

29 March 2018

Committee Secretary
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Re: Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) is pleased to respond to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The Sustainable Development Agenda offers an unprecedented opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. Australia can also make a major contribution to our regional neighbours' efforts to achieve sustainability, prosperity and equality within their own countries.

The following submission responds to terms of reference (b), (c) and (d), with the following key recommendations:

1. The Commonwealth Government should consider reorienting investment to prioritise health promotion and preventive health, with a focus on the social determinants of health and health equity, across all SDG.
2. The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with other levels of government, non-government organisations and a wide range of sectors, should implement the World Health Organization's [Regional action plan on health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals 2018–2030](#).
3. The Commonwealth Government should harness the expertise and knowledge of Australian World Health Organization Collaborating Centres (WHOCCs) and state-level agencies in designing and delivering Commonwealth Government action to achieve the SDG.
4. The Commonwealth Government should establish formal planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure that the outcomes of WHOCC/state-level agency action are included in Australia's reporting, and that efforts complement rather than duplicate that of the Government.

The following submission details the above recommendations, as well as providing background on VicHealth and our role in achieving the SDG.

VicHealth would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further with the Senate Committee and/or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Should you require any further information please contact Cassie Nicholls, Senior Policy Officer, on cnicholls@vichealth.vic.gov.au or 03 9667 1317.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerril Rechter', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jerril Rechter
Chief Executive Officer

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

Submission to

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

March 2018

BACKGROUND

VicHealth overview

The [Victorian Health Promotion Foundation \(VicHealth\)](#) was established under the *Tobacco Act 1987* (Vic). We are a pioneer in health promotion – the process of enabling people to increase control over and improve their health. Our primary focus is promoting good health and preventing chronic disease.

We seek to make health gains among Victorians by pre-empting and targeting improvements in health across our population, fostered within the day-to-day spaces where people spend their time, and with benefits to be enjoyed by all.

VicHealth's [Action Agenda for Health Promotion](#) focuses on five strategic imperatives with associated goals and three-year priorities:

- promoting healthy eating
- encouraging regular physical activity
- preventing tobacco use
- preventing harm from alcohol
- improving mental wellbeing.

VicHealth's focus on the Sustainable Development Goals

VicHealth is strongly committed to the principles of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Our work directly contributes to Australia's achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3: Good health and wellbeing, in particular targets 3.4 (noncommunicable diseases), 3.5 (alcohol), 3.10 (tobacco), and 3.12 and 3.13 (capacity building).

Beyond SDG3, we make major contributions to a number of other SDG, including:

- SDG1: No poverty
- SDG4: Quality education
- SDG5: Gender equality (e.g. through our [Gender Equality, Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2017–19](#))
- SDG8: Decent work and economic growth
- SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- SDG10: Reduced inequalities (e.g. through our [Health Equity Strategy 2017–19](#))
- SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities
- SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
- SDG17: Partnerships for the Goals.

We are also working to strengthen the evidence base on sustainable development, through our [SDG Partnership Grant Round](#), which aims to build collaborative research partnerships with the potential to address the impacts of global megatrends on specific SDG targets.

VicHealth has been designated as the [World Health Organization Collaborating Centre \(WHOCC\) for Leadership in Health Promotion](#). In this role, we work with current and emerging leaders across the Western Pacific Region and beyond to build health promotion capacity, in turn building their capability to achieve the SDG within their own countries.

Based on this experience, VicHealth makes the following key recommendations to the inquiry, focused on our areas of expertise under terms of reference (b), (c) and (d).

INQUIRY TOR (B): Potential costs, benefits and opportunities

RECOMMENDATION 1: Prioritise health promotion and preventive health, with a focus on the social determinants of health and health equity, across all SDG

A key opportunity for the Commonwealth Government in implementing the SDG is to use health promotion and preventive health approaches across all SDG, with the aim of preventing noncommunicable disease and promoting health and wellbeing.

Australia's population is ageing and becoming more urban. At the same time, health inequities are widening. Most deaths in Australia are the result of noncommunicable diseases, such as stroke, cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Many of these are preventable.

