

Draft for committee input

# National Preventive Health Strategy

## Vision 2020 Australia response to consultation questions

April 2021

### Introduction

#### 1. What is your name?

Judith Abbott

#### 2. What is your email address?

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#### 3. What is your organisation?

Vision 2020 Australia

#### 4. Do you agree with the vision of the strategy?

*Agree*

Vision 2020 Australia notes that the vision and aims outlined for the next 10 years are sufficiently broad to capture a wide range of activity needed to bring about real change in the health status of Australians.

#### 5. Do you agree with the aims and their associated targets for the Strategy?

*Disagree*

Vision 2020 Australia does however believe that the wording of aim two should be amended to reflect the importance of independence, by amending the wording to read “Australians live independently as long as possible in good health”. We know this is one of the things that Australians value highly, particularly those who may rely on government services or supports for their continued health and wellbeing such as people living with blindness or vision impairment.

It would also be helpful for the latter sentence in aim 2 to be amended to “...prevent the development and progression of chronic conditions, injuries, infectious disease and disabilities...”. This would place a greater focus on prevention and preventing the progression of conditions such as a range of eye conditions which if identified early, can be managed to minimise or prevent visual impacts, associated risks and disability.

## **6. Do you agree with the principles?**

### *Disagree*

Vision 2020 Australia notes the addition of the principles to the latest draft of the National Preventive Health Strategy. The inclusion of principles provides positive guidance for the implementation of the Strategy. Vision 2020 Australia is especially supportive of efforts to bring together sectors for collaboration in health promotion alongside community engagement that empowers at-risk groups to take the lead in health promotion in their communities.

Vision 2020 Australia previously submitted that people who are blind or have vision loss need additional support to access health information and to develop individual autonomy to take preventive action to protect their health. The experience of community messaging during COVID-19 illustrated the need for health promotion to take many forms to ensure it reaches as wide an audience as possible.

It would be helpful for the principle regarding equity to note that there needs to be equitable access to both healthcare and information as without the latter, it will be difficult for those who cannot readily access mainstream resources to participate in or contribute to a range of the activities outlined in the draft strategy.

Vision 2020 Australia notes that these principles will require committed investment to achieve.

## **7. Do you agree with the enablers?**

### *Disagree*

Vision 2020 Australia supports the enablers and evidence provided to support them. Vision 2020 Australia notes that the importance of connected up services and systems, including and beyond health, is reflected in Enabler 1 – Leadership, governance and funding.

In our submission of September 2020, we noted the need to ensure health literacy through the provision of information that is not only culturally appropriate and available in languages other than English, but also in forms that are accessible to people who are blind or have low vision. We continue to advocate for the inclusion of this principle in Enabler 4 – Information and health literacy.

Vision 2020 Australia is supportive of ongoing research and evaluation of the efficacy of prevention and health promotion, but also of key baseline data that will map the effectiveness of early interventions. We support an approach that draws on as many evidence sources as possible, especially people with lived experience and the organisations that work with them and support them. In particular prevalence, effectiveness and evaluation research should include people who are blind or have low vision, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## **8. Do you agree with the policy achievements for the enablers?**

### *Disagree*

#### *Enabler 6: Monitoring and Surveillance*

Vision 2020 Australia suggests better access to population level patient drug and treatment data would support and inform preventative health activities. Improving access to MBS and PBS data would assist Prevention Partners (page 7) activate and implement community-led preventive health initiatives.

## **9. Do you agree with the seven focus areas?**

*Disagree*

In Vision 2020 Australia's previous submission we signalled the importance of boosting screening opportunities for a range of preventable health issues.

Vision and other sensory loss is a key issue, much of which can be prevented through early identification, but has not been included as a focus area. Evidence suggests a strong connection between vision loss and other health conditions, for example dementia, depression and injuries and hospitalisations caused by falls and motor vehicle accidents. Poor vision may also reduce independence including the capacity to self-manage health care and take exercise.

Early identification through screening can prevent vision loss and attendant conditions. Some conditions can be reversed simply and quickly (for example, refractive error, cataract). Vision 2020 Australia continues to advocate for a broader approach to screening programs that can identify and prevent a range of health conditions. For these reasons, we continue to advocate for the inclusion of a reference to screening and prevention of a broader range of conditions including sensory loss.

As part of promoting integrated approaches to prevention in the strategy, the text in relation to Focus Area 2 could be amended to note that a healthy diet can be a protective factor against eye disease such as age-related macular degeneration (for more information, go to <https://www.mdffoundation.com.au/about-macular-disease/age-related-macular-degeneration/nutrition-for-amd/>).

## **10. Do you agree with the targets for the focus areas?**

*Agree*

No further comment.

## **11. Do you agree with the policy achievements for the focus areas?**

*Agree*

No further comment.

## **12. Do you agree with this section of the Strategy?**

*Agree*

Vision 2020 Australia is pleased to see "Hearing/vision" included in the diagram on page 66 of the draft, but would like to see the heading above that diagram amended to provide flexibility for future focus areas to include not just emerging health issues but other priorities not included in the initial 7 focus areas.

The current heading implies that only new items could become future focus areas which would exclude other important areas that already exist from becoming future areas for focus, reducing the overall flexibility and amenity of the strategy.

## **13. Please provide any additional comments you have in the draft Strategy.**

There is increasing international and local evidence of the complex connections between vision loss and other conditions.

Prevention of vision loss is therefore central to prevention of other injuries and some chronic conditions, for example depression, dementia and injuries associated with falls and motor vehicle accidents.<sup>1</sup> Other conditions are known to contribute to preventable blindness, for example diabetes and smoking. Vision 2020 Australia will continue to promote and support approaches to prevention that make critical connections between health conditions.

Vision 2020 Australia is also of the view that sensory loss, including vision and hearing loss, can be included in holistic approaches to preventive screening and care. There are opportunities to support this approach throughout the life course so that the impacts of sensory loss are minimised at every age and stage – from ensuring children are able to engage fully with education through to ensuring that all Australians maintain independence as they age.

Vision 2020 Australia notes that changes to national and state cooperative structures will need to be resolved to ensure support structures are in place to facilitate work between the Australian government and the states and territories.

In developing appendices, Vision 2020 Australia would support the inclusion of a list of health strategic action plans (such as the National Strategic Action Plan for Macular Disease) and the National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Prevent Avoidable Blindness and Vision Loss.

Vision 2020 Australia looks forward to the continued development of the Draft National Health Preventive Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Burton et al (2021) *and* World Health Organization (2019)