Understanding national action to prevent chronic disease

The project: Prevention Landscape: The status of prevention programs in Australian states and territories following two national prevention initiatives

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Project start: January 2015  Project end: December 2015

Key messages

• The 2005 Chronic Disease Strategy and the 2008 National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (NPAPH) provided impetus and direction for national prevention initiatives.

• This project interviewed senior public health managers, program implementation staff, academics and public health advocates to understand the impact of these two initiatives and lessons for future directions.

• The interviews found that both initiatives had been useful and practical, and had set in motion potential gains for the health system.

• The interviews highlighted key aspects of successful national action including: strong Australian Government leadership and coordination; national alignment on priorities; evidence-informed implementation strategies; and funding and infrastructure to support implementation.

• The 2005 Chronic Disease Strategy was viewed as necessary for national coordination and to align priorities and action across states and territories, but without funding, infrastructure or an implementation plan, its achievements were limited.

• The NPAPH was seen as well on its way to achieving its goals, but it needed more time, stronger national leadership and an overarching national strategy to reach its potential.

We studied 2 national initiatives and found both played an important role in chronic disease prevention

The 2005 Chronic Disease Strategy set an agenda but needed funding and an implementation plan to achieve its goals

The NPAPH was on its way to achieving its goal but needed more time and stronger leadership to reach its potential
Why is this issue important?

Despite important advances, chronic diseases remain Australia’s greatest health challenge.¹ In efforts to tackle this increasing burden, several large-scale, national chronic disease control initiatives have been released in Australia over recent years, including the 2005 National Chronic Disease Strategy and the 2008 National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health (NPAPH).²,³

Initially covering 2008 to 2014, but extended to 2018, the NPAPH was an unprecedented, national, coordinated framework to comprehensively tackle the growing burden of chronic disease through prevention.³ The NPAPH was cancelled in the Abbott Government’s first budget in May 2014.⁴

Endorsed by Australian Health Ministers in 2005, the National Chronic Disease Strategy provided high-level policy guidance for action at every level of government and all parts of the health care system for the prevention and management of chronic disease. It will be superseded by the National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions, which is currently under development.

Both strategies provided impetus and direction for national prevention initiatives. A better understanding of what they did and didn’t achieve can help to inform future activities aimed at preventing chronic disease.

What did we do?

The project conducted qualitative interviews with key informants: senior public health managers and program implementation staff from state and territory health departments as well as senior academics, thought leaders and public health advocates from key agencies across the country. The interviews explored:

- The status of the Chronic Disease Strategy, in particular, its usefulness to the prevention sector and lessons for future strategies
- Jurisdictional responses to the cancellation of the NPAPH, focusing on changes to prevention programs in each state or territory and the factors that influenced decision-making. The team compiled a snapshot of NPAPH programs status as of July 2015.

"In short, informants wanted to see government leadership. They wanted government to signal its preparedness to embark on the difficult process of reform and bring about the culture change required to better prevent chronic disease.”

Chronic disease prevention landscape
key informants survey report
What did we produce?

Reports
Chronic disease prevention landscape: Results of a national key informant survey. The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre. 2015.


Published papers


Why does it matter?
The views of policy makers and thought leaders on the Australian Government’s two national policy approaches to the control of chronic disease show that both approaches were useful, practical and set in motion potential gains for the health system.

This research can inform current and future large-scale, population-level health initiatives through better understanding of how previous national chronic disease initiatives were viewed and used at national, state and local levels.
References


