RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

A wide range of people and groups have responsibility for promoting better health. These include:

• individuals
• community groups and schools
• non-government organisations
• various levels of government
• international organisations.

For health promotion to be effective, a coordinated approach by all people and organisations involved is needed to successfully plan, develop and deliver initiatives that address identified areas of concern.

![Diagram of Responsibility for Health Promotion]

**Figure 3.3:** A wide range of people, groups and organisations are responsible for health promotion.

**Individuals**

Individuals play a key role in promoting their own health, because personal behaviour is the major determining factor of health status. Ill health can be prevented by making choices that promote health and leading a healthy lifestyle. However, the living conditions of some people limit their ability to easily make healthy choices and prevent them from taking control of their health, leaving them vulnerable to illness and disease.

For health promotion to be effective, individuals need to be empowered. Individual **empowerment** refers to an individual's ability to make decisions about, or have personal control over their life. We need to be encouraged to participate in improving our level of health. This is best achieved when we are:

• provided with accurate and relevant health information that is presented in a format that is easily accessed and understood
• given the opportunity to be involved in decision making about our own and our community's health
• encouraged to work with a wide range of health professionals, knowing that our opinions will be taken into account
given the opportunity to develop personal skills that will aid us to adopt or maintain positive health behaviours
provided with social and economic supports such as support groups for weight loss and the facilities for undertaking regular exercise.

A diverse range of individuals working in health-related areas are able to work alongside people in ways that support them to develop greater control over their own health and bring about improvements. These include people traditionally involved in health professions such as:

- general practitioners
- dietitians
- counsellors
- dentists
- health workers
- community nurses.

Health professionals are able to increase people's awareness of health risk behaviours and provide them with information on healthier lifestyles. They can assist individuals to develop skills that can help them to modify these behaviours or recognise health problems in their early stages. For example, doctors can teach women how to perform regular breast self-examinations or help clients to quit smoking. They can also work with patients to determine how to effectively use the health services available to support positive health choices.

**APPLICATION: Health professionals in your community**

1. Compile a list of people within your local community who play a role in improving the health of the local community.
2. Interview two or three of these health professionals to find out:
(a) their specific role in promoting better health
(b) the type of support that they receive from other individuals, groups or organisations in promoting better health.

3. Write up your findings in a report and share reports among the class.

The understanding that health is socially determined has led to a broader range of individuals becoming involved in promoting better health for individuals, including:

• health educators
• social workers
• urban planners
• community workers
• environmental health officers.

These professionals also have roles to play in encouraging individual behavioural change, providing resources to support healthy living and working environments, and focusing on the prevention of ill health.

**CASE STUDY**

**An individual at risk**

Tamika is 21, unemployed and has little money. She dropped out of school in year 10 and has struggled to find regular full-time work. She has moved house many times in the past few years, even though she could live with her mother, who loves and cares about her but also expects her to take responsibility for her life.

Tamika sleeps most of the day and eats a large, usually high-fat meal at night. She is overweight and has been warned by her doctor that she is at risk of developing diabetes if she does not change her lifestyle. She suffers from depression and feels no-one understands her.

**INQUIRY: Empowering individuals to improve their health**

Read the case study about Tamika and answer the following questions.

1. Identify factors in Tamika's life that affect her ability to take actions to improve her health.

2. Propose people or groups who could play a role in supporting Tamika and empowering her to improve her level of health. Briefly describe how these people or groups could help to promote Tamika's health.

Health professionals also have a role in working in *partnership* with the community to set health priorities to address areas of concern within the community. They are able to:

• **advocate** on behalf of particular groups for social intervention or increased funding to support improved health
• generate community support for health promotion strategies
• work collaboratively as part of community groups to implement actions that address identified local health concerns.

**Community groups and schools**

Schools play an important role in health promotion. Childhood and adolescence are stages of life...
when attitudes towards health and health behaviours are still forming, providing schools with an opportunity to have a positive impact on young people’s values and beliefs.

Figure 3.5: Positive health messages can be instilled in students through classroom learning, playground activities and extracurricular activities.

Schools are responsible for delivering health and physical education programs that assist young people to develop the knowledge and understandings needed to make positive health choices. They provide opportunities for young people to develop skills needed to participate confidently in physical activity and manage their own health, while also promoting the value of regular activity and good health. They also equip students with skills to improve their health literacy by teaching them how to critically evaluate health information, products and services. Development of these skills at a young age increases the likelihood that they will be lifelong participants in physical activity and helps form lifestyle habits that will benefit health, both now and in the future.