Reorienting health funding and considering preventive health across all government portfolios will ensure that all Australians have access to the 'prerequisites for health' as outlined in the [Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion](#): peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity.¹

At the heart of this endeavour is an Australia where everyone has the opportunity for a healthy life. This means addressing health inequities by making the greatest health promotion efforts where the greatest health gains are likely.² The Commonwealth Government could consider [Fair foundations: The VicHealth framework for health equity](#) as a guide to ensure action to implement the SDG achieves health equity and is proportionate to need, particularly as it relates to SDG1, 3, 5 and 10.

Achieving equitable outcomes across all SDG will require action from a wide range of sectors and government portfolios, including health, housing and planning, employment, education, agriculture, media, community services, sport, the arts, industry, workplaces, law, local and state/territory governments, and more. The Commonwealth Government should ensure that a whole-of-government approach is embedded in action to achieve the SDG, and continue to establish and strengthen partnerships with all sectors.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Implement the World Health Organization Western Pacific Region (WHO-WPRO) *Regional action plan on health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals 2018–2030*

A key opportunity for Australia to implement the SDG and meet global commitments is by implementing the WHO-WPRO [Regional action plan on health promotion in the sustainable development goals 2018–2030](#). The Regional Action Plan provides a roadmap for Western Pacific countries to address the social determinants of health and health equity, prevent risk factors for noncommunicable diseases, and achieve the UN targets across multiple SDG.

The Plan outlines four key strategic approaches:

- **Mainstreaming:** Integrate health promotion and healthy settings into development for the achievement of the SDG, and shape budget allocations accordingly.
- **Accelerating action:** Expand the scope and reach of health promotion, with a focus on speeding up action where need is greatest, to achieve equity.
- **Policy support:** Ensure alignment of policies across sectors and levels to address the determinants of health and health equity.

- **Strengthening capacity:** Enhance health promotion human resources, sustainable financing, accountability and information systems.³

VicHealth strongly recommends that the Commonwealth Government implements the Plan under its existing WHO and UN commitments, and works closely with all levels of government, health promotion practitioners and other sectors to achieve its objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Harness the expertise and knowledge of Australian World Health Organization Collaborating Centres and state-level agencies

[WHO Collaborating Centres](#) (WHOCCs) are research institutes, parts of universities and government bodies that are designated by the WHO Director-General to carry out activities in support of the WHO's programs. Currently there are 49 WHOCCs in Australia working on areas such as health promotion, health literacy, communicable diseases, nutrition, mental health and much more.

These Australian WHOCCs can provide a valuable and accessible resource for the Commonwealth Government. VicHealth and our partner WHOCCs would welcome greater interaction with the Commonwealth Government, and can provide expert advice to relevant government departments when designing and delivering Commonwealth action to implement the SDG.

As a state-level statutory body, VicHealth would also welcome greater engagement with the Commonwealth Government to share our evidence on initiatives that could be scaled up nationally or within relevant jurisdictions to aid Commonwealth action to implement the SDG.

INQUIRY TOR (C): Governance structures and accountability measures

RECOMMENDATION 4: Establish formal planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms around WHOCC and state-level action

VicHealth strongly recommends that the Commonwealth Government works with WHOCCs and state-level agencies to establish and/or strengthen existing planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms. There is a vast body of preventive health activity under way in various jurisdictions and organisations that may not be captured within existing mechanisms.

A formal planning mechanism would ensure that efforts complement rather than duplicate that of the Commonwealth Government and vice versa. Formal monitoring and reporting mechanisms would assist the Government in its reporting to the UN by effectively capturing the extent and outcomes of WHOCC and state-level action.

INQUIRY TOR (D): Monitoring and communicating performance

VicHealth's response to term of reference (d) is covered in the recommendations above, i.e.:

- **RECOMMENDATION 3:** Harness the expertise and knowledge of Australian World Health Organization Collaborating Centres (WHOCCs) and state-level agencies
- **RECOMMENDATION 4:** Establish formal planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms around WHOCC and state-level action

References

¹ World Health Organization 2017, *Regional action plan on health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals (2018–2030)*, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, <http://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/13964>

² VicHealth 2017, *VicHealth health equity strategy 2017–19*, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/vichealth-health-equity-strategy-2017-19>

³ World Health Organization 2017, *Regional action plan on health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals (2018–2030)*, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, p. viii.