

Municipal Public Health Plan Questionnaire Summary Report

November 2000

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Introduction

The Public Health Division of the Department of Human Services is coordinating a process with the Municipal Association of Victoria, Victorian Local Governance Association and other stakeholders to develop a Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) framework (previously referred to as a template) to encourage municipal public health planning of a high standard and provide consistency in the scope and approach across the state.

In August 2000 a questionnaire was sent to all Victorian local governments. The questionnaire sought information about the status and content of current MPHPs, and to uncover issues requiring consideration in the development of a new planning framework. The questionnaire was intended to provide information on good practice, and model planning processes that could be incorporated into a planning framework. Responses were received from 59 local governments. Additional data was received from seven DHS Regions and minutes from a regional local government workshop to explore the development of a consistent planning approach to MPHPs and Community Health Plans.

MPHP Status Summary

The current status for the MPHPs of the 78 Councils around Victoria is presented below:

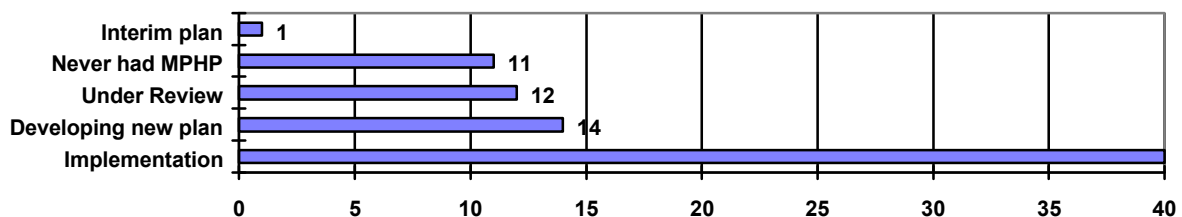


Figure 1: Current Status of MPHPs

Elements of an Effective MPHP

From the responses received from Councils participating in this survey, and the additional comment received from several regions, the following summary of the elements that make up an effective MPHP has been developed. These elements are interdependent and would need to be implemented concurrently. It is hoped that this summary will enable further discussion and inform the development of the MPHP framework.

Strategic Plans Containing Clear Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Intended Outcomes, Timelines, Performance Indicators and Evaluation Strategies

MPHPs need to be visible and tangible documents that incorporate community views, aspirations and issues with some measures to address them. Their adoption will create clear, concise goals, objectives, strategies, timelines, staff allocations, guidelines for work and funding priorities, and will ensure that health targets are clearly defined, measurable and achievable. Effective plans will also identify intended outcomes and describe the monitoring and evaluation strategies that will be used to assess performance.

Local Health Issues Highlighted

MPHPs play an important role in highlighting local health issues and providing a vehicle by which to address them. They provide an accurate picture of local health needs and access to local health services. They set policy direction of public health at the local level. They reflect the needs and attitudes of the community by containing specific activities addressing particular health issues of importance for the local community. By incorporating well-researched data and information, MPHPs will provide a sound platform for further planning and funding applications. Councils stressed the need for State-level assistance in collecting, collating and reporting data on local health needs and outcomes.

Community Involvement in Identifying, Prioritising and Acting on Local Issues

Effective MPHPs promote community involvement and ownership, which translate into an overall commitment from the community to the plan. These MPHPs present opportunities for more people and organisations to participate in the creation of health, rather than traditional health plans, which had a tendency to simply allocate all tasks within the plan to council officers. Community consultation was seen as a core process in developing trustful relationships, obtaining valid data and developing useful plans. As such, effective MPHPs enhance opportunities for local development of social capital.

Embrace New Public Health Principles (Social Model of Health)

Linked with the need for MPHPs to have a measurable impact on the community and to draw on valid data sources, is the need for MPHPs to be based on a soundly researched and documented model. They will allow for progressive qualitative and quantitative research to be undertaken at the local level. Effective MPHPs enable Councils to integrate a social model of health into public health planning. These plans integrate areas such as Community Health and Education, Community Development and Support, Community Safety and Security, Healthy Lifestyles and Healthy Environment

Whole-of-Council Involvement in Health Planning

To have maximum impact, MPHPs need to embrace – and be embraced by – all sections of Council. Linking and integrating MPHPs with other plans – especially the Corporate Plan – has the potential to involve a wide range of internal and external partners, thereby improving collaboration within Council and with outside organisations and local agencies. MPHPs are

...serving to increase internal and external awareness of Councils’ role in promoting public health. MPHPs need to be afforded sufficient internal acknowledgement and commitment in order to bring health planning into the mainstream of Council planning.