School policies and practices have the potential to reinforce classroom messages and further promote good health practices among young people. Examples include the following:

• sun safety policies. These aim to promote practices that reduce exposure to harmful UV rays by scheduling outdoor activities at times when UV radiation is lower, providing shaded outdoor areas, having ‘no hat, no play’ rules and supplying 15+ sunscreen to students when participating in outdoor activities.
• the Fresh Tastes New South Wales Healthy School Canteen Strategy. This requires all New South Wales government schools to provide a healthy, nutritious canteen menu in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents.
• anti-bullying policies. These reaffirm students’ rights to feel safe and outline procedures for identifying, reporting and dealing with bullying behaviours.
• the provision of play equipment for students to use during lunchtimes. This encourages physical activity.

These policies and procedures aim to reduce the harms students may face, while also sending clear positive messages to encourage health-promoting behaviours.

Schools are also commonly used to conduct health promotion initiatives targeted at young people. These health promotion initiatives can be developed and implemented in a variety of ways. For example, they could be:
• developed and coordinated by external groups such as the National Heart Foundation’s Jump Rope for Heart
• jointly funded by educational authorities and other government departments such as the national mental health initiative for secondary schools, MindMatters
• initiated and managed by education departments; for example, the Premier’s Sporting Challenge.

Individual schools may choose to initiate projects to address identified local health issues, either on their own or in partnership with other government or non-government organisations. The Health Promoting Schools framework provides a model for schools and outside agencies to use when developing school-based initiatives. Developed in line with the principles of the World Health Organization, the framework highlights the importance of not only teaching students about health-related issues, but also making changes to the school’s policies, organisation and practices to promote better health. It also highlights the importance of partnerships between the school and parents, local health services and the community in general. Building these partnerships enables schools to:

• utilise available resources and expertise
• actively involve parents in decision making, and
• support parents and caregivers to make changes that will improve the health of children and young people.

CASE STUDY

Breakfast at school — benefits for health and learning

Teachers in the Northern Territory have long been concerned about low attendance rates among indigenous schoolchildren and poor levels of concentration in class. A major concern was that many students were coming to school hungry, which caused them to be unsettled and lacking in energy. This in turn was affecting their ability to learn and enjoy school which had a long-term impact on their well-being and employment prospects.

There are various reasons why children don’t have breakfast at home; for example:

• some parents leave very early for work and aren’t able to supervise breakfast
• many children have early transport pick-ups and often skipped breakfast
• some families struggle financially to provide sufficient food for their children or make poor food choices
• there might be a limited understanding of nutrition and its importance for good health.

Health experts are clear about the benefits of a nutritious breakfast. It helps with children’s physical and mental development and is essential to maintain energy levels and concentration skills. Skipping breakfast during childhood is also believed to be a factor in increasing obesity later in life.

A school and community health initiative now operating in many schools across Australia, particularly in disadvantaged urban or regional communities, is the Good Start Breakfast Club. The program involves a team of volunteers who serve schoolchildren with cereal, fruit, toast and juice, and teach them healthy eating habits.

The Australian Red Cross runs the program in partnership with Sanitarium Health Foods. Some schools report that indigenous students’ attendance has risen from 50 per cent to around 70 per cent and their overall health, behaviour and willingness to learn have improved significantly.

The General Manager of Sanitarium Health Foods (www.sanitarium.com.au) states the program is about ‘nourishing the minds of growing bodies, and teaching kids positive habits that will stay with them for life, ensuring the brightest futures’.
Figure 3.5A: A nutritious breakfast is provided to children at Papunya School in the Northern Territory. The program has seen attendance rise and children healthier and more attentive in class.

INQUIRY: Breakfast at school

Read the case study about the breakfast program and answer the following questions.

1. Identify the problems that led to the introduction of a school breakfast program.
2. Which organisations are working in partnership to make this health initiative possible?
3. Discuss the importance of school-based programs such as the Breakfast Club for the promotion of health, both now and in the future.
4. Read more about the program using the Breakfast Club weblinks in your eBookPLUS.

Community-based groups such as migrant support groups, neighbourhood groups or young mothers’ support groups can often play an important role in health promotion through their close relationship with particular population groups. They are often well placed to develop projects that meet community needs or adapt programs to take into account particular barriers that may otherwise limit their effectiveness. For example, a migrant women’s support group seeking to promote increased levels of physical activity among females from non-English-speaking backgrounds may implement a program of physical activity that

- allows women to be active within their own cultural group
- overcomes language and transport barriers
- recognises cultural sensitivities relating to activity.

