

The National Public Health Partnership

The National Public Health Partnership was established in 1996 through a Memorandum of Understanding between the State, Territory and Commonwealth Health Ministers. It is the peak intergovernmental forum on public health issues reporting directly to the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC).

The Partnership group members include senior public health officials from the States, Territories and the Commonwealth health departments and representatives of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the National Health and Medical Research Council. A representative of the Ministry of Health of New Zealand attends Partnership meetings as an observer. The Partnership has an advisory group of representatives of peak non-government and professional organisations with an interest in Public Health, and the chair of the Advisory Group also attends Partnership meetings.

In the early years of its work the Partnership focused its attention on public health infrastructure issues such as information, public health practice and planning issues, workforce issues, research and legislative reform and established the National Public Health Information Working Group and the Legislative Reform Working Group.

In 1999 a decision was made by AHMAC that all public health committees reporting to AHMAC would become committees of the Partnership, hence the then Communicable Diseases Network Australia New Zealand became a sub committee of the Partnership and a member of the Partnership was appointed as the Chair of the Network.

This decision coincided with a general shift in the Partnership's agenda to include specific priority public health issues along with issues of public health practice and infrastructure. The Partnership now has a number of subcommittees addressing the range of public health priority issues in addition to Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA), including:

- enHealth Council, addressing environmental health matters;
- SIGNAL, the Strategic Intergovernmental Nutrition Alliance;
- SIGPAH, the Strategic Intergovernmental Forum on Physical Activity;

- SIPP, the Strategic Injury Prevention Partnership;
- CHIP, the Child and Youth Health Intergovernmental Partnership; and
- PHGWG, the Public Health Genetics Working Group.

The Partnership has always sought to work in partnership with other key groups and has joint working groups in general practice, mental health and healthy ageing with other key national bodies.

The Partnership has a number of major ongoing projects including:

- Development of the Public Health Evidence Schema. This project is developing a schema for considering evidence in relation to public health interventions which is broader than assessment based on a hierarchy of evidence more suitable for clinical practice and more readily addresses issues such as context.
- Development of public health performance indicators. A consultation process is currently underway in the States and Territories to assess appropriate indicators for public health for inclusion in national health performance reporting.
- The Public Health Expenditure Project which reports on expenditure in a number of categories of public health practice across the States, Territories and the Commonwealth.
- Development of a framework for public health workforce studies.
- A project to develop guidelines for National Public Health Strategies to improve their capacity to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues.

In addition, each sub-committee has an extensive work program.

A review was conducted of the Partnership's activities over the first 5 years of its operations. This review reported to AHMAC in February 2002. At that meeting AHMAC endorsed the Partnership's continuing operation for the next 5 years and endorsed a framework for its agenda and priorities. The current Chair of AHMAC, Dr Rob Stable from Queensland, was appointed as Chair of the Partnership from June this year.

Communicable diseases remain a key priority for the Partnership under its new work program. The CDNA is strongly supported by the Partnership with project funds for some key initiatives of CDNA being funded through a cost sharing arrangement between Partnership members.

A number of key themes have been endorsed to guide the work of all sub-groups of the partnership over the next few years. These themes include:

- addressing health inequalities through public health programs and interventions;
- improving the quality of public health practice;
- engaging effectively with non-government organisations, key experts, major national structures and key consumer groups;

- strengthening the evidence for public health interventions;
- integrating key risk groups, settings and priority areas into all work programs;
- collaborating and priority setting in public health research; and
- regulatory reform.

Details of the Partnership's activities and its publications can be accessed on the Partnership's Website at: www.nphp.gov.au.

Dr Cathy Mead
Executive Officer
National Public Health Partnership