Integration of MPHP with Local, State and National Health Issues

Effective MPHPs will be based on a municipal health profile that addresses need, based on the National, State and Local health priorities identified during the initial planning stages. MPHPs need to be linked not only with internal plans, such as the corporate plan, but also with other planning, such as regional community health planning. Respondents felt that clarification is needed about future relationships between MPHPs and Community Health Plans; several called for enhanced coordination of efforts between sub-regional local government areas.

MPHPs Foster Effective Partnerships and Networking Between Agencies

MPHPs will be instrumental in promoting cooperative and collaborative networks and partnerships throughout the municipality amongst allied workers and other stakeholders who are often working to achieve complementary outcomes. MPHPs will provide opportunities to develop partnerships and combine resources in health promotion, advocacy and service provision. Treating MPHP as municipal-wide plan, rather than Council-owned program, has the potential to gain commitment from external agencies and community groups.

Steering Committees and Working Groups Integral to Successful Planning

Respondents identified the centrality of well-resourced steering committees and working groups to the implementation of the MPHP. Inherent in the variety of names and functions of management groups identified by respondents is a range of delegated power and control held by the management group over the process of developing, implementing and overseeing the MPHP program or feature.

Positive Features Observed in MPHPs

Positive features observed in MPHPs included:

- Providing a strategic planning focus
- Promoting useful partnerships and networks throughout the municipality
- Highlighting local health issues and providing a vehicle by which to address them
- Involving all divisions of Council
- Promoting community involvement and ownership
- Enabling Councils to integrate a social model of health into public health planning
- Linking regional, state and national priorities

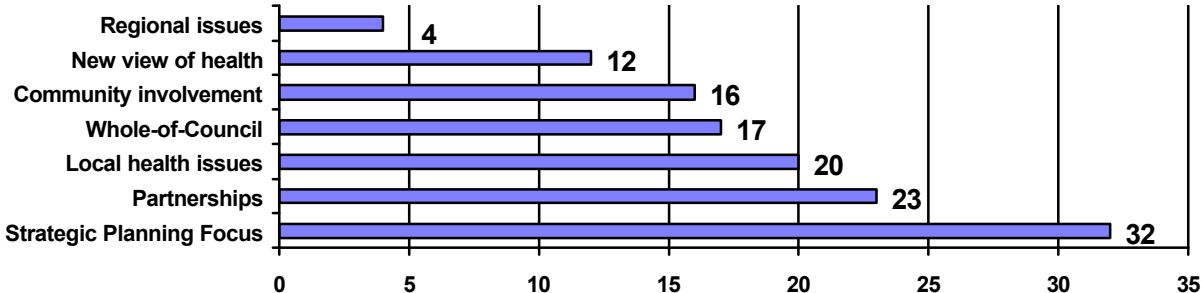


Figure 2: Positive Features Observed in MPHPs

Successful Processes Experienced or Observed

A wide range of positive processes were reported, in the areas of:

- Strategic Planning – achievable plans with clear strategies and measurable outcomes; linked and integrated plans, especially the Corporate Plan; soundly researched health profiles; and policy development
- Partnership Development – facilitating internal and external interaction between departments and health service providers and the setting of common goals
- Community Involvement – a core process in developing trustful relationships, obtaining valid data and developing useful plans
- Working Arrangements – well-resourced steering committees and working groups to the implementation of the MPHP
- Whole-of-Council Approach - encouraging and facilitating participation in and commitment to public health across Council, particularly at the executive level.

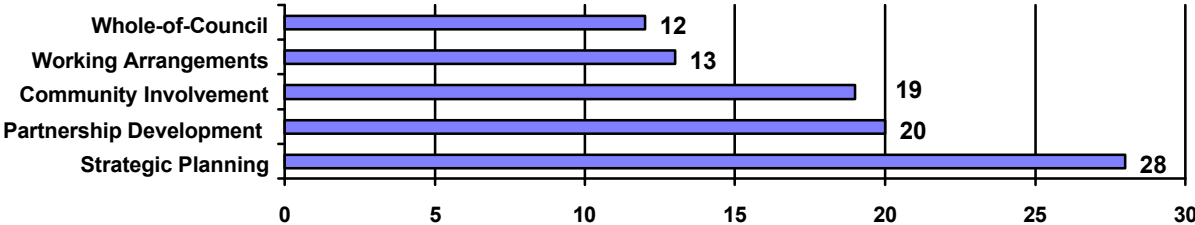


Figure 3. Successful Processes Experienced in MPHPs

Suggestions for Improving MPHP Implementation

One-hundred-and-sixty-three suggestions were received for improving the implementation of MPHPs. Suggestions fell into the following categories:

