

Tip sheet

Municipal public health and wellbeing planning



Writing measurable objectives

What is the tip sheet for?

The reason for writing any plan is to provide a map of where we are, where we want to be in the future and how we are going to get there. This simple aim can sometimes be obscured by the sheer breadth of a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP), as well as time pressures and political or organisational considerations.

Writing measurable objectives means stating what council will do in a way that allows a reader to tell whether it has succeeded. The more measurable the objectives are, the more likely they are contributing directly to long term goals.

This tip sheet is designed to assist health planners to write objectives that provide clear guidance to business units responsible for implementing the plan and clear information to partners and community audiences.

What are objectives?

For the purposes of this tip sheet **objectives** are statements that explain how plan **goals** will be achieved. When considering health and wellbeing, plan goals are broad statements related to improving health and wellbeing status, through

changes in mortality and morbidity, disability, quality of life and equity. These are statements about long-term benefits.

Consequently, the goal of improved health and wellbeing status is achieved through a range of objectives that increase awareness and change behaviours; influence public policy and organisational practice; deliver more effective services; and create healthier environments. The actions taken to reach these objectives are called strategies.

The language of planning can vary widely between councils so that objectives in some cases, might be termed 'goals', 'strategic priorities' or 'key result areas' and so on. The terms and meanings used in this tip sheet use a program planning framework adapted from Victorian Department of Human Services publications (Round et al, 2005, VDHS, 2003a and 2003b). These are available at:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/evidence_res/index.htm

It is not necessary to use the same terms to use this tip sheet, but you will need to identify what level your statements relate to.

Term	Scope	Measured by
Goal	Long term benefits - such as health gain	Outcome evaluation
Objective	Short or Medium term impacts - such as behaviour change	Impact evaluation
Strategy	Short Term results - such as completed action	Process evaluation

Adapted from Round et al, 2005



How can you write measurable objectives?

Plans by their nature are largely concerned with change or an effort to maintain valued aspects of the current situation. The extensive process of information collection and analysis, consultation, validation and priority setting is used to identify where you think effort needs to be focussed.

When it comes to writing these into objectives, there should be a clear logic between objectives and the goal they are pursuing. The use of Program Logic in developing elements of your MPHWP might assist with this (see www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/understanding_program_logic.pdf).

Objective statements will follow a general form: 'To do what, for whom, by when?'

Careful selection of the language used to express objectives can provide clearer intention of what will be done and what you hope to achieve.

Strong, clear verbs describe the 'do' component and are the key to setting the tone and commitment of the objective. The list of verbs below provides some examples of words that are action oriented applied to common interventions.

Word	Generally applied to...	Examples
Introduce, create, establish, advocate for, develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy public policies and organisational practices that lead to supportive built, social, natural and economic environments 	<p>To create a physical environment that supports physical activity participation for the whole community</p> <p>To develop an affordable housing policy for low income earners by end 2011</p>
Increase, improve, strengthen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protective factors promoting healthy lifestyles and supportive environments Health literacy – health related knowledge, attitudes, motivation, confidence, behavioural intentions and personal skills, as well as knowledge of where to go and what to do to obtain support or services 	<p>To increase access to education and employment opportunities for young people in rural communities</p> <p>To strengthen social and economic participation of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds</p>
Decrease, reduce, eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risks, hazards and barriers – overcoming health inequalities 	<p>To reduce bullying behaviour among children aged 12–17 years within local schools</p>
Facilitate, initiate, participate in, support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social action and influence – community participation, community empowerment, social norms and public opinion 	<p>To facilitate the participation of young people in decisions that affect them</p>



Caution is recommended against the over-use of words such as ‘develop’, ‘facilitate’ or ‘support’. These are less descriptive and can dull the tone of a plan if over-used. However, they should not be replaced with inferior, vaguer words or at the other extreme, technical terms or jargon.

Avoid words like ‘enhance’, ‘commit’, which are not specific and hence more difficult to measure. Also, avoid multiple verb use for objectives: For example:

Not: ‘To explore opportunities to increase access to...’

