



Bringing together the national story of the Healthy Workers Initiative

The project: Workplace health insights: Cross-jurisdictional analysis of the Healthy Workers Initiative

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Key messages

- Workplace health and wellbeing programs help people lead healthier lives and avoid chronic disease.
- As part of the National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health, all states and territories implemented the national Healthy Workers Initiative. There were valuable lessons from the experiences of different jurisdictions in trying to translate complex health initiatives into programs.
- This project interviewed those responsible for directing the development and implementation of the Initiative to compare their experiences. While program evaluation usually concerns the impact of individual programs, this project was different because it examined lessons at a state program development level.
- The project found that states took a variety of approaches to the Initiative, but they had common goals: achieving sustainability and capacity for meaningful change.
- The Initiative's national performance indicators – such as lowering obesity – were not meaningful for state and territory jurisdictions and were not used by them to gauge the success of programs.
- The project identified factors that helped or hindered success of workplace health programs at state level, such as jurisdiction size, political imperatives and funding decisions.
- The project identified four ways jurisdictions sought to achieve their goals:
 - Taking an embedded approach to workplace health promotion
 - Ensuring relevance of the workplace health program to businesses
 - Engaging in collaborative partnerships with agencies responsible for implementation
 - Cultivating evolution of the workplace health program.



Workplace health
programs
can help prevent
chronic disease



We studied how
states and territories
implemented the
**Healthy Workers
Initiative**

Our findings
can help
governments
develop

**effective
workplace
health programs**

Why is this issue important?

There is significant evidence that workplace health and wellbeing programs can influence people to lead healthier lives and avoid chronic disease.^{1,2,3} However, it is important to understand how governments develop workplace health programs, the influences that shape them, and how policy and program makers conceptualise success.

Introduced in 2008 under the Council of Australian Government's National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (NPAPH), the Healthy Workers Initiative supported healthy lifestyle programs in workplaces in all states in Australia.⁴

These programs were new for most health departments, who were asked to roll out the Initiative with minimal specifications from the Commonwealth and limited scope to expand existing programs. Each jurisdiction took a different approach, but there were common threads between programs, and some jurisdictions collaborated and ensured their approaches were similar.⁴

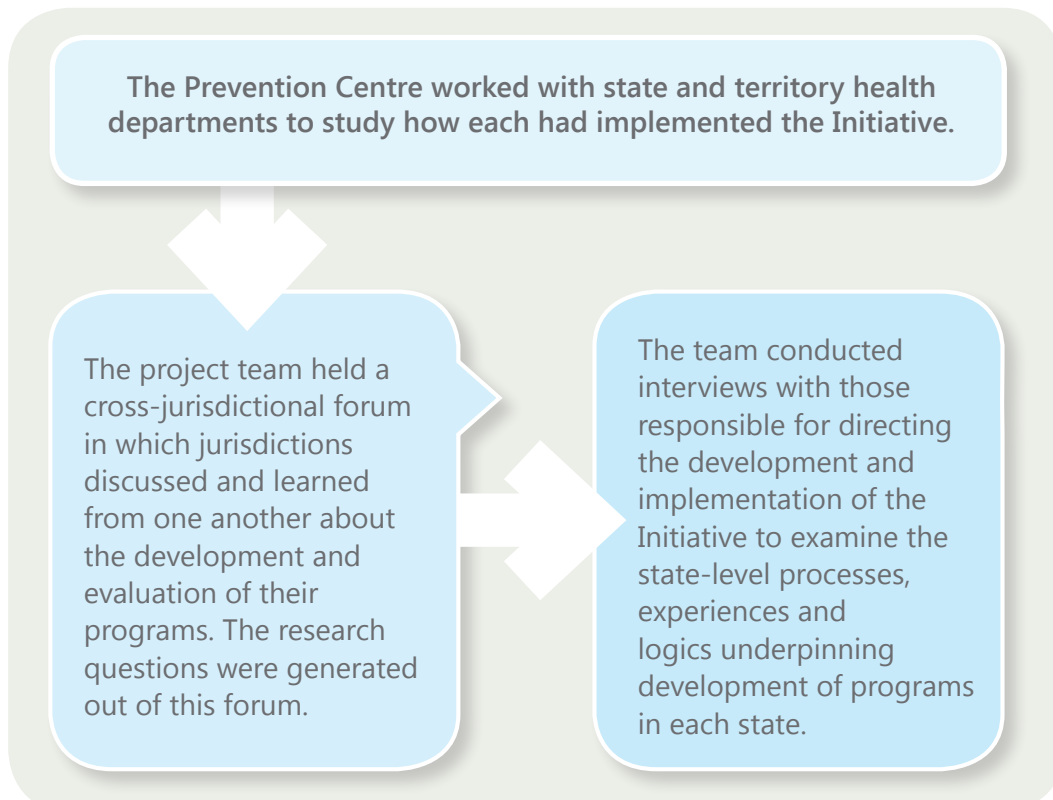
Even though the funding for the Initiative was suddenly withdrawn with the cancellation of the NPAPH in 2014, there are valuable lessons to be learned from the experiences of different states and territories in trying to translate complex health initiatives into programs.



