

Tools to assist in evaluation of municipal public health and wellbeing plans

Module 1 of 7: Municipal public health and wellbeing plan evaluation at a glance



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Introduction

The purpose of this module is to provide an overview of the suite of separate modules that make up **Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP**s. Together the modules are designed to provide evaluation support and guidance to practitioners involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans (MPHWPs) as required under Section 26 of the Victorian *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

An MPHWP describes the positive changes council wishes to bring to the health and wellbeing of the community and the strategies council will pursue to achieve these changes. As a result, MPHWP's express broad strategic direction across the built, social, economic and natural environments and drive a multi-faceted portfolio of policies, programs and activities intended to influence health and wellbeing.

The complexity of MPHWP's means that MPHWP evaluation cannot be conducted in the same way a single program might be. It requires a multilayered and sometimes pragmatic approach - balancing risks, resources and opportunities.

The *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning*¹ recommends four actions to undertaking MPHWP evaluation:

- **Develop an MPHWP evaluation strategy**
- **Determine role of internal partners, external partners and the community**
- **Design systems to support the evaluation strategy**
- **Conduct MPHWP evaluation.**

Table 1 illustrates how the **Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP**s modules provide an understanding of MPHWP evaluation and support these different MPHWP evaluation actions.

¹ Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (a), *Guide to municipal public health planning*, DH, Melbourne p 22
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/\\$FILE/1209008_guide_mph_wp_WEB-v02.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/$FILE/1209008_guide_mph_wp_WEB-v02.pdf)

Table 1: Alignment of Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP modules with evaluation actions

MPHWP evaluation action	Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP modules
<p>Understanding MPHWP evaluation</p>	<p>Use Module 1; MPHWP evaluation at a glance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the legislative requirements for MPHWP evaluation under the <i>Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>. • understand the multilayered approach applied to MPHWP evaluation applied in this resource.
<p>Develop an MPHWP evaluation strategy</p>	<p>Use Module 2; Building an MPHWP evaluation strategy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish the governance mechanisms for MPHWP evaluation • clarify how each evaluation question will be approached and what will be evaluated • establish systems to coordinate evaluation elements • design summary MPHWP evaluation reporting
<p>Determine role of internal partners, external partners and the community</p>	<p>Use Module 3: Achieving a culture of evaluation to develop internal relationships that promote MPHWP evaluation across council</p> <p>Use Module 4: Evaluating with partners to work with external partners to include assisting in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation in their MPHWP roles</p> <p>Use Module 5: Engaging the community in evaluation to engage the community more effectively in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation</p>
<p>Design systems to support the evaluation strategy</p>	<p>Use Module 6: Making evaluation sustainable to develop approaches to the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation that are sustainable</p>
<p>Conduct MPHWP evaluation</p>	<p>Use Module 1 to guide how answers to evaluation questions will be brought together, analysed and reported</p> <p>Use Modules 3, 4,5 to guide the way in which internal partners, external partners and the community are engaged in the conduct of evaluation</p> <p>Use Module 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation to design and conduct an evaluation of selected MPHWP topics or to support someone else to do so</p>

You are here

1. A working definition of MPHWP evaluation

Section 26 (2)(c) of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* requires councils to:

*'...provide for the involvement of people in the local community in the development, implementation and **evaluation** of the public health plan'.*

Councils that have included public health and wellbeing matters in a Council Plan or Strategic Plan and have received an exemption from Section 26 are still required to meet this provision. See *Including public health and wellbeing matters in the council plan or strategic plan: A resource for local government planners*².

The legislation does not prescribe what evaluation entails. However, some guidance can be drawn from two principles expressed in the legislation:

Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 **Part 2 - Objective, Principles and Application:**

Section 5 Principle of evidence-based decision-making

Decisions as to

- (a) the most effective use of resources to promote and protect public health and wellbeing; and
- (b) the most effective and efficient public health and wellbeing interventions

- should be based on evidence available in the circumstances that is relevant and reliable.

Section 8 Principle of accountability

1. Persons who are engaged in the administration of this Act should as far as practicable ensure that decisions are transparent, systematic and appropriate.
2. Members of the public should there be given –
 - (a) Access to reliable information in appropriate forms to facilitate a good understanding of public health issues; and
 - (b) Opportunities to participate in policy and program development.

Evaluation plays an important role in delivering on both these principles and as a result **Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP**s uses the following working definition:

MPHWP evaluation is a structured process of inquiry that informs council's health and wellbeing decision-making and demonstrates transparency.

² Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (b), *Including public health and wellbeing matters in the council plan or strategic plan: A resource for local government planners*, DH, Melbourne
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/1A72EA5BE96EAC3CCA257AF2007CE50A/\\$FILE/1209009_mphwp_resource_WEB.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/1A72EA5BE96EAC3CCA257AF2007CE50A/$FILE/1209009_mphwp_resource_WEB.pdf)

2. MPHWP evaluation and the planning cycle

Evaluation is an integral part of the MPHWP planning cycle. The Victorian Government *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning*³ describes evaluation as part a six step process:

- Pre-planning
- Municipal scan
- Engagement
- Planning decisions
- Implementation
- **Evaluation**

The MPHWP itself is made up of planning statements that express council intentions across the built, social, economic and natural environments. While different councils can use different terms to describe their planning statements there are usually three levels that can be differentiated by what they describe. In some instances the strategy statements might be expressed in companion documents such as MPHWP action plans or business unit plans.

Table 2: MPHWP planning statements

Planning Statements	Describe...
Goals	the changes council wants to see to the health status of the community or to key determinants of health
Objectives	the broad ways in which council will pursue its goals for example, increasing awareness, supporting improved behaviours, creating healthier environments
Strategies	the policies, programs, projects and activities that council will implement to meet its objectives

From the perspectives of both accountability and learning it is important to be confident that council is not only achieving or making progress towards their goals but that each strategy included in the MPHWP portfolio is contributing positively to the health and wellbeing of the community (or can be adjusted or ceased if needs be).

It is important to build evaluation into the fabric of the MPHWP from the earliest planning stages and to flow this through to planning for the next MPHWP. In thinking about MPHWP evaluation early, it is possible to lay the foundations for evaluation throughout the life of the MPHWP by ensuring goals, objectives and strategies are expressed in a

³ Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (a), pp 9-10
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/\\$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf)

measurable way and identifying baseline data sources for health and wellbeing indicators.

3. An approach to MPHWP evaluation

Evaluating an MPHWP can be approached by posing overarching evaluation questions that examine the MPHWP's multi-layered elements.

The *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning*⁴ suggests that MPHWP evaluation consider four questions:

- ***Have we achieved the change we sought?***
- ***Are we having the influence we expected?***
- ***Have we done what we said we would do?***
- ***What worked well and what needs improvement?***

The success of an MPHWP depends not only on what is done for the community but how planning is conducted through its different stages. Evaluating MPHWP planning itself ensures that the structures and processes supporting MPHWP reach a high standard. In this way MPHWP governance, engagement with the community, partnership building with key stakeholders, priority identification, strategy selection and evaluation mechanisms themselves can all be examined and improved upon to contribute to a more effective MPHWP.

For these reasons ***Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP*** includes a fifth optional evaluation question:

- ***How effective is the way we plan?***

The following sections address each evaluation question considering key points and proposing a practical approach to answering them:

⁴ Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (a), p22
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/\\$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf)

3.1. Evaluation question: *Have we achieved the change we sought?*

Key points

- MPHWP goals are council's response to the challenges faced by its communities.
- The goals are derived from a consolidated profile of the health and wellbeing across the municipality using a municipal scan and stakeholder engagement. This profile includes current data on health status and key health determinants - often expressed as indicators.
- The data that has prompted the decision to pursue change can be revisited to assess whether significant change is now demonstrated in the indicators.
- MPHWPs might include a mix of goals some of which might take many years to achieve (particularly those seeking a change in health status) and others that might show change in the life of the MPHWP, for example, some determinant or supportive environment goals.
- However, given that MPHWPs are cyclic and goals are unlikely to vary substantially, monitoring such change might go well beyond an individual four year cycle.
- For all goals there will be many factors outside the control of council that will influence what council can achieve. As a result it is unwise to treat this aspect of evaluation as a measure of council's accountability.

Approach

- Revisiting health and wellbeing indicators provides a way of answering this evaluation question, particularly for those indicators where change is conceivable within the MPHWP lifecycle. Beyond this it can be embraced as providing insight into the community's wellbeing over a longer timeframe.
- The challenge for councils is to be practical in their approach to gathering health and wellbeing data, for example using reliable secondary sources, and to be realistic about analysing and interpreting the results.
- High level health and wellbeing indicators can be selected that will be used to assess the progress of goals. This would occur during the early stages of planning and once the goals are agreed.
- Evaluation reporting would occur towards the end of the MPHWP's four years of operation to inform planning for the next MPHWP.

3.2. Evaluation question: *Are we having the influence we expected?*

Key points

- Given the breadth of most MPHWP, it is unlikely that an evaluation of much depth could be applied to every policy, every program and every activity.
- Limited resources (funds or people) might require decisions about where evaluation effort will be applied.
- This challenge is offset to some extent by the effort of councils to select MPHWP strategies based on evidence. Strategies selected in this way can give councils some confidence that they are likely to work and provide less cause for concern about unintended consequences.
- A lack of evidence on some topics means that there might be important aspects of MPHWP activity that are innovative and demand evaluation.

