

Family Planning Victoria's response to: Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011-2015

Family Planning Victoria (FPV) congratulates the Minister and the Department of Health on the development of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011-2015 and welcomes the opportunity to comment.

FPV's role in health service delivery

FPV is a statewide, independent, not-for-profit, pro-choice organisation that has been advocating for the sexual and reproductive health rights and needs of the Victorian community for over 40 years.

Our vision is sexual and reproductive health for all Victorians and our mission is to provide leadership in public policy, advocacy, education and clinical care in sexual and reproductive health.

We provide:

- specialist training programs for education and healthcare providers
- school and community education sessions
- clinical services
- research and advocacy.

We have particular expertise in education, training and clinical services for people aged under 25 years. We also work with:

- education and healthcare providers
- parents and carers
- people in their reproductive years
- agencies working with vulnerable populations.

For more information about FPV, go to www.fpv.org.au.

Our response

The intent of our response is to provide comment on the direction of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and provide specific suggestions regarding implementation as they relate to sexual and reproductive health.

FPV welcomes the Preventative focus in the Plan, the emphasis on the partnership approach and community engagement. FPV looks forward to working in collaboration to implement the objectives of the Plan over the next four years

The Implementation of the Plan

Inclusion of young people as a significant population group

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011-2015 acknowledges that many chronic conditions causing significant burden of disease in adulthood actually start in adolescence (page 25). The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises young people are particularly vulnerable to factors affecting their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.

FPV recommends that the implementation of the Plan actively engages with and involves young people in the planning and implementation of prevention strategies at all levels, especially within local communities.

Investment in programs that build young people's capacity to participate in the development of prevention strategies and take leadership roles within their communities is strongly recommended by FPV.

FPV has a strong history of engaging with young people regarding their sexual health needs, and current service gaps identified by this population group include:

- Limited access to affordable contraception advice and services
- Lack of consistent and comprehensive relationships and sexual wellbeing education in school and community settings
- Limited availability of youth friendly health services that address sexual and reproductive health issues
- Lack of user friendly health information to balance the often misleading information promoted through a range of media
- Lack of bulk billing GP services
- Lack of health professionals who are aware of the issues faced by young people and are trained in the delivery of youth health services

The Plan recognises the success in working in schools and early year settings on health promotion topics (page 51); **FPV strongly recommends that the Plan also includes reference to sexual and reproductive health as a health promotion topic.**

Inclusion of state-wide organisations in planning, governance and leadership

FPV is a state-wide organisation and we welcome the suggestion of the establishment of a state-wide interagency prevention forum (pg. 35).

FPV recommends that further consideration be given to the role and inclusion of state wide agencies in the implementation of the Plan. FPV suggests that the experiences and lessons learnt from the primary care partnership structure could enhance the implementation of this plan.

FPV is currently working with a number of school communities in a health promotion context to address sexual and reproductive issues.

Workforce development

Whilst the Plan refers to increasing the capacity of the healthcare workforce to deliver preventative healthcare (page 54) and building their skills and knowledge in prevention strategies, FPV is most concerned about the lack of sexual and reproductive health knowledge of professional in the health, allied health, human service and education sectors. Currently sexual and reproductive health is NOT a core element of pre-service training in the above-mentioned professional groups. One of FPV core functions is to train and education health and education professionals, however our reach is limited by resources.

In 2009-10, we provided accredited and non-accredited sexual and reproductive health training to:

- **1969** GPs/doctors, reaching approximately **28 per cent** of the estimated total GP population of 6007, as reported in the Division of GPs annual survey 2008-09
- **842** nurses, **54 per cent** of whom were from rural and regional Victoria
- **3133** teachers, approximately 67 per cent of whom were from government funded schools and **22 per cent** of whom were from rural and regional Victoria.

To maximise the outcomes of building the preventive capacity in relation to sexual and reproductive health in the health and education sector this needs to occur on the platform of understanding the subject content.

Sexual and reproductive health promotion

FPV welcomes the inclusion of Sexual and reproductive health promotion in the Plan (section 7.6). We support the focused attention to those most at risk, many of whom FPV provides a service.

To maximise the value of preventive strategies in relation to sexual and reproductive health FPV strongly recommends that a collaborative approach be used to develop a consistent understanding of the social determinants of sexual and reproductive health across the sector.

This understanding then sets the platform upon which to develop and implement evidence based prevention strategies.

FPV welcomes the inclusion of improving young people's sexual health literacy through the provision of quality school-based education. **FPV considers the most effective way forward is to build the capacity of schools to deliver effective relationship and sexual wellbeing education.**

The development of such a capacity building project has been an FPV priority during the past 18 months. A summary of Safe Landing is provided below.