As with schools, community groups may also work in partnership with other organisations to support health promotion initiatives and tailor the initiatives to particular groups and/or local needs.

Non-government organisations

Non-government organisations (NGOs) are non-profit making organisations that operate at local, national, or international levels. They are funded from a variety of sources, including public donations, fundraising and government grants. While they receive government funding, their work is
not controlled or limited by government policy or legislation.

Non-government organisations generally focus on a specific issue or ailment. The Heart Foundation, the Cancer Council, Asthma Foundations Australia and the Inspire Foundation are examples of NGOs that play a significant role in health promotion in Australia. Use the NGOs weblinks in your eBookPLUS to find out more information about these examples of NGOs.

![NGOs](image)

**Figure 3.6:** beyondblue is an example of an NGO with roles in health promotion and support.

Non-government organisations undertake a number of roles in health promotion relating to their particular issue. These include:

- conducting activities designed to raise public awareness, such as the Cancer Council Australia's Pink Ribbon Day
- providing educational programs and resources that promote positive health choices and behaviours. For example, the Heart Foundation's Jump Rope for Heart aims to increase young people's knowledge about the benefits of physical activity and the importance of heart health.
- providing accurate and up-to-date information. For example, the Inspire Foundation manages the Reach Out! website. This website seeks to offer information, support and resources to young people to improve their understanding of mental health issues, develop a sense of resilience, and increase their coping skills and help-seeking behaviour.
- funding and conducting research into prevention and treatment of a particular disease; for example, cardiovascular disease
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- providing support services and counselling to people affected by the disease, their families and carers. The Cancer Council offers a range of help services including a telephone help service, support groups, outreach services for people living in rural locations and peer support programs.
- advocacy. Many NGOs make submissions or representations to government on a range of issues related to their health concern in an effort to bring about changes to reduce the prevalence of the disease or improve standards of care. The Cancer Council, for example, has lobbied for anti-smoking advertisements to be shown in cinemas before the screening of movies that feature images of people smoking in an effort to discourage the uptake of smoking by young people.

INQUIRY: Health promotion projects by NGOs

Headspace and Youthsafe are examples of NGOs. Use the Headspace and Youthsafe weblinks in your eBookPLUS and answer the following questions.

1. Describe the role of each of these organisations in promoting better health for young people.
2. Outline some of the projects and initiatives that each organisation has instigated in an effort to improve the health of adolescents.

Government

All levels of government share a degree of responsibility for promoting better health within their community. The nature and scope of the health promotion initiatives they undertake vary considerably due to differences in priorities, allocated funding and resources available.

Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for:

- planning and forming national health policies
- identifying priority areas for action and coordinating health promotion campaigns to ensure national health priorities are addressed in an effective and efficient way
- giving direction to state health policy making and influencing its delivery
- allocating funding for health promotion, special projects and research to state and local government groups as well as NGOs
- introducing regulations and legislation to ensure the maintenance of health.

INQUIRY: The Commonwealth Government's health promotion responsibilities

Draw up a table like the one below. For each area of responsibility, brainstorm and fill in examples that demonstrate how the government fulfils its health promotion responsibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of responsibility</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Formulating national health policies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Coordinating national health campaigns</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Directing state policies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Allocating funding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Regulations/legislation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Commonwealth Government is responsible for formulating and overseeing long-term programs and strategies that address Australia's health priorities. These programs seek to reduce the risk factors for chronic diseases suffered by many Australians in order to improve the general well-being of the nation and lessen the burden of chronic poor health. Examples of these programs (use the weblinks to find out more) include:

- National Tobacco Campaign
- Go for 2 & 5 campaign
- Get Set 4 Life
- Healthy Spaces and Places
- How do you measure up campaign
- Healthy Active Australia
- Community and Schools Grants program
- National Skin Cancer Awareness campaign.

National programs often involve a collaborative partnership between federal and state governments and can also be supported by industry and other organisations with an interest in promoting good health. Organisations such as the Cancer Council, the National Heart Foundation and the Australian Medical Association are some of the groups that have collaborated on the National Tobacco Campaign. Research is used to inform the strategies developed and evaluation is undertaken to measure their effectiveness and determine changes in knowledge, behaviour and attitudes that may have taken place.

