and works in partnership with the sporting community and key health agencies in Victoria to provide healthier participation opportunities in local sporting clubs. These agencies and supports include Quit (smoking), the Australian Drug Foundation (alcohol), Play By the Rules and **Everyone Wins** (inclusion), Regional Sporting Organisations, Local Government and the Victorian Department of Health (nutrition and healthy eating). Bringing these program partners together ensures learnings and experiences are shared, appropriate and practical program changes are incorporated where possible and the sectors of sport and health work in partnership to provide improved outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

This experience has shown the importance of a partnership approach to using sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. The sport sector does not hold all of the answers to improved well being for Aboriginal communities and neither can sport affect change in isolation of other sectors that can and should, assist. VicHealth's **Healthy Sporting Environments** program focuses on working directly with local clubs, harnessing the power of involving and empowering club members to address health within the club environment. Addressing inequity at the local level provides the opportunity for sporting clubs to be recognized as a powerful local lever for change.

VicHealth's work with the Fitzroy Stars Football and Netball Club supports the operation of Indigenous owned and operated sporting clubs and the role they play in improving health and well being. The following case study provides a brief example of this innovative work.

Case Study: Fitzroy Stars Football and Netball Club

The Fitzroy Stars was first formed in the 1970's as a sports club providing Aboriginal Victorians a place to spend the weekends, giving families a place to participate in sport and an important weekly community space to gather. Unfortunately, in the 1990's the Stars disbanded and was in the wilderness until 2007 when the Aboriginal community of Melbourne, recognizing the importance of the central meeting place that the Stars provided, fought for its reinstatement.

Since the Stars reinvigoration the football and netball club has gone from strength to strength. This is because the Stars provide more than the opportunity to get on the football field or netball court. They are a sports club with a mission to nurture a culture that promotes a healthy lifestyle, fitness, nutrition and self-esteem, that builds bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and provides pathways to employment for Aboriginal people. The Stars are a strong example of Aboriginal health promotion through sport; building community cohesion and providing positive images of Aboriginal people in Victoria.

The vision of the Stars brings together the strengths of heritage and aspirations of the future. VicHealth along with other Government and non-government organisations are providing funding to support the long term sustainability of the club. This ensures the Aboriginal community of Melbourne maintains a place that fosters a sense of achievement, pride and unity in partnership with the non-Indigenous community.

Harnessing the power of sport to effect change in Aboriginal Communities

VicHealth is guided by the Victorian Aboriginal evidence based health promotion resource and framework titled *Life is health is life* which defines best practice principles for Aboriginal health promotion. These best practice principles are based on the current evidence base, which emphasises the importance of self-determination, social, historical and cultural determinants, educational attainment and lifestyle factors. Specifically, these VicHealth principles specify that health promotion practice should be:

- Inclusive of historical, social and cultural context
- 'Community centred practice' – community owned and driven, builds on strengths to address community priorities
- Flexible, allowing for innovation and accountable
- Comprehensive with multiple strategies to address all the determinants
- Sustainable in terms of funding, program and governance
- Evidence based with built in monitoring and evaluation systems
- Build and sustain the social, human and economic capital from a strengths based perspective.

VicHealth is also guided by our commitments to *Close the Gap* in which we are a Victorian signatory onto the *Close the Gap Statement of Intent*. Specific guidelines in this document focused on health promotion include:

- To ensuring the full participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies in all aspects of addressing their health needs
- To working collectively to systematically address the social determinants that impact on achieving health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- To building on the evidence base and supporting what works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and relevant international experience
- To supporting and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services in urban, rural and remote areas in order to achieve lasting improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing
- To respect and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- To measure, monitor, and report on our joint efforts, in accordance with benchmarks and targets, to ensure that we are progressively realising our shared ambitions.

Through the experience of VicHealth's funding, research and program development and implementation both directly with Aboriginal communities and as a driving source of support for sporting organisations, a number of important lessons have been learnt regarding the key components necessary to ensure the successful utilisation of sport as a vehicle to genuinely improve social and health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

These components include the importance of co-creation of programs, innovation, recognition of history, use of common and meaningful language, understanding of health and wellbeing in an Aboriginal context, long term funding and time commitment, shared skill development, knowledge sharing and support, cultural awareness, trust development and a people centered approach.

Co-creation of programs provides the opportunity for those directly impacted by programs and initiatives, for example Aboriginal communities who are the intended beneficiaries of funding programs, to be actively involved in the early stages of program development. Co-creation processes provide for a more collaborative engagement, with greater interaction and intensity of participation among funders, partners and communities and enhance the empowerment and ownership that is important in successfully ensuring sport has the capacity to contribute positively to Aboriginal wellbeing.

Innovation in program design, delivery methods and evaluation are important to ensure an evolution of approaches and that lessons are learnt from previous activities. For example, many of VicHealth's recent funding programs focus on building the internal capacity of sporting organisations to work with underrepresented communities, including Aboriginal communities. This has shifted from direct program delivery to ensuring that funded organisations have governance procedures and internal policies in place that reflect an ongoing commitment to access and inclusion. This provides for a more sustainable, innovative delivery model.

Recognition of history and use of common and meaningful language is vital to ensuring sport maximizes its contribution to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities. As

outlined in the VicHealth Victorian Aboriginal evidence-based health promotion resource *Life is health is life'*

(<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Health%20Inequalities/Life%20is%20health/Life%20is%20health%20is%20life%20-%20web.ashx>) a

key determinant of Aboriginal health in Victoria relates to the history of colonization.

Including recognition of connection to country and reflecting on the strong culture and identity of Aboriginal people in the shaping of sport based interventions can contribute to acceptance and respect, both of which are key components in harnessing the power of sports contribution to Aboriginal wellbeing. Likewise, using common, meaningful and inclusive language works towards a sense of joint ownership of activities.

Sport can only contribute meaningfully to Aboriginal health and wellbeing if funding and effort is committed over a significant period of time. Many examples of the successful use of sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes in Aboriginal communities have taken a significant period of time. This involves funding bodies, from government, sport, health and community development committing to extended periods of managed funding. In particular cases, this may also include decreasing amounts over time to assist in building organisational sustainability.

Ensuring that Aboriginal people are involved in decision making and co-creation of programs is an effective method of sharing skills and knowledge sharing. Provision of opportunity to gain new skills and understanding, both for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, can add value to the way in which sport improves lives and can strengthen the mentoring component of sport development.

Finally, a people centred approach can aid opportunity for cultural development, awareness and respect and create trust in sport based partnerships. putting the needs of Aboriginal communities at the centre of decision making is an effective method of ensuring outcomes actually meet required needs, rather than purely membership or participation numbers of involved sporting organisations. With health, wellbeing and community connectedness at the centre of decision making, not only will membership and participation follow, but so will broader and more holistic outcomes for Aboriginal people.

In summary, over time Australia has progressed significantly in development of Indigenous sport. Over the next decade attention must be given to:

- 1) Creating a National sport infrastructure to support mainstream and Indigenous sporting organisations to continue to increase Indigenous participation;
- 2) Supporting and strengthening Indigenous specific sporting organisations to strengthen their work and
- 3) Resourcing and supporting innovative sustainable projects designed to increase Indigenous participation and decision making in sport at all levels.