Approach

- This evaluation question can be answered by selecting key policies, programs or activities for evaluation in appropriate depth based on assessed risks (for example, a program with pre-existing high evidence for effectiveness would mean lower risk than an innovative or trial program) available resources and opportunities.
- Individual evaluations can be scheduled across the full four-year MPHWP cycle.
- These evaluations might be designed and conducted in-house or by other internal or external partners.
- Some strategies included in the MPHWP might already be agreed for evaluation as part of other council or external planning processes. These evaluation activities can be included as selected topics.
- The findings of such evaluations would be summarised towards the end of the MPHWP's four years of operation to provide a picture of the effectiveness of the MPHWP in key areas.

3.3. Evaluation question: *Have we done what we said we would do?*

Key points

- This element of evaluation is largely concerned with monitoring the progress of implementation so that timely adjustments can be made to strategy design or delivery.
- As a result it needs to be established on a regular and routine basis.
- Reporting will require coordination of business unit information across council.
- Alignment with existing council reporting systems can simplify the process and feed information into existing decision-making mechanisms.

Approach

- This evaluation question can be answered by coordinating and analysing regular reports on the progress of all MPHWP strategies
- It is useful to clarify that existing reporting systems adequately report on MPHWP strategies and if necessary design additional methods to collect implementation information methods and collate routine implementation reports.
- Routine reporting might be aligned with other council reporting systems and processes, which might occur monthly, quarterly or less frequently.
- Reports can simply note progress against agreed timelines or report on key aspects of implementation, for example, program participation targets, reach, satisfaction, and quality. However, practically, this is more likely to feature in fuller selected evaluations.

3.4. Evaluation question: *How effective is the way we plan?*

Key points

- Understanding whether the MPHWP is planned and implemented to a high standard can be undertaken at a number of levels, for example, from the level of the business unit responsible for health and wellbeing planning to the whole of council level.
- Some of the enablers critical to effective MPHWP planning identified in the *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning* ⁵ might also be of interest to other areas of council, for example, *Evidence focus*, *Partnership* or *Community Participation*, which might provide opportunities for collaboration.
- Limited resources (funds or people) might require decisions about where evaluation effort will be applied and the depth of analysis.

Approach

- This evaluation question can be answered by selecting key planning principles to evaluate based on available resources, assessed risks and opportunities
- Individual evaluations can be scheduled across the full four-year MPHWP cycle.
- These evaluations might be designed and conducted in-house or by other internal partners.
- The findings of such evaluations would be summarised towards the end of the MPHWP's four years of operation to provide a picture of the effectiveness of the MPHWP planning in key areas.
- Alternatively, a simple review could be conducted using the planning milestones in the *Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning* ⁶ as a checklist and will inform how you plan for the next MPHWP.

⁵ Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (a), p 11

⁶ Victorian Department of Health, 2013 (a), pp 13-22

[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/\\$FILE/1209008_guide_mph_wp_WEB-v02.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/$FILE/1209008_guide_mph_wp_WEB-v02.pdf)

3.5. Evaluation question: *What worked well and what needs improvement?*

Key points

- There are three forms in which council will want to understand what MPHWP strategies have worked (or are working) well and what needs improvement:
 - **Routine implementation reports** dealing with answering: *Have we done what we said we would do?*
 - **MPHWP annual reviews** drawing on evaluation to date to inform decisions on what needs to be done differently from year to year. Annual Reviews also check the context has not changed sufficiently to require a change in the overall direction and major strategies
 - **Summary MPHWP Evaluation** bringing together the answers from all evaluation questions to assess the overall effectiveness of the MPHWP and to inform strategic thinking about where to direct effort in the next MPHWP.

Approach

- **Routine implementation reports** – see *Have we done what we said we would do?*
- **MPHWP annual reviews** MPHWP annual reviews and their relationship to evaluation activities is dealt with in *A practical guide to conducting annual reviews of MPHWP*⁷
- **Summary MPHWP Evaluation**

As a summary evaluation this will compile findings from the assessment of significant change in health and wellbeing indicators, the results of the selected evaluations; and any other evaluation activity. It will identify achievements and challenges and make recommendations about what needs to be done differently.

⁷ Victorian Department of Health Southern Metropolitan Region, 2012, *A practical guide to conducting annual reviews of MPHWP*, DH SMR, Dandenong
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/E2DCDF76848BC286CA257AC3006E4DB2/\\$FILE/Final%20SMR%20Annual%20Review%20Guide_Mar2012.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/E2DCDF76848BC286CA257AC3006E4DB2/$FILE/Final%20SMR%20Annual%20Review%20Guide_Mar2012.pdf)

4. Using the modules to evaluate your MPHWP

Each of the modules that make up *Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWP*s is designed to provide support and guidance in answering the overarching MPHWP evaluation questions.

The suite of modules unpacks the proposed approach for each evaluation question starting with the task of developing an overarching MPHWP evaluation strategy (Module 2).

Evaluation tasks are underpinned with tools to develop the internal relationships and partnerships with other stakeholders and the community that will support effective and sustainable evaluation (Modules 3-6).

Finally the resource includes a tool to assist with designing and conducting specific topic evaluation selected under the overarching strategy (Module 7).

