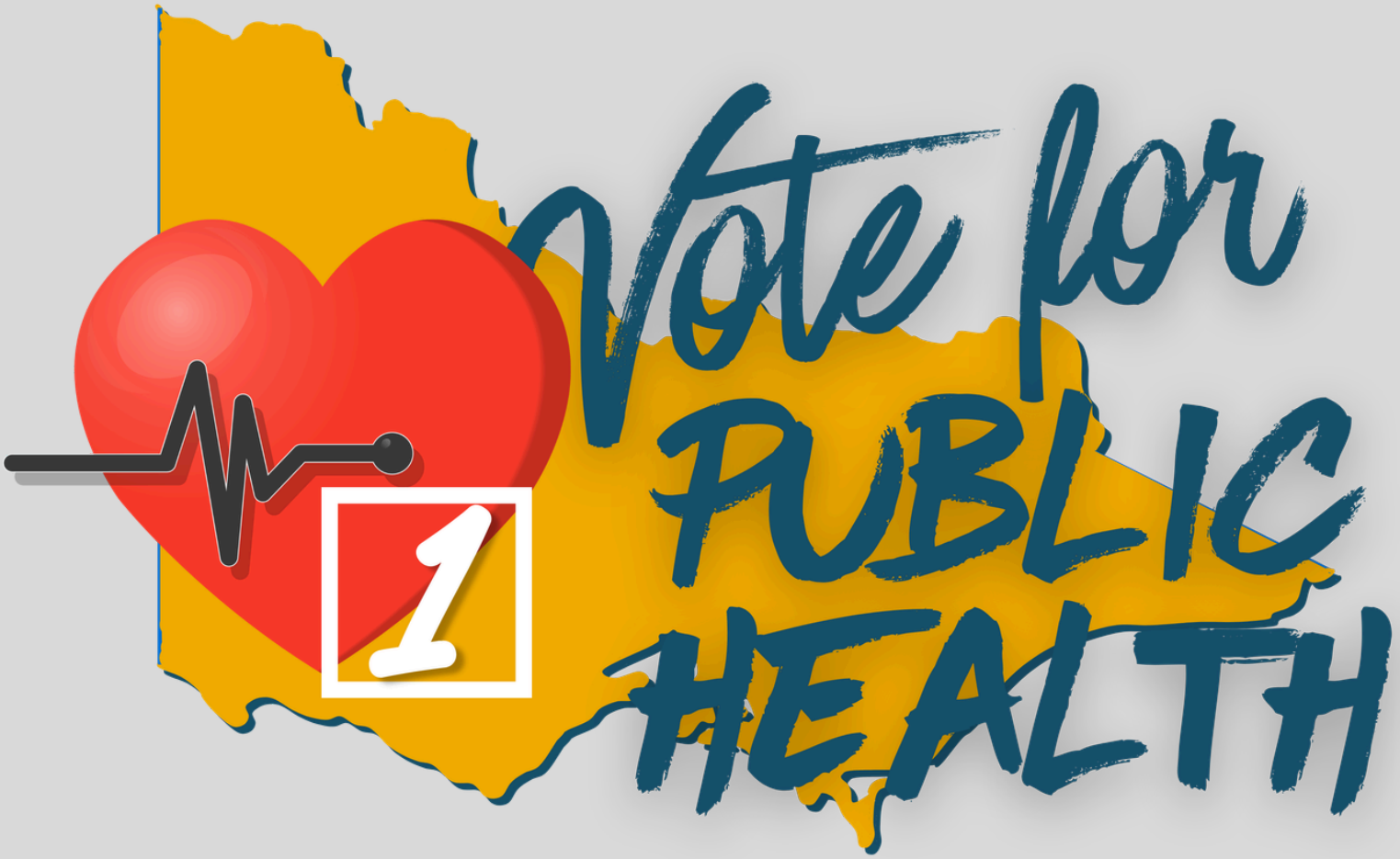
Victoria, vote for

Public Health

this November



Action 1: Prioritise Local Public Health Units

Victoria's nine Local Public Health Units know their local communities best

What is a local public health unit?