- Improved planning through: a whole of council approach, improved data, better evaluation, making plans more practical and a better grounding in theory
- Improved access to resources
- Enhanced collaborative partnerships between Councils and other stakeholders across sectors
- Meaningful community involvement at all stages of development
- A planning framework to clearly define a common structure for MPHPs, indicate their scope and which core elements should be included, and promote best practice examples
- Internal council changes, such as raising the profile of the importance of MPHPs to Councils’ corporate planning process
- Enhanced coordination of efforts between sub-regional local government areas
- Enhanced reporting and communication of outcomes

Need for Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

A noteworthy feature of the questionnaire analysis was the scarcity of reported evaluation strategies and performance indicators built into MPHPs. Respondents largely indicated whether they had included outcome measures and evaluation processes in their plans, without actually detailing them. This in part reflects limitations in the questionnaire construction, which did not explicitly ask respondents to list outcome measures or explain evaluation processes. It also highlights the difficulty in measuring demonstrable health outcomes that

may be long-term in nature. Furthermore, outcome measures in health are frequently couched in terms of deficit reduction, as opposed to competency development.

Local Area Issues

Settings for health development

The following settings for health development were identified:

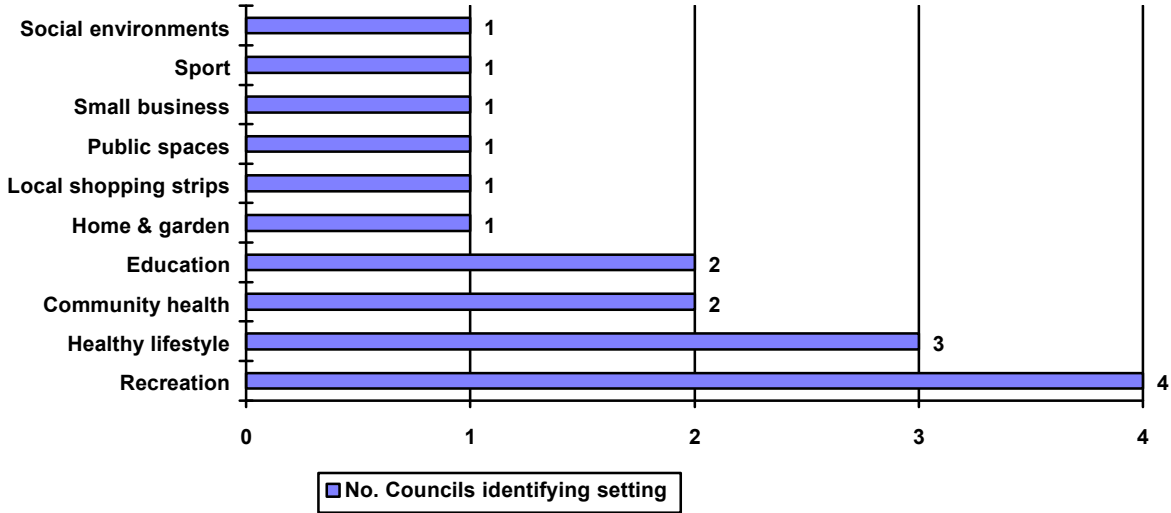


Figure 4. Health Development Settings Identified in MPHPs

Risk Factors Targeted in MPHPs

Councils identified a wide range of disease or risk factors in their MPHPs, as demonstrated below. ‘Cancer’ included four mentions of skin cancer. ‘Injury Prevention’ included five references to falls prevention.

