

## 7.1 Notice of Motion, Cr Dr Olivia Ball: Maintain VicHealth, its independence and funding

**Mover: Cr Dr Ball**

**Secunder: Cr Liu**

### Motion

1. That Council:
  - 1.1. Notes
    - 1.1.1. the critical role played by VicHealth – the world-first and world-renowned independent health promotion foundation, established in 1987 with support from across the political spectrum – in keeping communities in the City of Melbourne healthy, active and well;
    - 1.1.2. the community health initiatives the City of Melbourne has been able to deliver thanks to partnerships with VicHealth, including alcohol harm prevention, tobacco and vaping prevention, support for healthy food environments and systems, along with professional development opportunities for staff;
    - 1.1.3. that for every dollar spent on public health, early intervention and prevention, \$14.30 is saved on future healthcare; and
    - 1.1.4. the vital importance of maintaining the independence of public and preventive health bodies, because health promotion can be subject to competing, vested interests;
  - 1.2. Calls on the Victorian Government to maintain VicHealth, its independence and funding and requests:
    - 1.2.1. the Lord Mayor write to the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Health to: express the City's strong support for VicHealth, its independence and funding; and request genuine and adequate consultation with local governments and their peak bodies prior to any future changes to VicHealth's role, funding or focus; and
    - 1.2.2. the CEO write to state MPs representing electorates that include the City of Melbourne municipality (the state electoral districts of Melbourne, Albert Park, Prahran, Essendon and Brunswick) to: express the City's strong support for VicHealth, its independence and funding, and seek their support for it; and
  - 1.3. Requests management:
    - 1.3.1. submit a motion to the next meeting of MAV State Council on behalf of Melbourne City Council conveying the same; and
    - 1.3.2. add support for VicHealth, its independence and funding to the City of Melbourne's advocacy plan.

### Background

2. VicHealth (short for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation) was established in 1987 as the world's first health promotion foundation, designed to promote health and prevent chronic disease in Victoria through research, policy development, health initiatives and public awareness and behaviour-change campaigns. Its founding challenge was to wean sporting

organisations off tobacco sponsorship. Since then, smoking rates in Victoria have plummeted to roughly half what they were.<sup>1</sup>

3. Its other ground-breaking, life-saving programs, initiatives and campaigns have included:
  - banning tobacco advertising in Victoria, including billboards, TV and at major sporting and cultural events
  - funding specific initiatives at the Cancer Council Victoria, including the QUIT helpline, tobacco harm-reduction research and the SunSmart program
  - the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program growing vegetables and teaching cooking in schools
  - 'This Girl Can' which supports Victorian women and girls to be active
  - the first Victorian breast screening and community-based cervical screening programs.
4. VicHealth has been especially impactful in supporting healthy, sustainable and fair food systems across the state as a partner of local government. For example, its Partners in Place program funds 20 local governments to support sustainable and healthy local food systems for children and young people.
5. A 2025 review of the Victorian public service led by Helen Silver recommended the abolition of VicHealth. The review says this would save \$45m and the functions of VicHealth could be 'absorbed into the Department of Health'.<sup>2</sup>
6. This is a false economy, blind to the importance of VicHealth's independence from political and commercial influence, and its role in preventing disease and avoidable suffering that would cost far more to treat than to prevent.
7. The political editor of The Age has said, "Anyone who can do arithmetic should be outraged":

"The federal government estimates that every dollar spent on public health today saves \$14.30 on future health costs. If we don't want tomorrow's hospital bills to swallow our state and national finances, we need to find and fund better ways of convincing people to eat better, drink less alcohol and exercise more.

"Today's modest budget savings will be, quite literally, a killer in years to come."<sup>3</sup>
8. Despite leading the world in creating VicHealth, Australia now ranks 27th out of the 36 OECD countries in the proportion of health dollars it spends on preventive health.<sup>4</sup> And within Australia, Victoria spends the least per capita of any state or territory.<sup>5</sup> Victoria needs to increase, not cut, its spending on public and preventive health.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Le Grand, 'There's a simple calculation about health that should outrage anyone who can do arithmetic,' *The Age* newspaper (11 December 2025) <<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/there-s-a-simple-calculation-about-health-that-should-outrage-anyone-who-can-do-arithmetic-20251209-p5nm5d.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> H. Silver (2025) 'Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service' <<https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-12/Independent-Review-of-the-VPS-Final-Report.pdf>>, p84.

<sup>3</sup> Le Grand, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Productivity Commission (2025), 'Delivering quality care more efficiently: Interim report' <<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/quality-care/interim/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025), 'Government expenditure on public health activities in Australia 2023-24' <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/health-welfare-expenditure/government-expenditure-on-public-health-activities/contents/government-expenditure-on-public-health-activities>>.

9. The social determinants of health are well-established. Any reduction in VicHealth's funding or independence will harm the health of our communities, lead to poorer social and economic outcomes and greater inequality, in addition to increasing demand on council services and our state's already stretched healthcare system, shifting avoidable illness into the acute health system and increasing long-term costs both to council and other healthcare providers.
10. The Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008) recognises the role of local government in the health and well-being of people in their municipality. Local councils are healthcare providers in a limited but real way (e.g. maternity services and immunisations) and play a huge role in creating conditions for healthy living through public services (e.g. swimming pools and gyms, parks, playgrounds and sporting facilities) and through the planning, design and provision of public space. Every time we plant canopy trees, build parks and bike lanes, create smoke-free zones, enforce hat rules in our childcare centres, install air-conditioning and add generous verandahs to our community facilities, Councils are safeguarding public health.
11. Victorian local governments have amplified their public health impact by partnering with VicHealth. Evidence shows that these partnerships lead to improved health outcomes for local communities.<sup>6</sup>
12. In short, VicHealth's funding, strategic focus and leadership is crucial to achieving better population health outcomes for Victorians. VicHealth is effective because of its independence, its prevention-focused mandate, and its ability to partner directly with communities, researchers and the health promotion sector.
13. Dissolving VicHealth into the Department of Health will erode that independence, disrupt longstanding community partnerships and make prevention efforts invisible within a government department whose focus is hospitals and healthcare.
14. It would be bad for Victorians, bad for Victorian Councils, and bad for the Victorian state budget.

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<sup>6</sup> T. Felmingham, S. O'Halloran, J. Poorter, E. Rhook, C. Needham, J. Hayward, P. Fraser, S. Kilpatrick, D. Leahy, S. Allender (2023), 'Systems thinking in local government: intervention design and adaptation in a community-based study', *Health Research, Policy & Systems* vol. 21(1) <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37667377/>>.