The Commonwealth Government is also responsible for allocating the funding and developing systems to ensure all Australians have access to affordable, high-quality health-care services that are convenient. A variety of strategies are needed to adequately cater for the health-care needs of Australians living in vastly different geographic locations and support them to improve their health and prevent illness.

**SNAPSHOT**

**Climate change and health**

In January 2009, the Commonwealth Government allocated $10 million to fund research by the CSIRO and the Australian National University into the effects of climate change on the health of Australians.

The Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, said that research was vital to gain more understanding of health risks from climate change, including heat-related illnesses and higher incidences of infectious diseases. In a media release on 27 January, the senator explained the concerns: 'By 2020, the number of heat-related deaths in our capital cities is projected to double to about 2300 a year; we are likely to see more food-safety related illness; and dengue fever is likely to spread southwards . . . We need to better understand the diversity of these health risks, who will be most vulnerable, and the action governments, individuals and communities can take to reduce the risks.'

The government has put forward its research plans for the next five to seven years in *Human Health and Climate Change — a National Adaptation Research Plan*.

The Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, stated: ‘Australia’s scientific and research community is making an important contribution to domestic and international understanding of climate change and its impacts. However, research on health impacts, risks and adaptation strategies is in its early stages and . . . This information is critical to inform future policy making in the health arena and in a broader range of areas, including urban planning and disaster management’.
INQUIRY: The Commonwealth Government's role in promoting better health

1. Read the snapshot on health and climate change. Outline the action being taken by the Commonwealth Government to investigate possible health issues related to climate change.

2. Predict future actions that the government may need to take to combat the health effects of climate change if estimates of the number of heat-related deaths prove to be accurate.

3. Explain why researching the health effects of climate change is part of the Commonwealth Government's responsibilities in relation to health promotion.

4. Describe other key roles and responsibilities of the government in relation to improving the health of all Australians.

State government

State governments have the primary responsibility for planning and delivering specific health promotion and disease prevention programs. These programs may be funded by Commonwealth grants, jointly funded by the federal and state government, or funded solely by the state itself. Each state has a department of health that includes health promotion personnel who develop and run health promotion programs.

The New South Wales Department of Health (NSW Health) is divided into areas, with Area Health Services allocated funds to implement health promotion initiatives that support identified state and local needs. The diversity of communities that exists across New South Wales highlights the importance of giving these services the responsibility of developing programs that cater for the needs of the population group in their area.

INQUIRY: Live Life Well initiatives

1. Use the Live Life Well weblink in your eBookPLUS and read the information it provides on the home page.

2. Click on the link in the left-hand menu bar for ‘Live Life Well Initiatives in NSW’. Investigate a health promotion initiative that is being organised by your area health service. Write a report on this initiative that includes:
   (a) a description of the initiative
   (b) an outline of its aims
   (c) the population group on which the initiative focuses
   (d) the setting for implementing the initiative
   (e) the health promotion strategies that are involved in the initiative.

3. Present your report to the class either orally or as a PowerPoint presentation.

States are also responsible for planning and forming health policies and legislation that aim to reduce health risks, decrease the incidence of major health problems and promote better health for all. State laws around smoking in work environments and public spaces, opening hours of licensed premises, drink driving, vehicle and passenger restrictions for P1 and P2 licence holders, and WorkCover requirements are examples of legislation introduced at state level aimed at promoting health and reducing injury.
Local governments

Local governments are given specific health roles for helping to implement state-controlled programs at a community level. For example, they ensure swimming pools are fenced and are responsible for carrying out inspections to ensure compliance with food handling, storage and preparation regulations by businesses selling food.

However, a recent trend has seen local councils participating in a broader range of health promotion programs. For example, they have been responsible for developing lifestyle events and programs using community infrastructure and facilities, such as creating community gardens and holding ‘come and try’ workshops in local parks and halls. Such programs seek to address local issues and strengthen community involvement in actions that target these issues.

It has become increasingly common for local councils to participate in activities as part of campaigns that are developed by other levels of government or organisations; for example, World No Tobacco Day or the Cancer Council's Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. The introduction of programs such as the Healthy Local Government Grants Program has also provided funds that have enabled an increasing number of local councils to develop their own health strategies to promote healthy environments and public health. These strategies often see local people involved in determining the priorities for local action and may target minority or disadvantaged groups in the community; for example, the elderly or cultural groups.
Local governments are responsible for undertaking long-term environmental planning. This means they play a significant role in promoting opportunities for people to be physically active within their communities. Zoning regulations and land use policies can ensure healthy urban design principles are incorporated into local plans. These principles include:

- provision of open public spaces such as parks and play areas
- introduction of measures to slow or ban traffic from areas with large numbers of pedestrian activity
- construction and maintenance of well-lit walking and cycling tracks
- installation of safe play equipment and exercise stations in local parks.

