



Victorian Healthcare Association

Submission to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Terms of Reference and Principles of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission.

The Victorian Healthcare Association

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA), established in 1938, is the major peak body representing the interests of the public healthcare sector in Victoria. Our membership includes public hospitals, rural and regional health services, community health services and aged care facilities.

In preparing this submission, the VHA has consulted with its members and distilled a shared position aimed at improving the health of Victorians. This submission remains the position of the VHA and does not supersede any submission or position stated by any member agency.

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Please find the VHA's full submission attached. A summary is provided below.

Focusing on Prevention

The VHA commends the NHHRC's efforts in bringing prevention, wellness and primary health care into focus and believes such principles underpin a preventative approach for the health system. Victoria is a leader in prevention and health promotion and the VHA believes many of its programs warrant utilisation at a national level. The public health system must develop and fund packages of care that support holistic client management. It is always in the system's interest to keep people well, but this requires key performance indicators (KPI) of success. The VHA calls for additional resources to invest in the transition from the current bed-based acute focus, to appropriate ambulatory case management approaches. This shift will require directing significant resources to capacity building in the health system to address population health issues that transit care models from the bed-based environment to community models.

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Mental Health

A major omission in the NHHRC's terms of reference is in the area of mental health. The growing prevalence of mental health issues, particularly in rural areas, and the linkages to chronic disease highlight the critical need for this focus. These include developing depression or other associated mental illness, family breakdown, increased incidence in substance abuse and increased incidence of domestic violence.

Victorian Innovation

Victoria's public health system offers many benchmark programs suitable for adoption across Australia. Examples include the **Hospital Admission Risk program (HARP)**¹ that has demonstrated reduced hospitalisations. **Sustainable Farm Families**² has shown innovation in improving rural health. The **Rural Maternity Initiative**³ provides flexible maternity services for people living in regional areas and various local projects funded by **Go For Your Life**⁴ have improved individual physical and social health outcomes. These models have relevance to the Australian community but require significant investment.

Boards of Governance

The Victorian model of governance with boards of governance at its core provides unique opportunities for planning systematically and debating issues at a representative level, within the community.

The VHA believes local communities deserve a greater say in their health facilities and calls on the NHHRC to set a national framework to ensure health services base their strategic planning on population health needs.

Consultation

Framing a modern health system requires widespread consultation. Any consultation should engage all stakeholders including consumers, non-consumers and carers. This requires educating health consumers and arming them with the knowledge to make decisions about health expectations and priorities. The NHHRC needs also to develop a framework to facilitate widespread community consultation. It is vital to bring communities and the media on a journey through the reform process, demonstrating the shifts required in policy and the resultant investment and expenditure outcomes.

Workforce Challenges and Changes

The creation of new categories of health workers is an Australian Health Workforce Institute objective that is supported by the VHA. Changing the dynamics of the health workforce will assist in overcoming inequity of service provision. **Bendigo Community Health** implemented **nurse practitioners** into their organisation to better meet service delivery needs. In 2003, the **Rural Men’s Health Nurse Practitioner Project**⁵ was established and has reduced the demands on an over-stretched rural health system. However, current funding models block such initiatives. It is vital that the NHHRC address these issues and overcome jurisdictional prejudices that frustrate more flexible workplace solutions.

Comment

The VHA has consistently advocated for health reform through its position statements that are sent to all Victorian politicians:

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| <p>Tackling Obesity: Healthy Food Labelling in Victoria's Health Services (2008)</p> <p>Link</p> | <p>Creating Healthy Communities: Reforming the Australian Health System (2007)</p> <p>Link</p> | <p>Creating Healthy Communities: Primary Health Care in Australia (2007)</p> <p>Link</p> | <p>A Whole of Health Approach (2007)</p> <p>Link</p> |

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The VHA has highlighted the significant issues that must be addressed to reorient the Victorian health system to a population health approach. Among these issues are: more resources for health promotion, prevention, early intervention and primary health care strategies.

Victoria has a unique service delivery structure compared to the other States of Australia. Our hospital and community health centres are held accountable by a governance structure, expressed through local boards of governance. We embrace this uniqueness. In this context, I believe the VHA has the capacity to provide an important and pertinent contribution to any consideration of systemic health reform at a federal level.

Notes:

1. Hospital Admission Risk program (HARP) – (<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/harp-cdm/>)
2. Sustainable Farm Families - (<http://www.sustainablefarmfamilies.org.au>)
3. Rural Maternity Initiative – (http://www.health.vic.gov.au/maternitycare/serv_statement2004.pdf)
4. Go For Your Life - (<http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au>)
5. Bendigo Community Health Rural Men's Health Nurse Practitioner Project – (http://www.health.vic.gov.au/nursing/furthering/practitioner/a_day_in_the_life.../alfred6)



The VHA is able to assist the NHHRC. Please contact our chief executive, Trevor Carr (03) 9094 7777 or 0409 362 382.