



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

## Submission to Public Consultation Paper

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL PREVENTATIVE HEALTH STRATEGY (NPHS)

#### **Vision of the NPHS Strategy:**

The NPHS strategy will improve the health of all Australians at all stages of life, through early intervention, better information, targeting risk factors and address broader causes of health and wellbeing

#### **Aims of the NPHS Strategy are that all Australians have**

- The best start in life
- Live as long as possible in good health
- Those with more needs have greater gains
- Investment in prevention is increased

#### **Are the vision and aims appropriate for the next 10 years? Why or why not?**

HCANZA agrees with the overall statement of the aims of the strategy to give Australians the best start in life, have them live as long as possible in good health, assist those with more needs have greater gains, and investing increasingly in prevention.

There can be no long-term change in societal health outcomes unless individuals and communities feel enfranchised to make health decisions that are aligned with their values and priorities. This should be one of the stated aims of the program.

Underpinning the achievement of each one of these aims is the requirement for structural change and the fundamental recognition that none of this could occur without investing in behaviour change programs, at every level in the healthcare industry. Behaviour change is the fundamental enabler in moving to a preventative model.

Unhealthy lifestyle behaviours are modifiable risk factors for many diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cognitive decline, and many more. Empowering individuals and communities to create health and reverse chronic disease is paramount.

HCANZA supports a whole of Life Pro-Health approach - not just preventative (post illness) and treatment regimes.

We understand that for the purposes of representing a model in this document, some structural aspects have been adopted. However, we believe this compartmentalisation of aims into four groups fails to address some important subtleties of lifelong health.



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

For example:

Australians have the best start in life:

The best start in life begins before birth. Healthy supported mothers during pregnancy, birthing and postnatally are vital.

Parents who are empowered every day in their healthy lifestyle choices enable children to feel a sense of ownership of their own health journeys.

The current strategy subdivides individuals into either community groups or illnesses. While there are some groups that are extremely disadvantaged for perspectives of culture, location and education, HCANZA believes that the need for a much more individual approach should be acknowledged. Even within groups, each individual is unique and has very specific barriers to them attaining health.

While they may have some systemic lifestyle issues to be addressed, a patient-centred approach is more than categorising them according to their similarities but rather requires recognition of unique differences that often are the linchpins to them each achieving improved health.

## **NPHS stated Goals:**

- Different sectors, including across governments at all levels, will work together to address complex prevention challenges
- Prevention will be embedded in the health system
- Environments will support health and healthy living
- Communities across Australia will be engaged in prevention
- Individuals will be enabled to make the best possible decisions about their health
- Prevention efforts will be adapted to emerging and new science

## **Are these the right goals to achieve the vision and aims of the strategy? Why or why not? Is anything missing?**

### **Goal 1: Different sectors, including across governments at all levels, will work together to address complex prevention challenges.**

HCANZA agrees with this from the fundamental principle that to address societal illness and promote health; all sectors need to be fully engaged in the goal. Health is not just a medical issue. The built environment, education systems, work and corporate environments all need to be involved.

Also, there should be appropriate economic incentives and signals.

### **Goal 2: Prevention will be embedded in the health system.**

Currently, we are the most medicated, stressed, and overweight adult cohort in history

There is a 15yr gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy.

Deep structural change is required to move from the current illness model of diagnosis with pharmaceutical intervention. If Primary care physicians are to be pivotal in health delivery, then medical education in Australia would need to be overhauled. Current training of doctors is wholly geared to the illness model.



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

One example:

Overall, the prevention strategy supports improving understanding of appropriate nutrition guidelines, for instance, yet graduating doctors have had approximately 15 - 20 hours of nutrition training in 6 years of education. This is also true of other lifestyle interventions. Primary care physicians are in the front line - but have not been equipped with early intervention tools and strategies to help patients prevent illness.

## **Goal 5: Individuals will be enabled to make the best possible decision about their health.**

It is this goal that HCANZA is wholly committed to. Health and Wellness Coaches partner with clients seeking self-directed, lasting changes, aligned with their values, which promote health and wellness and, thereby, enhance wellbeing.

In the course of their work health and wellness, coaches display unconditional positive regard for their clients and a belief in their capacity for change, honouring that each client is an expert on his or her life while ensuring that all interactions are respectful and non-judgmental.

Persuading people is an art and a science but cannot be achieved within a 12-minute consultation. Insights (by the client) into what matters to their health experience is a mix of complex human behaviour recognising what underpins old habits. It is a discovery process.

Programs that will make a difference is where the program is driven by principals of collaboration, respect and the client's values and priorities. It is truly patient-centred.

Health & wellness coaches support patients and clients to create a bridge between intention and action for a long-term lifestyle change. In this way, they assist the client in gaining clarity; it is greater than educating and advising.

More information and education without understanding personal drivers of current unhelpful behaviour will not lead to health creation and reversal of old habits. The old paradigm of imposed, prescribed or complying tablet regimes, has not encouraged individuals to take accountability for their health outcomes and led to the acceptance of chronic disease as inevitable.

## **NPHS Framework for Action – 1. Mobilising a Prevention System.**

- Information and literacy skills
- Health system action
- Partnerships
- Leadership and governance
- Preparedness
- Research and evaluation
- Monitoring and surveillance

## **Are these the right actions to mobilise a prevention system?**

For this section of the survey, the following is a brief discussion of the items, Information and literacy skills, Health system action and Partnerships.