Try: ‘To increase access to ...’

In this case, ‘exploring opportunities’ is probably a step towards ‘increasing access’. However, you don’t need to include the steps you will take to achieve your objective in the objective statement. If it warrants it, this will be described at the strategy level (which, as stated above, are the actions taken to reach these objectives).

Words like ‘explore’, ‘discuss’, ‘commence’, seek, and ‘encourage’ are often used in this way and

should be avoided. If these words cannot be eliminated in favour of a more direct word, the likelihood is that you are describing a strategy not an objective, or you are not clear enough in your own mind about what you propose to do.

How can you keep your objectives consistent?

One of the challenges of plan writing is creating a consistent relationship between plan statements so that they are pitched at a consistent level. It is confusing if an objective in one part of a document is a broad statement while in another it is quite specific (more like a strategy).

One way of checking whether your objectives are pitched at the right level is to ask ‘why?’ The answer will test the theory behind your objective and should lead you to a health and wellbeing goal - whether stated or implied.

If the goal is more than one step away from the statement the likelihood is that is pitched at a strategy level. For examples, see below.

Draft Objective	To increase healthy eating among children and young people	Objective
Why?	To improve their prospects of long term health and wellbeing.	Goal

Draft Objective	Provide public transport orientation for newly arrived refugees	Strategy
Why?	To improve use of public transport by newly arrived refugees within 12 months of arrival	Objective
Why?	To increase physical activity participation by newly arrived refugees	Objective
Why?	To improve their prospects of long term health and wellbeing.	Goal



The verbs used might not provide any clues to the appropriate level. Words like ‘increase’ and ‘decrease’ are also likely to be used at goal level and a strategy level. However, at a goal level ‘increase’ is likely to be applied to quality of life and ‘decrease’ to the incidence of illness or disease. At a strategy level both are likely to be applied to features of service systems or standards.

Other words might fit an objective or strategy level, however, some will suggest that the statement is better included as a strategy level. Words more common at a strategy level include:

Descriptive words for strategies

provide	develop	deliver	manage
partner	collaborate	coordinate	administer
promote	support	contribute	stimulate
build	expand	extend	streamline
fund	resource	subsidise	contract
identify	investigate	survey	research
review	consult	evaluate	report
raise	recognise	celebrate	document

How can I check my objectives?

A good way to test your objectives is to use the SMART technique. SMART statements have the following characteristics.

- S** **specific:** it indicates clear action on a determinant, population group and setting.
- M** **measurable:** it includes features that will help you tell whether it has succeeded.
- A** **attainable:** it can be realistically achieved on time and within available resources.
- R** **relevant:** it is a logical way to achieve your goals.
- T** **time-framed:** it indicates a timeframe for action.



Examples:

Objective: To increase healthy eating among children and young people.				
S	M	A	R	T
Yes	Partially Assuming a baseline, any increase can be measured. However, it might benefit from specific targets.	Yes	Yes	No Consider adding '...by x date' or '...within x time period'

Objective: To improve the use of public transport by newly arrived refugees with 12 months of their arrival.				
S	M	A	R	T
Yes	Yes Assuming a baseline, improvement in use can be measured.	Yes	Yes	Yes

While this tip sheet focuses on objectives, both goals and strategies should also be written in a way that allows you to answer the question 'Did we do and achieve what we intended?'

References or resources

Round, R., Marshall, B., Horton, K., 2005 Planning for effective health promotion evaluation, Victorian Government Department of Human Services

Victorian Department of Human Services, 2003a, The Integrated health promotion resource kit, DHS, Melbourne.

Victorian Department of Human Services, 2003b, Measuring health promotion impacts: A guide to impact evaluation in integrated health promotion, DHS, Melbourne

All three are available at:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/evidence_res/index.htm

A paper on using Program Logic is available at:

www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/understanding_program_logic.pdf

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For further information about municipal public health and wellbeing planning in the Department of Health's Southern Metropolitan Region visit:
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/regional/southern/regional-programs/public-health>

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