



# 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  
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to achieve its goals**

**The NPAPH was on its way to achieving  
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## Why is this issue important?

Despite important advances, chronic diseases remain Australia's greatest health challenge.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2,3</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> The NPAPH was cancelled in the Abbott Government's first budget in May 2014.<sup>4</sup>

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 find?



The project found general support for national approaches to chronic disease prevention – that the Chronic Disease Strategy and the NPAPH had combined to advance chronic disease prevention in Australia in terms of strategic direction and programs on the ground.



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The interviews highlighted key aspects of successful national action: strong Australian Government leadership and coordination; setting a common agenda; national alignment on priorities; evidence-informed implementation strategies; partnerships within and across governments, as well as with other sectors; and funding and infrastructure to support implementation.



The effect of the NPAPH cancellation on programs was more noticeable in some states and territories than others. In some states, the end of NPAPH funding meant the end of some programs. In other jurisdictions, programs continued but with different funding.

## What did we produce?

### Reports

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

Status of NPAPH programs, July 2015. Available from: <http://preventioncentre.org.au/our-work/research-projects/mapping-national-action-to-prevent-chronic-disease>

### Published papers

Wutzke S, Morrice E, Benton M, Wilson A. What will it take to improve prevention of chronic diseases in Australia? A case study of two national approaches. *Aust Health Rev.* 2016; doi: 10.1071/AH16002

Wutzke S, Morrice E, Benton M, Wilson A. Systems approaches for chronic disease prevention: sound logic and empirical evidence, but is this view shared outside of academia? *Public Health Res Pract.* 2016;26(3):e2631632. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17061/phrp2631632>

Wutzke S, Morrice E, Benton M, Milat A, Russell L, Wilson A. Australia's National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health: Critical reflections from States and Territories. *Health Promot J Aust.* In press.

## 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

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The Australian Prevention  
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