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### **State Public Health Plan 2019-2024 Submission**

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People my mandate under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (the Act) is to advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia. It is also my role to ensure that the State, at all levels of government satisfies its international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Under the Act each State authority must, in carrying out its functions or exercising its powers, protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights set out in the CRC.

To undertake this role, in the last 18 months I have spoken to thousands of children and young people on issues that are important to them. Over this time, they told me how important health and wellbeing is to them. In one random poll, children and young people told me about aspects of their lives in relation to their hopes for the future; it is interesting to note that Health, Fairness, Education and Environment were amongst some of the most prominent issues they considered.

The South Australian State Public Health Plan 2019-2024 (the Plan) provides a vision for a South Australia that includes many aspects of the things that children and young people have told me are important to them. However, the Plan in its priorities does not appear to articulate a clear set of actions or focus areas that are measureable and comparable over time. In light of this I would like to make the following suggestions, based on a contemporary understanding of rights and some of the thoughts and views from children and young people.

#### **1. The Rights of Children and young people**

The Plan should ensure that it protects, respects and gives effect to the rights of children and young people. Under the CRC children and young people have a right to develop healthily and live a full life (Article 6) and to be heard and considered in matters that affect them (Article 12). They also have a right to receive and share information (Article 13) and to live in a clean environment (Article 24) free from the dangers and risks that environmental pollution poses, including from climate change.<sup>1</sup> They also have a right to relax, to play and to participate in community culture (Article 31). It is important that the Plan accurately reflects and gives effect to these rights.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 15 (2013) para. 49-50.

## **2. There is very little on how Children and young people will be engaged as stakeholders in this process**

I commend the engagement of the Plan for taking steps to empower and engage with individuals and communities across the priorities. Children and young people have a right to receive and share information (Article 13); and to be heard and considered in matters that affect them (Article 12). Children and young people have repeatedly told me how important it is for their voices to be heard and respected.

- *“Being listened to – having a continuous (continuous) discussion on issues involving young people.”*
- *“Change: Improve ability of youth to affect gov (government) policies that affect their future – state and national.”*

Children and young people often do not engage as stakeholders in areas that effect their lives. Their voices and views are important, therefore, it is imperative that the Plan includes focussed strategies on how children and young people will be engaged and how they will be able to contribute and participate in its implementation.

Children and young people can be at the forefront of leading improvements in their own lives and they offer an enormous opportunity to contribute to the implementation of this plan. There are examples of this engagement and participation happening around the world.

One highly successful example of children and young people leading a health education and prevention program is from Denmark called “Lekepatruljen” (*Play Patrol*). The program was developed by experts with the input of children and young people to reduce obesity and cancer risk by encouraging those not normally active to become more active during break times at school. The program is led by children and young people in their environment utilising peer to peer learning which has also resulted in other health benefits. Due to its immense success it exceeded the target population by 130% and has been a feature in a large number of Danish schools since 2005.

## **3. Data sets need to be clearer in the Plan**

Data and research may assist in providing some reporting metrics; however as with the previous State Public Health Plan it does not use many measurable data sets that are available and accessible as a benchmark. Additionally, data that is available under these areas fails to properly feature children and young people. Children and young people, for example, are very concerned about mental health and currently there is very little readily available data currently available on them making it very difficult for the Plan to improve mental health within this cohort. As such, how will this strategy actually improve the health and wellbeing of children and young and how will this improvement be shown?

## **4. Visions and outcomes need to be better explained**

I agree with the vision of the Plan, however currently this vision is not accurately linked to outcomes (including any measurable datasets). The plan should better explain how its vision can be linked to tangible outcomes and improvements to the lives of South Australians, including the State’s children and young people.

## **5. Reports on the Plan and Regional Public Health Plans should be centralised**

For the success of this Plan, reporting should be accessible, relevant and tailored to the needs of the community, and be readily accessible to children and young people. The Plan should include relevant and meaningful reporting to them along with a strategy for how it will be distributed.

I note that the past Regional Public Health Plan reports from councils are found on their own websites. There is no centralised site to see all these and any progress on these plans. It may be useful to place all plans and any progress on one website (or other fora) so they are more accessible and so that the performance of Regional Public Health Plans may be better determined.

**6. The Plan should better clarify how it will relate to other State Plans particularly those concerning the environment**


I note that the State Public Health Plan includes action areas that are also covered by the plans of other departments, including the new planning system and the planning and design code currently open to public consultation. In order to ensure that we are providing the best possible defence against future risks and challenges to their health and environment, how will this cross-over between state plans be managed? Further, how can children and young people become active participants?

Children and young people are very concerned about the future of the environment and how it relates to their health and wellbeing, therefore it is important that how all these plans interact are made clearer.

- *“The climate – I care about having a safe climate because I want communities to be safe from extreme weather events.”*
- *“Education on how to be environmentally friendly, without a healthy and clean environment future generations will not be able to live life to the fullest.”*

I hope that these recommendations and contributions are able to lead to the proactive involvement and participation of children and young people, and a plan that delivers the best possible outcomes for them. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**Helen Connolly**

Commissioner for Children and Young People