Local Public Health Units identify the health needs specific to their region and community, which can then be addressed at the local level.

They play a critical role in providing locally-driven, coordinated efforts to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of their communities.

For example, they investigate and manage communicable disease outbreaks (such as measles) through rapid responses such as tracing, testing and quarantine measures.
The units also have population health/health promotion responsibilities focusing on promoting healthy lifestyles to help reduce chronic illnesses such as heart disease and preventable forms of cancer.

Why is investment in Local Public Health Units critical?

Compared to other Australian states, Victoria's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was hindered because of longstanding under investment and highly centralised processes.

Local Public Health Units are organisations with tailored knowledge and connections, making them ideally placed to address the needs of local communities, including local populations at greater risk of preventable illnesses.

In public health emergencies such as infectious disease outbreaks and environmental disasters, these units enable timely and community-specific public health interventions.

Policy context

The Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27 recognises that Local Public Health Units improve Victoria's capacity for a strong and responsive public health system, especially when delivered in partnership with local communities and service, delivering greater coordination and collective action across the plan's priorities.



Action 2: Invest in preventive health

Prioritise by allocating 5 per cent of the state's overall health budget on prevention, up from around 2 per cent

Why?

Everyone in Victoria should have the best opportunity to live healthy and full lives, no matter where they live, their personal identity or circumstances, or their stage of life. More than a third of illness, disease, and early are preventable, with disadvantaged communities most at risk.

Action and investment in preventive health will lower rates of physical and mental illness, easing the pressure on overburdened and over-capacity hospital and ambulance services.

What is prevention?

The World Health Organization defines prevention (also called preventive health) as 'approaches and activities aimed at reducing the likelihood that a disease or disorder will affect an individual, interrupting or slowing the progress of the disorder or reduce disability'. Preventive health includes policies and programs that support healthy eating, active living, vaccinations, and effective tobacco control.

Why is this investment in preventive health critical?

The two most common risk factors contributing to disease burden in Australia are both important targets of preventive health work: overweight and obesity (8.3 per cent) and tobacco (7.6 per cent).

1 in 16 hospitalisations (6.2 per cent) in Australia were potentially preventable in 2023-24, accounting for 1 in 11 hospital bed days (9 per cent).

The proportion of adult Victorians living with obesity is 50 per cent higher in the lowest socioeconomic areas compared to the highest. Targeted investment and community-informed programs can reduce this inequity.

Young Victorians (12-17 years old) living in rural areas are much more likely to smoke than those living in metro areas.

Policy context

A strong and well-funded preventive health approach would be consistent with priority areas of the Victorian public health and wellbeing plan (2023–27), including reducing harm from tobacco and e-cigarette use, increasing healthy eating, and preventing all forms of violence.

The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030, sets a target of "investment in preventive health will rise to be five per cent of total health expenditure across Commonwealth, state and territory governments by 2030".

Currently only around 2 per cent of health spending in Victoria is dedicated to prevention.

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Action 3: Maintain VicHealth's independence and full funding

VicHealth is the world's first health promotion foundation.
It is a leader in tackling the health consequences of harmful industries such as alcohol, tobacco, vaping, and gambling. VicHealth's independence must be maintained to preserve the critical role and unique contribution it makes to the state's health system.

What is VicHealth?
VicHealth's core objective is to promote good health and prevent chronic disease. The critical role VicHealth plays differs to other parts of the health system and works with communities to address their unique health priorities. It promotes and supports research that meets the needs of people across Victoria, and also advises government by drawing on current evidence and best practices.

Examples of this critical work include Victoria's first breast cancer screening program, successfully reducing tobacco billboard advertising, and the framework to prevent Violence Against Women. Other public health initiatives led by VicHealth include the establishing of the Alcohol Policy Coalition, and the Salt Reduction Strategic Partnership.