Local governments are also used as avenues for the dissemination of health promotion messages and information. Council libraries can be used to display promotional material and distribute health information.

Figure 3.7: Local government libraries and medical centres play an important role in providing health information.
brochures and leaflets related to health, while council staff and websites can inform residents of upcoming health promotion events and activities in the local area.

Local public libraries are currently used to provide accessible drug information to communities throughout New South Wales. The drug info@your library initiative provides public libraries across the state with easy-to-read information about various drugs via regularly updated book collections, free pamphlets and the web. Council may also provide venues for support groups to meet and education programs to be conducted.

**International organisations**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is one of the major international organisations responsible for health promotion. Established in 1948, WHO is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN) that serves as the coordinating authority on international public health issues. Its membership consists of all UN member countries that accept WHO's constitution and approved other countries.

WHO undertakes a number of key responsibilities in the global promotion of better health for the citizens of all countries. These include:

- providing leadership on health issues causing significant worldwide concern and establishing partnerships that will bring about the changes necessary to improve the health of all people, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and populations. In 2004 WHO was responsible for developing the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health in an effort to reduce the worldwide incidence of death and chronic diseases related to poor diet and inactivity.
- working collaboratively with governments, NGOs and other agencies to support countries to establish and implement appropriate health promotion strategies and programs in order to bring about the highest attainable standard of health for all people
- setting international health standards for elements that are essential for promoting good health, such as water and air quality and food safety standards
- producing an annual report that provides governments, donor agencies, international organisations and others with the information necessary to make policy and funding decisions
- influencing research priorities and disseminating information produced by research to drive evidence-based change to health-related policies and practices.

**INQUIRY: Responding to global health issues**

Read the snapshot on the World Health Organization's role in relation to epidemics and pandemics and answer the following questions.

1. Outline the responsibilities of the World Health Organization in addressing global health issues such as pandemics. Explain why these would be considered actions to promote people's health.

2. Use the World Health Organization EPR weblink in your eBookPLUS to find out more about current global health issues.

3. Discuss ways that organisations such as the World Health Organization are able to support governments to improve the health of their citizens.

4. Debate the need for an international organisation to promote health. Justify your arguments with examples.
World Health Organization's responsibility in epidemics and pandemics

The website of the World Health Organization (www.who.int) is a focal point for information, guidance and updates in the event of potentially serious outbreaks of infectious diseases, known as epidemics and pandemics. Recent examples includes Influenza A(H1N1) or ‘swine flu’ and Avian Influenza A(H5N1) or ‘bird flu’. The organisation implements an Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response (EPR) in response to potential global health crises. WHO states:

- Epidemics and pandemics can place sudden and intense demands on health systems. They expose existing weaknesses in these systems and, in addition to their morbidity and mortality, can disrupt economic activity and development.
- The world requires a global system that can rapidly identify and contain public health emergencies and reduce unneeded panic and disruption of trade, travel and society in general.
- The revised International Health Regulations, IHR (2005), provide a global framework to address these needs through a collective approach to the prevention, detection, and timely response to any public health emergency of international concern.

**Source:** World Health Organization, EPR web page, May 2009.

The philosophy, structures and principles that guide the WHO's work have been instrumental in shifting the way that governments and organisations throughout the world approach health promotion. They have advocated for approaches that not only empower individuals and communities, but also recognise the underlying social, economic and environmental determinants of health. This has resulted in a greater understanding of the importance of actions directed towards changing social, environmental and economic conditions to alleviate their impact on public and individual health.

In 1986 the WHO was responsible for organising the First International Conference on Health Promotion. This conference saw the production and acceptance of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion — an action plan for all nations to implement in order to achieve health for all by 2000 (see appendix 1).

The basic principles of the Ottawa Charter continue to provide the framework that underpins health promotion strategies developed at all levels of government in Australia (this is discussed further on pages 115–20). Subsequent conferences have reiterated and built upon the principles outlined in the Ottawa Charter, including the Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalized World that was passed at the global Conference on Health Promotion coordinated by WHO in 2005.