



Australian
**HEALTH
PROMOTION**
Association

Early Years Strategy

Submission

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Early Years Strategy
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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Health Promotion Association Ltd (AHPA®) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the discussion paper for an Early Years Strategy for Australia. AHPA advocates for the development of healthy living, working and recreational environments for all people. Through our work we support the participation of communities and groups in decisions that affect their health.

Australia is one of the healthiest countries in the world. This is largely because of effective public health and its core services – protection, prevention and health promotion which includes action to create and support the social and environmental conditions that enable Australians to enjoy a healthy and happy life. We are now more aware than ever of just how complex the circumstances are by which human health is influenced – policies and actions shaped by the unfair distribution of wealth, power and resources, both locally and internationally. We are also more cognisant of the range of skills and practices required to enhance individual and community capacity and act to address those forces that lead to health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. **Health promotion's role has never been so significant.**

As Australia's peak professional association for health promotion, AHPA encourages a focus on prevention and early intervention in the early years, to set the foundation for a healthy future.

About Us

Incorporated in 1990, AHPA is the only professional association specifically for people interested or involved in the practice, policy, research and study of health promotion. Our member-driven national Association represents over 1000 members and subscribers and is governed by a Board at the national level with operational branches representing all states and territories. Membership of AHPA is diverse, and includes designated health promotion practitioners, researchers and students, as well as others involved in promoting physical, mental, social, cultural and environmental health, whose primary profession or area of study may be something different, but whose responsibilities include promoting health. Members represent a broad range of sectors including health, education, welfare, environment, transport, law enforcement, town planning, housing, and politics. They are drawn from government departments and agencies, universities, non-government organisations, community-based organisations and groups, private companies, and students.

Our activities include: national registration of health promotion practitioners for the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) in Australia; national health promotion university learning and teaching network; early career support; national and local conferences and events; a tri-yearly Population Health Congress (with partners: Public Health Association of Australia, Australasian Epidemiological Association and Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine); a website providing professional and membership information; a national listserv providing members with sector news, employment, advocacy and events information; stakeholder and member communication across a range of platforms; advocacy action; strong partnership working with a range of organisations; awards; traineeships; mentoring; scholarships and bursaries; and the Health Promotion Journal of Australia, which has a strong focus on health equity and participation by First Nations people.

Our Vision

A healthy, equitable Australia.

Our Purpose

Leadership, advocacy and workforce development for health promotion practice, research, evaluation and policy.

Our Principles

- Ethical practice - Supporting culturally informed, participatory, respectful, and safe practice.
- Health equity - Addressing the sociocultural, economic, political, commercial and ecological determinants of health in order to build health equity.
- Innovative and evidence informed approaches - Promoting and supporting evidence informed research, policy and practice.
- Collaboration - Working in partnership with other organisations to improve health and wellbeing.

Our Strategy

1. Promote our profession and members
2. Advocate for health promotion
3. Build professional capacity of AHPA members
4. Support career pathways in health promotion
5. Promote equity, diversity and inclusion
6. Provide responsible and sustainable governance and management

Detailed actions to achieve the strategy can be found in our [Strategic Plan](#) document.

Achieving change

AHPA welcomes a commitment by the Commonwealth government of Australia to support the early years. In the jointly published Australian Health Promotion Association and Public Health Association of Australia policy position statement on health promotion and illness prevention (AHPA PHAA, 2021), AHPA acknowledges that:

*The determinants of health and wellbeing and inequities in health include socio-economic, cultural, commercial, political, ecological, working and environmental conditions. **Early childhood development**, social and community networks, psychosocial factors, access to quality health care programs and services and biomedical factors also impact on the health of individuals and populations. Individuals' health practices are directly and indirectly affected by social and economic contexts, which can both cause and compound poorer health outcomes (2021:4).*

The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre notes that investment in “a healthy lifestyle during preconception, pregnancy, postpartum and early life is warranted. Intervening in the first 2000 days of a child’s life (conception to age five):

- is more effective than at other times
- sets children up for a healthy life and reduces the risk of disease into adulthood
- provides economic benefits and is cost effective
- reduces health inequities throughout life
- is strongly supported by the public (TPPC, 2022).
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Further information about our suggested areas for refinement and focus in the Strategy are outlined below. More about our vision for a healthy, equitable Australia can be found in our [Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy](#).

We welcome an opportunity for further involvement in the subsequent steps towards the development of a Strategy including consultation and representation on relevant committees and working groups. For further discussion, please contact [REDACTED]



[REDACTED] | Australian Health Promotion Association

This submission was led by AHPA member [REDACTED]

Principles

At the outset, AHPA encourages an interconnected, multi strategy and sustainable approach to development of an Early Years Strategy for Australia. We suggest that this is based on the key health promotion action areas outlined in the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion which is recognised as an evidence-informed, impactful and sustainable approach to population-wide approaches for health and wellbeing. Elements are outline below.

Healthy public policy

AHPA encourages the Early Years Strategy to focus on healthy public policy. In the first instance, this includes integration with other global, national and state / territory strategies and plans which include:

- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which provide a clear direction for a united approach to wellbeing actions for people and planet including the early years.
- The World Health Organization's Geneva Charter for Wellbeing (2021) which calls for the creation of wellbeing societies.
- The Australian National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 with its vision to "improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians at all stages of life through prevention" (2021:9).
- State and Territory based health promotion plans such as the Western Australian Health Promotion Strategic Framework (2022-2026) and the work of health promotion entities such as VicHealth and Health and Wellbeing Queensland.

