The McCaughey Centre
VicHealth Centre for the
Promotion of Mental Health
and Community Wellbeing

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

4 October 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Community Indicators Victoria's submission to: Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health report "Closing the gap within a generation"

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs regarding Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health report "Closing the gap within a generation".

I am pleased to enclose general feedback and recommendations from Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) for consideration. Please also note that CIV is hosted by the School of Population Health within the University of Melbourne and that there are a number of separate submissions also provided by other areas of the School.

For all inquiries related to this submission please contact Micaela Drieberg on 03 8344 9101 or mdrieberg@unimelb.edu.au .

Yours sincerely,

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Community Indicators Victoria

For informed, engaged and well planned communities

Contents

Background

Community Indicators Victoria

Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) aims to support the development and use of local community wellbeing indicators in Victoria, Australia, with the purpose of improving citizen engagement, community planning and policy making. CIV presents data and reports on the wellbeing of Victorians using an integrated set of community wellbeing indicators via an interactive website[1]. These indicators include a broad range of measures designed to identify and communicate trends and outcomes according to five major domains of wellbeing: social; economic; environmental; democratic; and cultural.

The comprehensive framework of indicators included in CIV was determined by the Victorian Community Indicators Project commissioned by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation VicHealth (VicHealth) to establish a sustainable statewide system of local community wellbeing indicators (Wiseman et al., 2006). The project completed extensive consultation with local and state government, academics and a literature review in order to develop a framework of indicators for measuring the wellbeing of Victorians.

The objectives of CIV are to:

- provide a sustainable mechanism for the collation, analysis and distribution of local community wellbeing indicator trend data across Victoria;
- be a resource centre supporting the development and use of local community wellbeing indicators by local governments and their communities; and
- contribute to national and international policy research on the development and use of local community wellbeing indicators as a basis for improving community engagement, community planning and policy making.

CIV is a collaborative project, funded by VicHealth and hosted by the McCaughey Centre, Melbourne School of Population Health, at the University of Melbourne. The McCaughey Centre works in partnership with a wide range of government, community, and academic organisations to ensure that CIV is based on policy relevant research and remains in touch with the needs of its users.

The McCaughey Centre VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing

The McCaughey Centre[2] was established in the School of Population Health, University of Melbourne, in June 2006 with core funding provided by VicHealth and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences. The purpose of the McCaughey Centre is to create and share knowledge which strengthens the foundations of healthy, just and resilient communities leading to improved mental health and community wellbeing. The Mission of the McCaughey Centre is to undertake policy and practice-relevant research to improve the social, economic and environmental conditions for health, equity and community wellbeing. Our Vision is to be recognized internationally as a centre of excellence for research that promotes equity, empowerment, harmony, health and community wellbeing. The McCaughey Centre is supported by and works closely with VicHealth which defines mental health as 'the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just'.

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[1] www.communityindicators.net.au
[2] www.mccaugheycentre.unimelb.edu.au

Melbourne School of Population Health

The Melbourne School of Population Health (MSPH)[3] was established at the University of Melbourne within the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences in 2001. The School aims to strengthen the understanding, capacity and services of society to meet population health needs and to improve the quality and equity of health care. It employs a population health framework that incorporates public health and preventative medicine, health promotion, clinical medicine and allied healthcare disciplines and an evidence-based approach to health care. MSPH places particular emphasis on indigenous health. Its research programs aim to elucidate the genetic, environmental, social and economic determinants of health, and also focus on the evaluation of the health systems, programs and services that seek to prevent disease and injury and to promote health. The School provides research and professional development opportunities for medical undergraduates, postgraduates in a wide range of disciplines, clinicians in all sectors of the health care industry, scientists, professionals and leaders in population health.

