

Dear Jaclyn Symes

Keep VicHealth independent and strong

We are writing to urge you to keep VicHealth as an independent agency and abandon plans to move it to the Department of Health. The Council of Academic Public Health Institutions of Australasia (CAPHIA) is the peak body representing the universities and aligned organisations which train the current and future public health and health promotion workforce.

As the world's first health promotion foundation, VicHealth has been instrumental in major reforms and initiatives, including the Quit and SunSmart programs, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program, the This Girl Can Program to support Victorian women and girls to be active, and the first Victorian breast screening and cervical screening programs.

Removing its independence will reduce Victoria's ability to respond to the growing polycrisis facing our communities, from vaping and mental ill-health to the effects of climate change, chronic disease burden and widening inequities. CAPHIA highlights three critical risks arising from the decision:

1. Loss of Independent Leadership

VicHealth's independence allows it to express positions on politically sensitive issues without fear or favour such as alcohol, tobacco, gambling, unhealthy food marketing and priority populations. This essential advocacy role will be severely constrained within a government department.

2. Reduced Innovation, Community Partnerships and Equity Impact

VicHealth's ability to pilot innovative, community-led programs, particularly with Aboriginal communities, multicultural groups, young people and women, will be at risk. Departmental structures cannot replicate the agility, trust and cross-sector partnerships that VicHealth has built over decades.

3. Erosion of Victoria's Long-Term Prevention Capacity

Disease prevention requires stable investment and long-term vision. Absorbing VicHealth into the Victorian State Department of Health, risks diverting prevention funding into acute system responses and undermining Victoria's ability to build the workforce, research capability and system stewardship required to meet future health threats.

VicHealth is effective because of its independence, its prevention-focused mandate, and its ability to partner directly with communities, researchers, and the health promotion workforce. Moving VicHealth into the Department of Health will almost certainly erode that critical independence, disrupt longstanding community partnerships and will make prevention efforts invisible within a Department whose key responsibility is hospitals and health service delivery.

The Productivity Commission has called for *more* investment in prevention — not less. The pressures of chronic disease, mental ill health and growing inequities make VicHealth's evidence-based, community-led health promotion more important than ever.

**The planned merger will weaken prevention at the worst possible time.
Victoria should be increasing investment in prevention and public health workforce capability, not dismantling the very institutions that make that possible.**

This decision affects every Victorian. We respectfully ask you to support keeping VicHealth as an independent, fully funded health promotion agency.

Sincerely,



Holly Donaldson
CAPHIA Executive Director



Associate Professor Julie Saunders
CAPHIA Chair of the Board

On behalf of the CAPHIA Board of Directors and CAPHIA member institutions

CAPHIA member institutions

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2. [Australian National University](#)
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4. [Charles Darwin University](#)
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