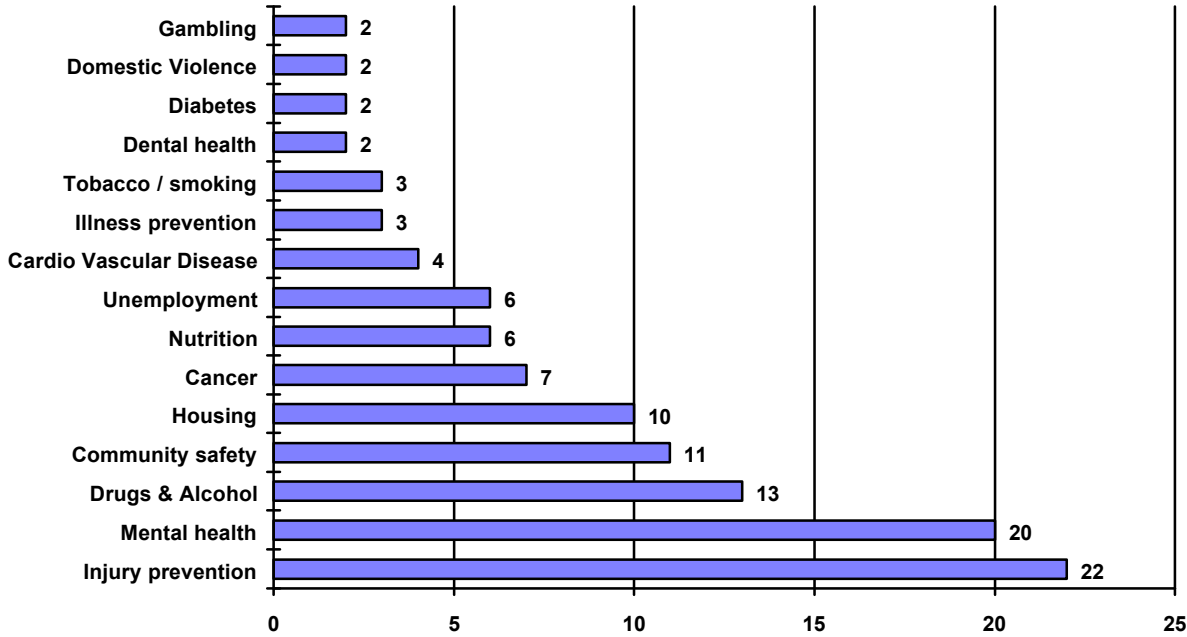


Figure 5: Risk Factors Identified in MPHPs

Local Target Populations and Groups

A wide range of target groups was identified for health development action, as shown below. The category of ‘older people’ included one council targeting older people with disabilities. The category of ‘families’ included one program aimed at young families. Target groups included in the ‘other’ category included single councils identifying: adults aged 25-39, all ages, city workers, Kooris, low income earners, migrants, minorities, new arrivals to the local government area, parents, residents, small communities, students, transient / disadvantaged people, and visitors.

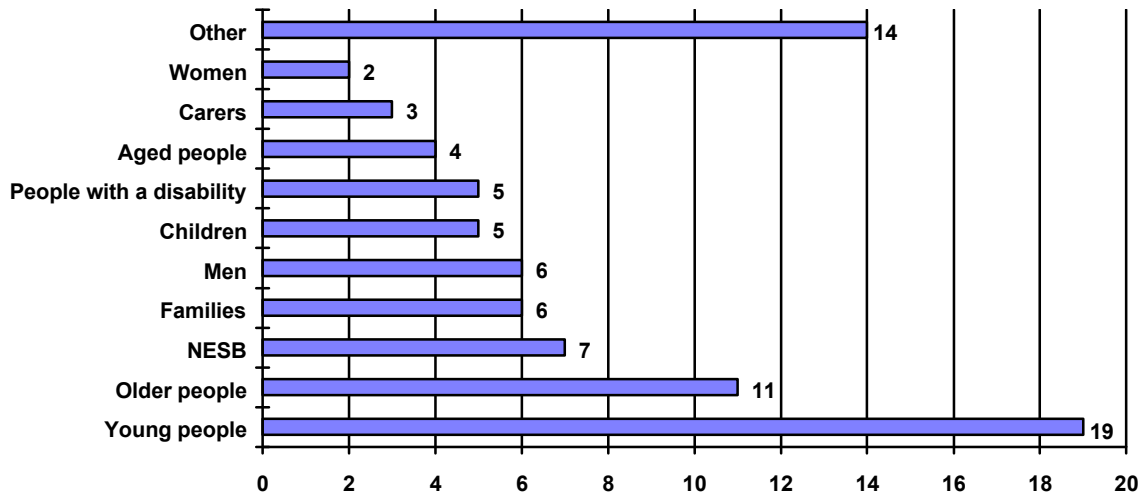


Figure 6. Target Groups Identified in MPHPs

National Health Priorities

National health priorities were identified in 42 of the 59 detailed returned surveys, a response rate of 71%. Injury prevention and mental health were mentioned most frequently.

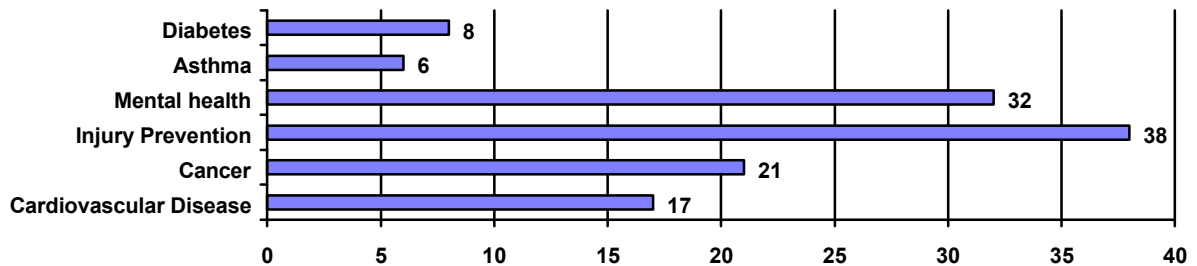


Figure 7: National Health Priorities Identified in MPHPs

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