The School is comprised of nine Centres and Units. They are:

- Centre for Health and Society (joint Centre with the Faculty of Arts)

- Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics

- Centre for International Mental Health

- McCaughey Centre (VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing)

- Centre for Molecular, Environmental, Genetic and Analytic (MEGA) Epidemiology

- Centre for Women's Health, Gender and Society

- Sexual Health Unit

- Vaccine and Immunisation Research Group (VIRGo)

- Indigenous Eye Health Unit

The Centres and Units accommodated at 207 Bouverie Street are the Centre for Health and Society (CHS, incorporating the Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit), the Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics (CHPPE), Centre for International Mental Health (CIMH), the McCaughey Centre, the Indigenous Eye Health Unit, Centre for Molecular, Environmental, Genetic and Analytic (MEGA) Epidemiology and the Centre for Women's Health, Gender and Society (CWHGS) and the School Executive and Academic Programs Office. The nearby on Swanston Street incorporates the School's Sexual Health Unit. The School also houses the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, and the Melbourne University-Murdoch Children's Research Institute collaborative Vaccine and Immunisation Research Group (VIRGo). The Centre for Women's Health, Gender and Society and the Centre for International Mental Health are official World Health Collaborating Centres.

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[3] www.sph.unimelb.edu.au

Responses to Terms of Reference

Extent to which the Commonwealth is adopting social determinants of health approach through:

(i) Relevant Commonwealth programs and services,

It is noted that the current government has a demonstrated interest in adopting a social determinants of health approach with the introduction of relatively new innovative entities such as the Australian National Preventative Health Agency and Social Inclusion Board. Such structures have a strong emphasis on equity and prevention however strategies and programs developed and delivered as a result, need to improve their reach and influence beyond the traditional health and community sectors.

Commonwealth programs and services addressing social determinants such as gender, housing, education, safety and transport have a direct influence on individual health yet are often not recognised as relevant agencies when discussing health outcomes. CIV supports and resources Local Governments across Victoria and the most common issues of concern in policy and planning focus on transport and housing needs which have substantial influence on the health outcomes of the community. These issues are particularly important in the metropolitan growth areas of Melbourne and poor transport is a major influence of employment and educational opportunities, access to services, social isolation and domestic violence.

Recommendations

CIV recommends that future programs and services aimed at improving health outcomes for Australians are developed in areas beyond traditional health outcomes and focus on upstream determinants of health such as education, housing, transport, social cohesion and economic participation. Upstream interventions addressing these issues are amenable to application at Local Government Areas with population level outcomes monitored by measures included within the CIV framework of wellbeing.

(ii) The structures and activities of national health agencies, and

Further to the previous comment regarding Commonwealth programs and services we again reiterate that whilst the structures and activities of national *health* agencies are important factors for influencing the health of our country, it should be recognised that social determinants of health are influenced by other professions and sectors outside of the traditional health sector and this is where further emphasis and education should ideally be placed.

(iii) Appropriate Commonwealth data gathering and analysis; and

Within Victoria, CIV is the leading body supporting state and local government planning and policy staff with data gathering and analysis to develop, monitor and evaluate relevant plans and policies. Further to this, CIV also works with many other interested agencies and non government organisations to support evidenced based policy and planning practice. CIV is also a founding member of the Australian Community Indicators Network (ACIN) which is a national collaborating body that aims to assist people using or developing community indicators to share ideas and information, and to foster collaboration. The Network provides the opportunity for a national dialogue and knowledge base across community indicator policy, research and practice.

The CIV framework is based on a set of approximately 80 community wellbeing indicators, covering the broad spectrum of local community wellbeing. The indicators are grouped under five major domains which include:

- Healthy, safe and inclusive communities;
- Dynamic, resilient local economies;
- Sustainable built and natural environments;
- Culturally rich and vibrant communities; and
- Democratic and engaged communities.

This set of indicators is intended as a starting point for local governments and local communities so that they can identify the issues and indicators which are most important to them. A large number of indicators could potentially be included in the framework of community wellbeing indicators and current indicators must meet the following guidelines:

- Are relevant and valuable to the community;
- Are grounded in theory and have been endorsed by experts on the topic;
- Measure progress towards sustainability and/or community vision;
- Are likely to give information about the future and/or early warning signs of problems;
- Are measurable with at the Local Government Area level;
- Can be measured over time to show trends in results;
- Have regular and reliable data sources (e.g. the ABS Census);
- Can be disaggregated by population groups;
- Can be benchmarked against relevant jurisdictions;
- Are methodologically defensible;
- Are unambiguous and resonate with the general population;
- Applicable to all Victorian Local Government Areas;
- Has been supported by consultation feedback;
- Are consistent with other key government indicators.

The indicators and measures included in CIV help to provide a clearer picture of a community and how the community is tracking in key areas. In some cases, the picture presented will challenge existing wisdom and assumptions about specific issues. For this reason, CIV indicators include a mix of subjective and objective measures, allowing perceptions to be considered alongside objective measures.

