

Our Vision – A Healthier Victoria

Our Vision

The Democrats main focus is on prevention rather than cure.

Once people are sick or injured the options to improve on existing levels of care are limited - the key is to reduce the numbers of sick and injured people in the first place.

Soft measures such as community education have not worked - now is the time for stronger measures.

Prevention

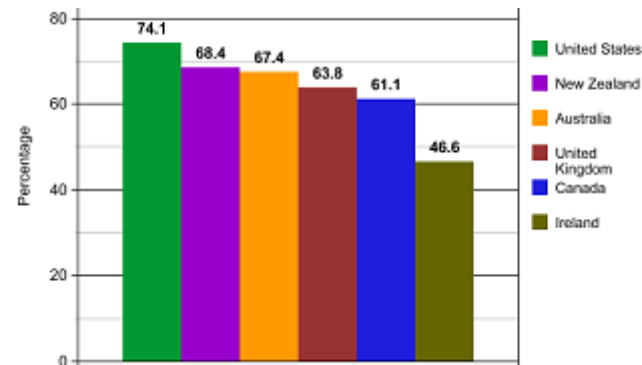
- **Controlling junk food** – regulations to curb the “junk” content of food.
- **Favour low-alcohol beverages** – tougher licensing regulations for those selling high-alcohol drinks.
- **Government supply to registered users** – instead of criminal supply to anyone.
- **Encouraging exercise** – more bike paths and walking tracks.

Junk Food

A major cause of the rise in global obesity is the failure of governments to control junk food.

Thirty three US states levy taxes on soft drinks; Taiwan is introducing a tax on junk food; and Denmark taxes some high fat and sugar foods. The Australian constitution prevents States imposing a junk food tax as it would be an excise, but Victoria could gradually tighten food quality regulations to reduce the 'junk' content of food.

At the same time the Federal government should be lobbied to tighten rules related to advertising and labelling of junk foods.



According to 2007 statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), Australia has the third-highest prevalence of overweight adults in the Anglosphere.

Cure

- **Reduce red tape** – let medical professionals get on with their jobs
- **Improve conditions for health workers** – leading to greater retention of staff.
- **Federal health take-over** – consideration of a full Federal take over of health to eliminate Federal–State buck passing.
- **Decentralisation** – More resources to the regions to ensure all Victorians have equal access to health care services.
- **Eight Steps to Better Mental Health Treatment** – Support the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria's '8 Point Program'.

Unregulated Drugs

Criminal supply of unregulated illicit drugs mixed with assorted contaminants greatly increases the harm done by these drugs. The Victorian Democrats propose tightly controlled government supply of clean drugs to registered users.

This will greatly reduce the health problems associated with drugs that are now unregulated and ultimately reduce the number of people using them at all.

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Alcohol

Alcohol abuse is a major cause of injuries and illness. The Democrats would change licensing and other arrangements to discourage sale of high alcohol drinks while liberalising arrangements for sale of low-alcohol beverages to change Victoria's drinking culture.

Reduce red tape

In an attempt to be seen to be doing something governments have imposed more and more burdensome reporting and cost control measures. The overall effect of these measures needs to be re-examined with a view to getting government out of the way of health professionals. Replacing complex funding regimes such as Case Mix with block grants needs to be considered.

Improve conditions for health workers

Nurses are some of the lowest paid professional workers in our society while at the same time having some of the most onerous working conditions. Pay and conditions for nurses should be increased before further pay rises for other public sector employees such as politicians are considered.

Federal health take-over?

Having two levels of government managing health has been a recipe for blame-shifting and mismanagement. Given the Federal governments control of Medicare, Veterans Affairs, pensions, tax and the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme handing over all health and allied services to the Federal government should be considered.

In return State governments should receive full control and funding for other areas such as Transport and Education that are currently mismanaged by both tiers of government.

Increase Exercise

Victorian Democrat policies to improve sustainable transport will encourage the use of bicycles, walking and public transport - all of which lead to higher levels of exercise. We would also amend planning arrangements to encourage small retail outlets in the suburbs while discouraging expansion of giant shopping centres requiring use of a car.

Mental Health

The Australian Democrats support the **Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria (MIFV)** 8 point program to support the 11,000 Victorians with a mental illness:

1) Seven new 10-bed Prevention And Recovery Care (PARC) units

The 10 existing PARC units provide a safe and highly effective alternative to hospital admission. They reduce pressure on hospitals, prevent the cycle of premature discharge and readmission and reduce the overall cost of acute care. Seven more would provide this cost-effective option across Victoria.

2) Double the number of community based support packages to 6,000.

This would provide an extra 2,000 standard, 600 high support and 400 intensive support packages.

3) 25 new additional Secure and Extended Care Units

This would assist the small number of people with very complex needs who risk frequently lapsing into crisis. Most of these people currently live in caravan parks or with ageing parents.

4) A 3 year housing pilot program

Fifty one bedroom units in a variety of locations leased by MIFV for people who receive the disability support pension. MIFV would provide home-based support and a modest supplement to the Commonwealth Government Rental Assistance Scheme would make the rents affordable.

Applied across the state, this could free up 30% of currently occupied psychiatric beds. It could substantially reduce the 'revolving door' of hospital readmissions and the pressure on Crisis Assessment Teams, police and prisons.

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Mental Health (cont...)

5) 'Well Ways' - Family and consumer education

Peer-led education by trained facilitators who have lived with mental illness is highly effective in helping sufferers and their families to improve their coping strategies. 'Well Ways' makes the road to recovery easier and should be promoted and made available throughout Victoria.

6) 'Well Ways' for culturally diverse families

Bilingual staff are needed to assist sufferers and families from ethnic communities to better understand and benefit from the services available. Family education products would be translated and adapted then trialled in the Chinese, Vietnamese, Afghani, Iraqi and Sudanese communities.

7) Community education to reduce stigma and promote social inclusion

A campaign advising individuals, families, communities, employers, policy makers, politicians and organisations on how to help mental illness sufferers to fully participate in the community - to help Victoria Police respond to situations involving mental illness sufferers – to ensure schools can provide a supporting environment for students with a mental illness – and to promote community based preventative solutions.

8) 120 new places in 'Road to recovery learning pathways'

Less than 50% of people with a severe and enduring mental illness complete their secondary education. In contrast, 75% of participants in the MIFV pathways program completed their schooling and more than half went on to work or further education.

What would it cost?

Around \$30m a year would provide these eight 'actions' but the saving on the health system and for people's lives would be immeasurable!