



Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill 2019

The Minister for Health and Ambulance Services should be commended for recognising the need to re-establish health promotion in Queensland beyond individual-level strategies via the introduction of the Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill 2019 into the Queensland Parliament. Health promotion is recognised globally as a vital public health discipline within and outside of the health sector to promote the health and wellbeing of, and reduce inequities within and between populations. It is paramount that governments lead such action and that action is both evidence-based and ethical. Situating “Health and Wellbeing Queensland” as a distinct entity separate from the Department of Health to fulfil its objectives is of value. This will enable the agency to work across sectors and levels of government where the broad range of determinants of health need to be addressed to better the lives of Queenslanders, and not restricting action to within the healthcare sector.

Comments to various sections of the Bill follow.

Division 2 - Objective, functions and powers

10 Objective

- The definition used to describe “health and wellbeing” will be paramount in establishing the objectives of Health and Wellbeing Queensland. Traditional medical views of health often limit health and wellbeing outcomes (often measured by hospitalisations and/or costs of health services and associated behavioural/biomedical risk factors). Health is defined by the World Health Organisation as being more than the absence of disease and confined to physical health. It defines health as also including mental and social health and wellbeing. For example, there is strong evidence to show that some of the most powerful predictors of morbidity and mortality are related to social health such as social connectedness and feelings of belonging. These social indicators are stronger than other behavioural risk factors such as diet and physical activity. Consistent with health promotion best practice it will be critical that a strengths-based approach, and socio-ecological view of health and wellbeing as distinct from biomedical and/or behavioural perspectives be upheld through the work of the agency. When addressing health outcomes, health promotion action needs to be influencing the underlying causes of health inequities, such as social inclusion, positive early childhood conditions and safe communities. In order to make the greatest sustainable impact on health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce health inequities, changes beyond the individual to the environments where people grow, live, learn, work and play will be needed. For example, systematic reviews have shown that the greatest increases in physical activity (average of 161%) have been made through good community-level design and land use, including locating residents close to commerce, schools and green spaces, and connecting streets, rather than individual-level strategies that only have modest short-term outcomes.
- Health promotion action also needs to involve whole populations and communities using strength-based community engagement approaches; which will have health-enhancing benefits for the community in and of itself. The principles underpinning the agency and how it makes decisions will therefore be important, including the criteria used to commission activities and funds (related to its objectives of reducing health inequities).



11 Functions

- “Activities” are referred to in Functions (a) “...facilitate and commission...” and (c) “...give grants for...” It will be important that activity include Queensland-specific research to guide good practice health promotion projects and policy in Queensland.
- Beyond Function (d) “to monitor and evaluate activities...” it will be important to establish indicators of health and wellbeing at all levels and sectors to prioritise action and monitor progress toward population health and wellbeing outcomes. Indicators need to measure underlying determinants of health and wellbeing as well as overarching health outcomes. Evidence-based community indicator frameworks for health and wellbeing are being developed and used to make resourcing decisions by other jurisdictions across Australia such as in Victoria – “Community Indicators Victoria”.
- In Function (e) “to develop policy...”, it will not only be important to establish overarching health promotion policy for Queensland, it will be vital to ensure health and wellbeing is considered in the policies of all Queensland Government departments. Most of the determinants of health and wellbeing are the legislated responsibility of non-traditional health sectors, such as transport, human services and education. Health and Wellbeing Queensland will need to not only provide “advice” but also leadership, expertise and resources to Queensland Government departments, local government, and to other sectors on existing and new initiatives through the establishment of formal review processes. Current examples of good practice processes to integrate health and wellbeing in policies across government departments include “health in all policy” initiatives in Tasmania and South Australia. There are examples of integrated “health impact assessment” good practice processes in New South Wales.

Division 2 - Membership

18 Board members

- Within the portfolio of membership persons listed, there is need for representation of inequity groups and entities beyond Brisbane. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation is noted. Rural/remote/regional representation will also be vital. This may be achieved by including a regional leading health promotion representative on the board.

Division 2 - Other staff

- Health promotion is a professional, internationally recognised discipline with specific qualifications. Australia has more recently established a professional accreditation process through the International Union for Health Promotion and Education. Australian universities have/are moving toward having their relevant health promotion degrees accredited through this process. All staff employed for specific functions related to health promotion employed by Health and Wellbeing Queensland should have mandatory qualifications in health promotion and be eligible/have appropriate accreditation.



Positions should be named as “health promotion” in their titles and a workforce be established that enables early career opportunities and mentoring pathways into the discipline to ensure the sustainability of a high quality workforce. Positions should also be located where community needs are and in sectors where changes are needed (for example in local government, and transport sector). They also need to be located beyond Brisbane to support regional and remote communities.

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