Data included in the CIV framework come from a range of sources. These include the Australian Bureau of Statistics customised Census data, existing administrative data from the Victorian Government, the Community Indicators Victoria Survey (2007), and the VicHealth Indicators Survey (2011).

Recommendations

CIV recommends that additional funding and support are provided to organisations such as CIV that enable reporting and monitoring of both upstream and downstream determinants of health. Health surveillance activities typically focus on health specific direct outcomes and exclude the wider upstream determinants included, monitored and measured within CIV. The readily accessible data on social, economic, environmental, cultural and democratic indicators provided by CIV ensures reliable and valid monitoring and reporting for government and should be encouraged and supported by both Federal and State Government agencies in any targeted and well founded approach to social determinants of health. Furthermore, the Federal Government should support agencies like CIV to build capacity across Australia so that similar projects can be developed across the nation.

(d) Scope for improving awareness of social determinants of health:

CIV currently offers capacity building support in the form of several training programs including:

- Results Based Accountability (RBA)
- Introduction to Community Indicators
- Tailored training
- Geographical Information Systems support

The aforementioned programs are offered on a regular basis or as requested and have the capacity to be adapted and utilised beyond Victorian audiences.

(i) In the community,

Community wellbeing indicators provide a concrete focus to engage local citizens and strengthen communities. The process of developing community wellbeing indicators and community plans is an excellent way to inform and involve local people and organisations, and is a meaningful task for citizens to engage in. It enables them to identify key issues, discuss priorities, and plan future directions for their community. For example, the Port Phillip City Council in Victoria developed a project called The Community Pulse to help achieve local environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability. They identified a set of critical indicators for measuring progress over time.

One of three important goals of The Community Pulse is to show the community how they can act to improve their environment, health and wellbeing and achieve their vision of a sustainable community. Their website lists the indicators and a range of suggested actions. One of the exciting aspects of The Community Pulse is that the website also guides residents in how to collect 'data' locally to help build a stronger community. For example, residents are supported to become a 'smile

spy' and count the number of smiles per 15 minutes they encounter on the streets in their local area. These are then converted into Smiles per Hour. This is a fun way for local residents to start conversations about actions they can take to improve community wellbeing. Indicators and data available through CIV adds to the evidence base of The Community Pulse and provides a spring board for other innovative community actions.

(ii) Within government programs, and

Community wellbeing indicators help Councils to shift their focus from inputs (e.g., dollars spent on recreational facilities) and outputs (eg. new parks and sporting facilities) to outcomes and practical results for their communities. They are an important tool for monitoring results and progress over time. To achieve their vision the Moreland City Council identified four key goals and fourteen areas for action. Indicators were been chosen for each action area and data collected to help the Council and community to see where improvements have been made and where effort was still required.

A quick glance at Moreland's Indicators for Health Safety and Wellbeing webpage provides a snap shot of how the community is faring, for example in labour force participation. Indicators for some action areas have until now not been available. CIV provides the framework and data to further strengthen the understanding of community wellbeing outcomes by Moreland City Council and their communities.

The City of Ballarat has also been working in partnership with CIV for the last 5 years to devise evidence based community health planning. Prior to 2007, planning for community health and wellbeing was based on only limited access to reliable and meaningful local data. However, this changed following the launch of CIV in 2007. Council adopted the robust CIV framework of wellbeing due to the close alignment with the social determinants of health model, and because of the provision of up-to-date, accessible and reliable data for local communities. This information provided the context and credibility for council with social planners able to set priorities and inform discussions about potential solutions.

(iii) Amongst health and community service providers

Community wellbeing data provides the basis for Councils to engage other organisations in discussions about how best to respond to local needs and issues. A Community Engagement Framework was developed by the Mildura Rural City Council. The Framework responds to community wellbeing trends and issues arising from the Mildura Social Indicators Report.

This information was used to examine the match between key wellbeing issues and the delivery of services locally by Council and other organisations. Council took a lead role in planning, with other key stakeholders, to respond to identified gaps in service delivery and established operational groups to respond to headline issues. CIV provides new data for the Framework to help the Mildura Rural City Council and their key partners to learn even more about the wellbeing of the community.