

## MEDIA RELEASE

### CAPHIA calls for reversal of decision to dismantle VicHealth's independence

The Council of Academic Public Health Institutions Australasia (CAPHIA) is calling on the Victorian Government to urgently reverse its decision to absorb VicHealth into the Victorian State Department of Health, warning that the move will significantly weaken Victoria's prevention system at a time of escalating health challenges. This decision will undermine nearly four decades of world-leading work in health promotion, disease prevention and population health and well-being.

VicHealth has been one of Australia's most effective prevention agencies for 38 years. Removing its independence will reduce Victoria's ability to respond to the growing polycrisis facing public health, 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 the Victoria's ability to build the workforce, research capability and system stewardship required to meet future health threats. CAPHIA noted that VicHealth's achievements, from world-leading tobacco control and gender-equity initiatives to groundbreaking work in mental wellbeing and community resilience, have delivered measurable improvements to the health of millions of Victorians.

**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.**

CAPHIA is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Maintain VicHealth as an independent statutory body
- Commit to strengthening, not shrinking, prevention investment
- Protect Victoria's public health workforce and research capability

Reversing this decision is critical to safeguarding the future health and wellbeing of Victorians.