The evidence

Sexuality education is a responsibility shared between school based programs, the local health and welfare community, and parents and carers. It should be:

- developmentally appropriate
- taught within a comprehensive health education curriculum
- included in primary, secondary and special school curricula as part of a whole school approach (DEECD 2010).

Evidence published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), tells us the majority of effective programs with **long term positive health effects** were those which were implemented in schools. These school based sexuality education programs were able to combine strong leadership with good policy development and, most importantly, provide a safe and inclusive environment.

Successful school based sexuality education programs help to:

- **delay the age of first sexual intercourse**
- **reduce the frequency of unprotected sexual activity**
- **reduce the number of sexual partners**
- **increase the use of contraception during sexual intercourse to help protect against sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and the likelihood of unplanned pregnancy.**

FPV has been involved in researching and attempting to strengthen the provision of sexuality education in Victoria through a number of projects, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) funded Bass Coast Project.

This project started in Bass Coast in 2003 and was replicated in three other Victorian regions (one rural and two urban) from 2006-08. In 2009, FPV funded a final evaluation of what came to be called the Bass Coast Project and used the findings from this research to further refine the Safe Landing capacity building model.

Findings from the Bass Coast Project research included the following:

- Provision of professional development in sexuality education increased the confidence, the understanding of the rationale for sexuality education and the inspiration to deliver the program among teachers, with 92 per cent recording improvements to program delivery.
- Issues such as teacher movement and leadership support significantly affected outcomes.
- Teachers benefited from the provision of resources and identified the need for assessment and reporting tools.

Safe Landing: the FPV capacity building model

Overview

The FPV Safe Landing Relationship and Sexual Wellbeing Capacity Building Model aims to enhance the capacity of schools and teachers to deliver effective relationship and sexual health literacy programs.

Drawing on Victorian and international evidence, our practice experience and the lessons learned from the Bass Coast Project, this model uses expert providers and facilitates local health and education services working together at a network level, forging strong links between schools and local health services to resource and support sexuality education and open service pathways for students.

The model incorporates *Catching On* and other key curriculum developments in an holistic approach to using resource material. It aims to build on rather than replicate or compete with existing curriculum materials.

Key deliverables

The key deliverables of the capacity building project are:

- a mechanism for developing strong links between schools and community agencies to support the delivery of sexuality and relationships education
- a research platform and database which captures baseline and project data to enable impacts and outcomes to be measured to inform future projects and policy
- a two day professional development program for two teachers and one school leader from each school in the school cluster
- a one day peer mentoring/coaching program for two teachers from each school in the school cluster
- an online peer support mechanism
- a package of ready-to-use practical classroom resources which includes:
 - a sexual health literacy program scope and sequence chart
 - a basic 12-15 week program for VELS Levels 3-6
 - support resources
 - assessment tools
 - an adaptable delivery model suitable for application in other regions across Victoria and characterized by the following critical factors:
 - supported by an international evidence base which outlines best practice in sexuality education
 - based on internationally accepted health promotion principles
 - consistent with the principles identified in the National Health Promoting Schools Framework and the Victorian Government's whole school learning approach
 - consistent with key Victorian curriculum guidelines (e.g. VELS and Schools Government Reference Guide)

Partnerships

The first step towards building a collaborative network for sexuality education at the statewide level involved a roundtable discussion facilitated by FPV and hosted by the Women's on 12 November 2010. Key stakeholders, including DEECD and the Department of Health, showed interest in the planned network and the capacity building model.

FPV is also involved in the development of a collaborative network to assist teachers at the school level through the Sexual Health of Young Victorians Project: Phase II.

Partners in the project typically include:

- Community health services
- Schools (teachers and nurses)
- DEECD Regional Office
- Universities (evaluation)
- Women's health services
- Department of Health

Working collaboratively to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies

FPV considers this to be a very important inclusion in the Plan. Over the past 6 months FPV has been scoping a piece of work that would provide the evidence base to implement prevention strategies. FPV considers it is important to understand both the cost of unplanned pregnancies to Victoria and also evaluate a range of intervention in terms of effectiveness and affordability.

FPV is working collaboratively with Women's Hospital, Women's Health Victoria and Deakin University in this scoping phase. This project will require funding from Government.

Family planning Victoria continues to welcome the opportunities to work with the Victorian Government in the implementing the Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011-2015. Given our expertise in sexual and reproductive health, we look forward to working collaboratively to improve the sexual and reproductive health of Victorians.

For further information, please contact CEO, Lynne Jordan at [E/ ljordan@fpv.org.au](mailto:ljordan@fpv.org.au) or on T/ 03 9257 0128