By identifying the factors that help or hinder programs, the findings can help policy makers develop and implement future programs to achieve meaningful and sustainable change."

Dr Anne Grunseit
Project lead

What did we do?



What did we find?

- The project found that states took a variety of approaches to the Healthy Workers Initiative, but they had common goals: achieving sustainability and capacity for meaningful change.
- The Healthy Workers Initiative's national performance indicators – such as lowering obesity – were not meaningful for state and territory jurisdictions and were not used by them to gauge the success of programs.

Factors that helped the success of workplace health and wellbeing programs at state level:

- Health is embedded within workplace practice. One-off programs or events are not enough.
- Businesses drive health promotion to achieve sustainability. Health departments should enable rather than deliver programs.
- Programs are relevant to businesses: health promotion is aligned with key business drivers such as brand image, productivity and staff morale.
- There are partnerships with local councils, workplace health and safety departments, unions, peak industry bodies and other government departments.
- Programs are incrementally adapted based on ongoing learning.

Factors that hinder the success of workplace health and wellbeing programs at state level:

- Businesses have other, more pressing priorities than health promotion.
- Missing key entry points for businesses, such as mental health and worker stress. By restricting the focus to smoking, nutrition, physical activity and alcohol, the Initiative may have missed this opportunity.
- Engaging partners in contractual style arrangements: this did not work as well as working in true partnership.
- Inability to properly evaluate programs (for example, due to time or resource constraints).

What did we produce?

Published papers

Grunseit AC, Rowbotham S, Pescud M, Indig D, Wutzke S. Beyond fun runs and fruit bowls: an evaluation of the meso-level processes that shaped the Australian Healthy Workers Initiative. *Health Promot J Austr.* 2016; doi: 10.1071/HE16049

Why does it matter?

Evaluation is crucial at all levels of health and wellbeing program development and implementation because it shows policy makers what works and what doesn't.

Researchers often focus on evaluating the impact of individual programs. Our study was different because it studied evaluation at a state program development level, showing how programs were generated and how program managers worked in different ways to meet the objectives of a national initiative.

The project has provided insights on program development and evaluation strategies of Healthy Workers Initiatives across Australia, and shed light on how they were implemented. By identifying the factors that help or hinder programs, the findings can help policy makers develop and implement future programs to achieve meaningful and sustainable change.

Next steps

This project did not include the Commonwealth perspective. Studying the factors that influenced the shaping of the Initiative nationally would provide a clearer picture of the best way to approach the design and implementation of complex initiatives.

References

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4. Grunseit AC, Rowbotham S, Pescud M, Indig D, Wutzke S. Beyond fun runs and fruit bowls: an evaluation of the meso-level processes that shaped the Australian Healthy Workers Initiative. *Health Promot J Austr.* 2016; doi: 10.1071/HE16049



The Australian Prevention
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