

# Joint Policy Statement between SACOSS and the Department for Health and Ageing: *A shared vision for improved community health and wellbeing*

## **BACKGROUND**

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) was established as a Public Health Partner Authority in October 2014, with this partnership commitment expressed through an agreement between the Department for Health and Ageing (DHA) and SACOSS. The establishment of Public Health Partner Authorities under the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* provides opportunities for collaborative action to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for South Australians. This Joint Policy Statement aims to further support the formalised partnership and strengthen opportunities for collaboration.

## **PURPOSE**

The Policy Statement expresses the commitment and shared vision of SACOSS and the DHA in continuing to work in partnership to support improved community health and wellbeing and public health outcomes.

The Statement confirms the important role the non-government sector plays in contributing to positive health and wellbeing for all South Australians and reducing inequities. This Statement, in conjunction with the Partnership Agreement intends to elevate the position of the sector, recognising its existing commitment and strengthening its strategic role in promoting community health and wellbeing.

The Statement aims to identify the overlapping and common agenda for the partnership and propose directions to guide future collaborative action.

## **BETTER OUTCOMES FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIANS**

The factors that contribute to community health and wellbeing are many, and often sit outside the control and policy influence of the health sector. These factors include the social, economic and physical environment, as well as individual behaviours and characteristics. Some of the most significant determinants of health and wellbeing include income, socio-economic position, access to social support, education, employment, and access to services. While these factors exist at a population level, they are not distributed evenly across the population and affect individuals in different ways. Vulnerable population groups, particularly people who are poor or living in poverty, often do not have the same access to these determinants of health as the rest of the population.

To advance action on the social determinants of health and reduce inequities strong partnerships, collaboration, and engagement strategies across sectors are needed to better respond to the needs of communities. It is acknowledged that one sector alone cannot address the complex or 'wicked' problems faced by 21<sup>st</sup> century society - a joined up approach is necessary to promoting health and reducing inequities.

SACOSS recognises that the health and wellbeing of South Australians is shaped by their socio-economic position and related factors such as income, education and access to resources. As a peak body for the

health and community services sector and advocate for the interests of disadvantaged South Australians, SACOSS has a clear stake in public policy that impacts the health and wellbeing of South Australians.

South Australia, like many other jurisdictions is facing a number of challenges, partly arising out of changing demographic patterns and societal expectations. In addition, the economic pressures of recent times means limited resources are available to advance community health and wellbeing and to address public health concerns. This demonstrates the imperative for joined-up solutions and the efforts of organisations to cut across 'silos' to maximise reach, if we are to successfully tackle the implications of changes and mitigate their impact on the South Australian community.

By working together to achieve shared goals, steps for sustainable change can be taken to optimise health and wellbeing outcomes for South Australians. This will also contribute to creating the physical and social environments needed to support thriving and connected communities.

SACOSS and the DHA share a common set of values in supporting health and wellbeing. This forms the foundation for the collaboration, and the basis to explore and harness the opportunities presented by the partnership.

## **SHARED PRINCIPLES**

- All government and non-government sector policies, services and programs should aim to have a positive impact on the population health of South Australia, including, but not limited to the health and human services sectors.
- The health sector (government and non-government agencies) should aim to promote health and prevent illness.
- Early, appropriate and accessible health promotion and primary care services and resources are crucial in building healthy societies.
- Local, regional and state-wide cooperation and collaboration within, and between government and non-government services is essential to prevent fragmentation of services, inefficiencies and barriers to access. Collaborative processes also allow joined-up policy making and delivery to occur.
- Health outcomes are distributed unevenly and according to socio-economic status. Reducing socio-economic inequity is central to building a healthy South Australia.
- Prevention and public health action is a shared responsibility for federal, state and local government and the non-government sector. Strong partnerships are required to optimise health and wellbeing outcomes for all, and to address the social determinants of health.

## **OUR ACTIONS**

Under the framework and objectives of the Public Health Partner Authority Agreement and through the vision of this Policy Statement we will focus our efforts on:

- Collaboration and coordination of activities to deliver co-benefits and optimised outcomes for health and wellbeing;
- Identify mutual topics of interest in response to emerging areas of community need;

- Explore the interface between the health and community services sector and the public health planning and implementation system, identifying areas of mutual benefit and opportunities for co-delivery to enhance community health and wellbeing;
- Develop a shared understanding of each other's agenda, priorities, and where the work of the sector intersects with public health to leverage expertise, knowledge and resources;
- Knowledge and understanding of the social determinants of health to strengthen action for community health and wellbeing and increase equity;
- Mechanisms for sharing information and maintaining an open dialogue to support healthy public policy and related initiatives;
- Apply and use best practice and evidence to inform collaborative action for health and wellbeing;
- Explore how other partners can contribute to the vision of this Statement, recognising the need for multiple collaborators to address action on the determinants of health.

It is acknowledged that the sector already contributes to the public health agenda, and the actions described for the Public Health Partnership aim to build on that work and strengthen collaborative effort.

### **SHARED ISSUE OF CONCERN**

Pressure on the hospital system in South Australia has resulted in reduced investment in prevention and primary health care activities. This has created difficulties in optimising the population health outcomes needed to achieve healthier South Australian communities. Acknowledging that this is a shared area of concern enables an open dialogue, which may support exploration of activities and actions that can maximise effort and harness windows of opportunity, in preparation for when a cycle of re-investment arises. Through the SACOSS-DHA Public Health Partnership, it is intended that the establishment of the SACOSS Policy Sub-council on health and wellbeing will provide a valuable mechanism for this dialogue to occur and identify opportunities to address barriers, for example through the elements of the South Australian Public Health Act.

### **ROLE OF SACOSS POLICY COUNCIL**

To progress the vision of this Statement it is recognised that system change, stronger governance for health, and a greater focus on addressing the social determinants is needed to improve outcomes for the South Australian community, in particular those families and individuals most vulnerable. This requires longer term action and concerted effort – this Statement represents a step forward for strengthening health and wellbeing and enables an open discussion to identify and address public health concerns as a collective.

In line with the intentions of this Statement and the Partnership Agreement, SACOSS and the DHA will establish a SACOSS Policy Sub-Council to enable the greater focus for health and wellbeing.