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

The strategy must build appropriate infrastructure and health care settings to support real patient care to ensure when a person enters the system; the opportunity to help them is not lost through systems and procedures. A goal of the strategy must be to facilitate behaviour change to empower patients and individuals to make positive decisions about their personalised health.

Australians accountable for their health will lead to a sustainable healthcare model – and thus reduce the burden of our current tertiary health care model. We have already outlined the need for increased health professional training in lifestyle medicine models that include Health & Wellness Coaches.

Individuals need first to understand what constitutes healthy living as a priority over public education in symptom alleviation or pharmaceutical benefits. Federal and state governments currently spend millions of dollars on information and literacy - yet we still have a chronic disease epidemic. The effectiveness of education, information and health literacy spending must be measured in behaviour change outcomes.

Health & Wellness Coaches focus on guiding and assisting their clients in developing advantages in physical, mental and emotional resilience that long-term behaviour change delivers in health and wellness outcomes.

In New Zealand, there was a commitment to placing a health coach in every GP practice. A strategy such as this is to be applauded. However, these coaches need to be appropriately trained to ensure measurable outcomes. It requires 6 - 12 months of minimum training in positive psychology core competencies that are proven to support patient outcomes. Long term changes to health behaviours cannot be achieved using health coaches that have been trained for 8 hours who then go on to work with a client using an app as their primary tool. Apps can be useful as a minor tool, but health resilience requires more.

At the moment, health coaches are available in Australia if you have private health insurance and are covered for extra services. Health Coaching should be available as part of a collaborative care team approach in primary care.

HCANZA agrees that community and industry partnerships are important. However, there is a need for them to be monitored for conflicts of interest, governance and inherent bias. In particular, HCANZA supports the recently announced review of the national nutrition guidelines and look forward to the management of the bias in the guidelines towards processed foods over whole foods.



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

## **NPBS Framework for Action – 2. Boosting Action in Focus Areas**

- Reducing tobacco use
- Improving consumption of a healthy diet
- Increasing physical activity
- Increasing cancer screening
- Improving immunisation coverage
- Reducing alcohol and other drug-related harm

## **Where should efforts be prioritised for focus areas?**

HCANZA believes there are four key areas of lifestyle practices for health that underpin wellbeing, and if any of these areas are not met, an individual is at risk of illness. They are interrelated and inextricable.

1. **Healthy diet and good nutrition:** We know the Western diet that encourages overconsumption of certain types of processed food, is responsible for the epidemic of obesity and a major contributor to most if not all chronic illness. Environmental factors influence the quality of our foods, and the strategy must include procedures to secure sustainable and healthy food production for the future as well as a crucial focus on what Australians eat.
2. **Adequate physical activity:** the importance of the physical activity to wellbeing and the contribution of physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyle to ill health needs no further proof. Physical activity reduces the risk of many illnesses and disease and promotes optimal physical and mental wellbeing as well as healthy aging. As the strategy acknowledges, we must work to increase Australians physical activity in a bid to decrease the overall burden of disease.
3. **Good sleep:** the importance of sleep to wellbeing and its contribution to both physical and mental health is also a primary focus area. Contrary to popular belief, a good night's sleep is not negotiable, though of course, individuals may experience periods of lower quality sleep due to circumstances beyond their control.

A consistently good night's sleep impacts every aspect of our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Many factors can adversely impact on our sleep, including stress, technology, and food. Poor sleep interacts with many conditions, including anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, to name only a few.

As mentioned previously, the strategy must include actions to promote and educate Australians on these most basic of preventative healthcare measures.



# Health Coaches

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION

**Mental health and the perceived need for substance use - including tobacco, alcohol, and other drug-related harm.** Substance abuse usually accompanies other imbalances in an individual's life, factors that may or not be within their locus of control. The use of alcohol daily has become normalised in our society, and peer pressure can be overwhelming. Tobacco use is far less acceptable now than previously. Stress management techniques are valuable adjunct behaviours to assist individuals in managing stress in a more proactive way.

It is important that all individuals, regardless of their cultural, geographical, or religious identity, feel fully resourced and supported to change a behaviour that is not serving them anymore. Health coaches are ideally placed to meet the needs of the individual and assist patients to improve their self-awareness, self-confidence and to effectively plan to make long term behaviour changes that lead to an increase living with vitality in good health.

This is a once in 50-year opportunity to make a substantive structural change to the health care system. It is undeniable that the current system is groaning under the consequence of an illness treatment model that only resulted in chronic illness epidemic.

Primarily this is because individuals were treated as minute component parts dissected into disease, specialists, and pharmaceutical care only. There is an overall need to treat the person as a whole - physical, emotional, spiritual.

I have already discussed that the education of health care professionals needs to include appropriate amounts of lifestyle medicine and behaviour change training.

The strategy needs to consider the role of prescription drugs in Australia. The current model of healthcare is not preventative but reactive and relies heavily on prescriptive drugs and medicine. Pharmaceuticals are an important part of the health care system - but should be used in combination with modifiable lifestyle behaviour change.

The strategy must include a review of Australian prescribing practices.

The strategy musty consider the role of consumerism, the consumer and related industries as paramount to improving preventative health.

HCANZA believes that the use Health & Wellness Coaches in a primary care setting, where they operate as the first line in a triage model would assist in the transition to a preventative model, placing the patient at the centre of care and enabling them to be authors of their own destiny.