



Intersectoral action to achieve Health in All Policies A practical approach for a healthy Tasmania

Tasmania is over represented in Australian preventable ill-health data. Disadvantaged Tasmanians shoulder an inequitable and unfair share of this burden. The total expenses for health and welfare in 2010-11 currently account for 33.7% of the total State budget. The 2010 Intergenerational Report highlights that our health and hospitals system is not adequately prepared for future challenges – with the combination of an ageing and growing population, the increased burden of chronic disease, ongoing workforce shortages and rising costs. Federal Treasury has concluded that by 2045-46, spending on health and hospitals would consume the entire revenue raised by state governments.

A large part of the increase in health spending arises from treating preventable conditions, but the health care system alone cannot prevent them. A new approach to improving the health and well-being of the population is needed – *Health in All Policies* is such an approach and one we call on the Tasmanian Government to adopt.

Health in All Policies: what is it?

Health in All Policies aims for major prevention gains and health advances by bringing about changes and improvements in our social, physical and economic environments. It promotes policies for improved health across all areas of government. It is a way of encouraging all sectors to consider the health, well-being and equality impacts of their policies and practices. It acknowledges that health is a priority for government and that a healthier population can make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of all sectors of government.

Why we need a Health in All Policies approach?

Health in All Policies focuses on the determinants of health. Health determinants are factors that most significantly influence health, including biological factors, lifestyle factors, environments, culture, societal structure and policies. These determinants are often better addressed through policies, interventions and actions outside the health sector. For example, we can improve health through environments that invite people to be physically active, through a shift towards a healthier food supply, through low rates of unemployment, job and housing security, good social support systems, or through the education of parents who lay the foundations for the health of the next generation. Thus, in order to effectively prevent illness and to improve the conditions which promote health, a partnership is needed between the health sector and other sectors of government, who have more influence over these conditions.

It requires a shift in our thinking from associating “health” with illness and hospitals to thinking about health as a positive concept that requires a holistic approach – with contributions to the health of all Tasmanians coming from all sectors and departments.

In general, disadvantaged groups do not benefit as quickly from improvements in health determinants as advantaged groups do. Compared to other Australians, Tasmanians have some of the poorest health outcomes and socio-economic indicators. An explicit focus on the determinants of inequalities in health is necessary in order to ensure improved equity in health.

Overall, the *Health in All Policy* approach aims to:

- create a healthier population with flow-on effects such as a better workforce, a stronger economy, improved standard of living, attracting migration to and investment in Tasmania
- limit or reduce the rapid increase in health expenditure
- decrease the inequalities in health

This approach has already been taken up in many European countries and has recently been adopted by the South Australian Government (see <http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/HiAP.htm>). Examples of work across government

sectors that will have a positive effect on the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians already exist. For example: the adoption of an Innovation Strategy entailing the establishment of a food bowl; the National Broadband Network; the development of renewable energy; and sustainability. *Health in All Policies* builds on this existing intersectoral approach. It will help the government to deliver on existing government objectives, such as the Food Security recommendations from the Social Inclusion Strategy report and the Tasmania *Together 2020* goals.

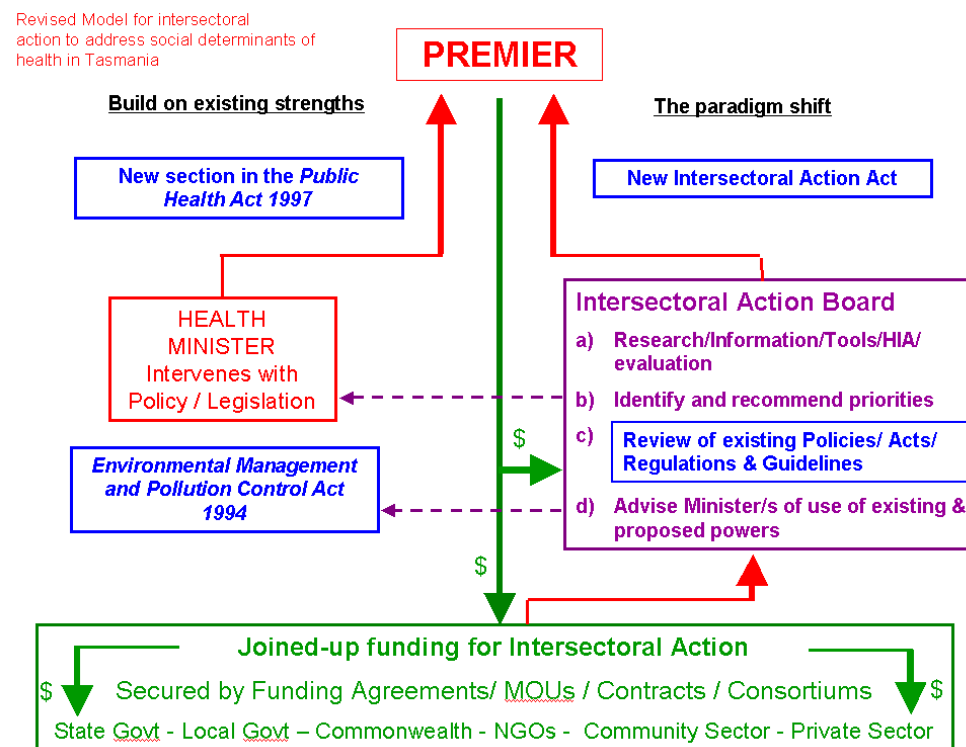
As identified in the Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania, there are sometimes issues that do not fit neatly under the portfolio of individual ministers or government departments or spheres of government. For *Health in All Policies* to work there is a need for joint effort within and between spheres of government, communities and businesses with an approach that fits logically into these already existing strategic frameworks.

What is required to establish a Health in All Policies approach?

It is recognised that the *Health in All Policies* agenda is much broader than the health sector. An approach that could achieve *Health in All Policies* would be to enact a new Intersectoral Action Act (name to be determined) which would enable the establishment of an independent Intersectoral Board (name also to be determined). This Board would then advise the Premier on priority areas for action and funding which would address the complex health challenges, including addressing the social determinants of health, across portfolio boundaries. This requires a whole of parliament/whole of government approach that is cross-sectional and multi-level across the many portfolios that impact on health.

In order for an Intersectoral Board to advise the Premier, a Population and Social Health Information and Research Centre would need to be established (and managed by the Board), which would provide the relevant research and data to identify priority areas for action and funding. The Intersectoral Board would also be responsible for reviewing existing Policies, Acts and Regulations. Additionally, a new section of the Public Health Act 1997 (similar to section 54 of the Quebec Public Health Act) could be established which would ensure legislative provisions that government ministries and agencies adopt do not adversely affect the health of Tasmanians, and would see the Minister for Health

(through advice from the Intersectoral Board) providing advice to other government ministries and agencies. This would also facilitate the use of Health Impact Assessments to be required for new laws, regulations, policies or guidelines being introduced by Government, and not restricted to just Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994 which is currently the case.



A well-implemented *Health in All Policies* approach would ensure that the health of all Tasmanians is a government priority. The health of the population would sit alongside and carry as equal weight as the economic health of the state. Good population health contributes positively to increased workforce participation and productivity, social inclusion, sustainability and the economy - in fact - *it benefits everyone*. A *Health in All Policies* approach has the potential to see Tasmanian's health outcomes leapfrog ahead of the rest of Australia.