

IMPROVING WELLBEING IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The Australian Institute of Family Studies' report Social Inclusion – Origins, concepts and key themes (2008) identifies some of the effects of neighbourhood disadvantage on the wellbeing of residents as being:

- poorer outcomes for children, including learning and behavioural outcomes, and physical health (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000);
- poorer health in adults, as indicated by rates of infectious diseases, asthma, smoking, depression, poor diet and poor self-rated health; and
- reduced job and educational prospects.

Many local government areas face economic, social and environmental challenges and the wealth disparity between communities makes comparisons difficult.

Particular challenges facing regional and remote communities include distance, isolation and access to services (Source: *Regional Matters 2005*, Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development).

Metropolitan communities with high socio-economic disadvantage are also faced with the demographic challenges presented by an ageing population. They have to balance the provision of services for older Australians with the needs of families and younger people.

The factors influencing a community's health and wellbeing can include factors such as the presence of social networks; access to support services; opportunities to participate in physical activity; the quality of infrastructure and transport; opportunities to participate in decisions affecting the community; and zoning of land, to ensure there are safe and healthy places to live and work.

The Australian Government, the state and territory governments, local governments, and the business and community sectors have an important role to play and all influence community wellbeing.

Local governments are well placed to identify gaps in community services and to respond appropriately. Local governments have already put in place numerous initiatives to address the breadth and depth of their communities' health and well-being. It is now time to reflect on these initiatives and how they can be improved.

What is the role of local government in building stronger local communities? Is it as service deliverer, broker, coordinator, or funder - or is it something else?

What are some of the programs that local governments run to make their communities safe and healthier places in which to live and work?

How can local governments work together with other levels of government and non-government organisations to ensure services are accessible and available for the community?

How can the Australian Government improve its partnerships with local governments, and the corporate and community sectors to deliver better policies and programs to improve the lives of those in disadvantaged communities?



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The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) works in partnership with local government and non-government organisations to support and improve the lives of Australians and build socially inclusive communities.

FaHCSIA seeks to support those at most risk groups through targeted community-based programs. The Department develops policies and programs to:

- assist communities to develop capacity, self-reliance and resilience;
- help people living in rural and regional areas to access services that support their special needs, and to take advantage of opportunities;
- contribute to improving the living conditions and social inclusion of people in culturally and linguistically diverse communities such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- help support individuals, families and communities in crisis;
- strengthen and build a more effective partnership with the not-for-profit sector;
- increase the capability of volunteer and community sectors through training, IT and other supports;
- encourage successful partnerships between business, community and government sectors;
- increase knowledge and understanding about how communities function;
- encourage Australians to undertake volunteering activities through the provision of funding to the community and the voluntary sector; and
- develop a wide range of support measures, including financial assistance, for Australians recovering from disasters both natural and man-made.

The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) helps to achieve improved health and wellbeing through evidence-based policy advice, improving program management, research, regulation, and partnerships with other government agencies, consumers and stakeholders.

DoHA's top priorities are:

- focusing the health and aged care system more on healthy lifestyles, prevention and early intervention and a 'best practice' handling of chronic disease;
- improving the transparency, accessibility, accountability and quality of public and private health and aged care service provision;
- consolidating and progressing reforms for choice and access to quality aged care services;
- working together with the states and territories to deliver efficient, value-for-money health and aged care services through an adaptable and sustainable health and aged care workforce;
- working towards improved health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through whole-of-government arrangements for policy development and service delivery, and improved access to, and responsiveness of, the mainstream health system;
- improving choice for consumers;
- supporting preventative health initiatives and programs aimed at increasing physical activity and opportunities to participate in sport; and
- leading a whole-of-government approach to strengthening Australia's readiness for disease threats, national emergencies and other large scale health incidents.



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