Why does VicHealth need full and continued investment?
VicHealth has grown into an innovative, effective, and world leading health promotion organisation.

As an independent health promotion agency, VicHealth is able to think and plan beyond four-year election cycles to tackle long-term and significant health challenges. Chronic diseases costs Australia more than $140 billion each year. With almost 40 years of experience preventing chronic diseases, VicHealth is uniquely placed to ensure the future social, health, and economic wellbeing people across Victoria.

Policy context
The Victorian state government recognises VicHealth as a critical partner for strategic planning and oversight of public health action, as outlined in its Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27.

Dismantling VicHealth is inconsistent with the Productivity Commission's recommendation in 2025 for government investment in prevention and early intervention.

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Action 4: Establish and fund our own Public Health Training program

Unlike New South Wales (NSW), Victoria lacks an ongoing public health training program, weakening our overall health infrastructure. We need more highly skilled practitioners who understand the needs of people across Victoria. This also means we have fewer specialists than NSW ready to activate as we face increasing and evolving health emergencies at the local and state levels. We experienced this shortage during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic – we can and must avoid repeating that mistake when future outbreaks occur.
Victoria lags NSW when it comes to public health training:

	NSW	VIC
Number of trainees currently in a government-funded speciality public health training program (2026)	21	4
Number of qualified medical doctor trainees currently enrolled	8	4
Non-medical doctor trainees currently enrolled	13	0
Specialist Public Health Medical practitioners in practice as of 2025	140	96
Ongoing funded training program?	Yes	No

Who are public health practitioners and what do they do?

- Public health is a distinct speciality of health practice focusing on the health and wellbeing needs of populations and communities, rather than individuals.
- Public health practitioners come from a diverse range of professional backgrounds such as nursing, allied health, epidemiology, environmental health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and medicine.

Responsibilities of a public health workforce are various and include controlling infectious disease threats like measles outbreaks. Public health practitioners work to promote and encourage communities to live healthy lifestyles, protecting their health and reducing their risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease. Public health workers also respond to environmental health threats including extreme heat, and emergency situations such as bushfires and floods.

Why is investment in a Victorian-specific Public Health Training Program critical?

The knowledge and skills required by public health practitioners extend beyond standard nursing, allied health, or medical university education. Public health requires dedicated, on-the-job specialty training. Longstanding underinvestment and highly centralised processes were found to have limited Victoria's public health response and local surge capacity during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Policy context

The Victorian Public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27 recognises that a healthy state needs a "resilient and connected public health system". A funded and ongoing public health training program would support identified government priorities in the Victorian Health Workforce Strategy and Victorian Public health and wellbeing plan 2023–27. It would also help with emergency preparedness, health worker succession pipelines, a strengthened regional workforce, and ensuring there's capacity to deliver statewide health priorities.
During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Contact Tracing Review (National Cabinet, November 2020) issued recommendations. One was for long term investment in accredited training programs for applied epidemiology and applied public health training. A second was to increase the number of public health training positions in all jurisdictions.

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About this document

This document outlines the four action items that the Victorian Branch of the Public Health Association of Australia is asking each party to commit to if they were to form government at the 28 November 2026 state election.

Here's how you can take action

- Write to your local member of parliament, and candidates in your electorate, and explain that you want them to prioritise public health action.

- If you're unsure of your local member's name, use the Victorian Parliament's Finder and change Keyword to Location.

- Never written to a politician before? See an example on our Resources page.

PHAA VIC Branch

Led by volunteers, our branch committee meets monthly to discuss current public health issues, policy submissions and advocacy work, and to plan events which strengthen links with other organisations and Victorian members.

We lead the policy conversation to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone across the state, and strive to ensure fewer people get sick.

Contact us via VIC@phaa.net.au, and follow us on Bluesky: @phaavic.bsky.social