In the second instance, AHPA suggests the strategy includes healthy public policy as part of an integrated and sustainable approach to building healthy foundations across the broad, interconnected determinants of health and wellbeing. This includes policies, laws and procedures at all three levels of government in Australia, where applicable, to support and nurture equitable approaches, investment and implementation across the priorities of an early years strategy.

Creating supportive environments

The creation, support and investment in environments which support Australia's children, their families, carers and communities to thrive, across the determinants of health and wellbeing. This includes investment in settings-based organisations where children live, love, play and learn such as health services, early childhood, education, community groups, formal and informal play, built environments, housing and connected communities.

Strengthening community action

AHPA encourages an early years strategy to include the voices of Australia's children and communities in its development, implementation, ongoing evaluation and sustainability. This in turn supports opportunities for advocacy and action, by communities, for communities to help create a groundswell of locally relevant action, coordinated interventions and approaches for Australia's children.

Developing personal skills

Supporting personal and social development through providing evidence-based information, education and opportunities for health promotion and prevention, needs to underpin an early years strategy. This would include a commitment to health and wellbeing literacy, education to support the foundations of early childhood development and the development of skills to ensure all Australians are equipped with the skills to live healthy, equitable lifestyles.

Reorientation of the health system

Traditionally, the health system focuses on responsive, curative approaches to health and wellbeing. AHPA encourages the translation of the abundance of evidence into practice to support a health system with a focus on prevention and early intervention for children, starting at conception, through the early years and all life stages.

Specific comments in response to the Discussion paper

1. Do you have any comments on the proposed structure of the Strategy?

AHPA supports the development of an evidence-based strategy underpinned by codesign and collaboration with communities and voices which represent the broadest determinants across the early years. We encourage adequate investment of all resources into a strategy, which is implemented with sustainability principles and underpinned by robust evaluation to ensure long term impact of the Strategy's outcomes.

2. What vision should our nation have for Australia's youngest children?

AHPA encourages the vision for the Early Years Strategy to include a focus on prevention and early intervention across the interconnected determinants for health and wellbeing, and the ability for Australia's children to live equitable, healthy and fulfilled lifestyles, across the lifespan.

3. What mix of outcomes are the most important to include in the Strategy?

AHPA encourages outcomes which are complementary to the National Preventive Health Strategy e.g.:

- *children grow up in communities that nurture their healthy development - providing the best start to life;*
- *individuals are living well for longer, enjoying life as they age – adding health to life;*
- *groups that experience poorer health outcomes compared to the rest of the population have greater improvements in health – addressing inequity in health; and*
- *prevention is valued and viewed as a worthwhile and important venture – funding is rebalanced towards prevention* (Department of Health 2021: 6).

4. What specific areas / policy priorities should be included in the Strategy and why?

AHPA encourages focus of the Strategy at the individual, community and population level including those actions which can be taken to create connected, equitable and sustainable system wide approaches to support Australia's children. We further encourage an 'upstream' focus on the interconnected determinants of health and wellbeing and encourage and collaboration with the Australian National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030.

We further encourage:

- strategies that focus on the whole population as well as at risk and vulnerable groups including supporting and empowering those whose life circumstances may create experiences of disadvantage.
- connected evidence-informed strategies which focus on long term sustainable outcomes including changes at the system-level.
- sufficient, consistent and coordinated investment in development, implementation, evaluation and sustainability of the Strategy.
- leadership by government at all levels, private and non-government organisations, communities and the general public.
- a trained, skilled and supported workforce to support the early years.
- investment in evidence, research, evaluation, quality and accessible data and monitoring.

5. What could the Commonwealth do to improve outcomes for children – particularly those who are born or raised in more vulnerable and / or disadvantaged circumstances? 6. What areas do you think the Commonwealth could focus on to improve coordination and collaboration in developing policies for children and families?

Responses suggest a coordinated, and evidence-informed approach underpinned by the voices of Australian communities and organisations. AHPA encourages a comprehensive review of the evidence with a focus on sustainable action to help guide creation of robust strategies underpinned by evaluation to help guide the Commonwealth's actions, in partnership with communities, for communities. The *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, AHPA's leading national scientific journal is an example of relevant evidence to guide Commonwealth actions.

7. What principles should be included in the Strategy?

AHPA encourages a holistic and multi strategy approach to the Early Years Strategy. We encourage the interconnectedness of the Early Years Strategy with the National Preventive Health Strategy and therefore suggest consideration of principles to reflect:

- Multi-sector collaboration
- Enabling the workforce
- Community participation
- Empowering and supporting Australians
- Adapting to emerging threats and evidence
- An equity lens
- Embracing the digital revolution.

References

Australian Health Promotion Association and Public Health Association of Australia (AHPA PHAA) (2021) Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy position statement

https://www.healthpromotion.org.au/images/AHPA_PHAH_Health_Promotion_and_Illness_Prevention_Policy_2021_.pdf

Department of Health (2021) National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030

<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/12/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030.pdf>

The Prevention Partnership Centre, Sax Institute (TPPC) (2022) Why invest in prevention in the first 2000 days? Policy Brief

<https://preventioncentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/First-2000-days-Policy-Brief-FINAL.pdf>