Local Government Association Tasmania

Local Government Response to The Health Revolution 20 Year Preventive Health Strategy exposure draft

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the exposure draft of the *Health Resolution 20 Year Preventative Health Strategy* (the Strategy). This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) on behalf of Tasmanian local government in collaboration with our members; all 29 councils.

LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate for local government in Tasmania. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that council in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by the LGAT for that specific issue.

Local government congratulates the vision and intentions of this Strategy. The sector supports the focus on prevention, the whole of government long term approach, and the strong focus on place-based action and community participation. We have consistently advocated for each of these over many years.

Recommendations Summary

The following section provides a summary of our key recommendations, which are discussed in greater detail later in this submission:

1. Recognise and incorporate the unique role of local government.
2. Suggested additions to the toolkit:
    - Learning new practices
    - Community leadership and learning.
3. Challenge the habits of mind in the Strategy that are barriers to the revolution.
4. Make citizens and community active participants at all stages across 20 years.
5. Build strength-based community led action for prevention into the Strategy.
6. Include a governance and implementation planning model that includes a local voice and councils through a regional structure.
7. Include complex system change models and practices more consistently across the Strategy.
8. Trust communities to decide priorities across the Pillars and sub-pillars and enable them to take local action over the 20 years.

9. Identify evidence of best practice for complex system change and apply them to a whole system formative evaluation and action research approach to implementation.
10. Define the preventive workforce across the whole system, including councils, and unlock a readily available and invaluable resource.

Unique role and capacity of Local Government

The introduction to The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre paper, *Funding and resourcing mechanisms for long term strategies* (2025), commissioned by the Tasmanian Government to inform the Strategy notes that "many preventive health strategies require a long time to demonstrate impact but often struggle to achieve outcomes due to a lack of practical support for sustained implementation" (p. 3). It goes on to identify enablers for the guiding principles as "tools, systems, and processes, such as governance, leadership and expertise that make those principles operational" (p .3). The paper provides several local government case studies demonstrating how councils activate these and other enablers in local communities.

Councils across Tasmania currently contribute to preventive health in communities across Tasmania through these enablers. Local government is uniquely placed to contribute to these statewide and locally place based enablers of the Strategy. It is the level of government and the only formal organisation that is best placed to support the Strategy's description of prevention:

> *It's about living your best possible life: feeling strong, capable, connected, and ready for life's best moments. It means having what you need to live well and do the things that matter to you. It's about living your best possible life: feeling strong, capable, connected, and ready for life's best moments. It means having what you need to live well and do the things that matter to you.*

Local government collectively and through individual councils act as the only **sense makers** across the five Pillars. No other agency or organisation works in communities to make meaning of the interconnections across the five Pillars and then facilitates the hard choice priorities for what is most important for their local communities. While they do this through partnership with agencies and organisations with expertise in particular Pillars, it is the councils that lead local interpretations and practical action. Councils combine that sense-making leadership with another unique role - they are the local **action takers** across the five Pillars throughout the whole policy implementation cycle. Many of the sub-pillars also rely on councils to lead, partner, and facilitate the complex mixture of action necessary to address them.

Local government is also formally placed through the Local Government Act and a myriad of legislative and regulatory instruments to contribute to the Strategy.

These unique roles and resources mean that local government's importance to the Strategy must be acknowledged, not least for reasons of productivity and cost effectiveness. These roles, capacity, and responsibilities mean that it is not appropriate to just list local government along with other organisations and community groups. The sector has a contribution to make in the Strategy that needs to be described in the Strategy.

Considerations and recommendations

Successful challenges to business as usual and habits of mind

The Strategy envisions and proposes deep complex changes across the whole of the system over time and recognises the need to accept that adaption, unintended consequences, and unpredictability are natural conditions of the revolution. The Principles capture those challenges in broad terms but we know that our long-term habits as individuals and organisations is to resist changes to rules, structures, and even funding models. The toolkit is a promising approach to sustained improvement and the addition of ***Learning new practices*** to the family of toolkits would address the risk of the Strategy decision makers failing deep change because we assume new habits and mental models will just happen.

Citizens and community as essential partners all the time

The voices of citizens and community groups drive the Strategy, and their importance is acknowledged eloquently throughout. The Pillars, sub-pillars, and the Principles identify and rely on the everyday actions of individuals and groups. The ingredients in most of the descriptions rely on the personal behaviour of individuals in communities and their perceptions of what it means to be healthy and well. This fundamental role of individuals and local groups cannot be assumed or left to chance. The beliefs, efficacy, and skills essential to this role must be addressed directly in the Strategy. It is recommended that **Community leadership and learning** be added to the toolkit to address this.

The current focus is on formal organisations and structures, and that is a fatal gap. It is important that the importance of citizens and community associations is not overlooked. This gap can be partially addressed by **recognising that citizens and local community groups must be understood as resources and partners rather than clients and consumers whose role is largely limited to being consulted and provided with services.**

This fundamental shift in understanding and practice is a necessary and essential ingredient for success. Citizens as essential resources and action takers must be the dominant characteristic established from the start through the Strategy. That provides the foundation for skill and knowledge development throughout the 20 years. We have already started the shift towards citizens and local associations as decision makers and practitioners. Community-led development and place-based action by communities themselves are already strong in Tasmania. The Tasmanian Government has encouraged and supported practical action in local communities, and councils are key partners in many of these.

Building strength-based community-led action for prevention into the Strategy now will help address some disconnects in the Strategy between the Principles, the recognised important elements, and how it all will work.

Whole of government and complex systems in action

The Strategy does not act on this understanding at the moment. This "big picture, whole of system plan" (p. 7) needs to be just that, and the whole system needs to be identified in the Strategy in broad terms. That means it must recognise the whole of public policy cycle as an interdependent and interactive system from policy development to implementation. That messy, nonlinear, unpredictable reality might be represented in the proposed alignment map. The following design principles need to be included in whatever way is decided to represent the whole of system plan to Tasmanians.

1. *The ''we," as in government, in the Strategy is just part of the whole system.* The crucial importance of informal everyday actions of people and the action of community groups and organisations will decide the plan's outcomes. Active engagement in taking action needs to be the emphasis rather than the current mental model of community as audience to be informed and consulted. This is acknowledged in "prevention is a team effort" (p. 39), but traditional habits and models will continue without some specifics of what the revolution will look like in the new model.

   That might **include a governance and implementation planning model at a regional level based on local government areas with the local knowledge and expertise of each council included along with local community associations.**

2. *The overall funding and authorising environment outlined in the Strategy is essential to guide the broad direction.* However, the dominant tone is a continued reliance on sequential steps and predetermined order of priorities. **Trusting communities to decide priorities across the Pillars and sub-pillars and enabling them to take local action is a proven approach in large systems including Canada and New Zealand, for example.**

   Simultaneous action across different communities on for example, aged care, youth mental health, improved safety, and loneliness must be possible for the revolution to be achievable. That cannot be done if the current system is mainly rebadged and reinvented to support it. Deep change is essential.
   Improvement does not happen in sequential linear steps uniformly across a system. This is particularly true for the five Pillars across Tasmania as the whole system. There are different strengths, challenges, and levels of readiness across our state, meaning support and practical action cannot be tightly controlled in a standard order. Readiness is a crucial concept in effective community development and for improving outcomes. Practical action most useful in different communities must start with strengths and readiness, not a one size fits all timeline.

3. *The changes required don't need to be invented.* There is a sound knowledge and evidence base for the Strategy's approach, and we don't require research and trials about what works. Formative evaluation and action research are required to inform practice and assess performance, and these can be developed using the expertise and examples available in Tasmania, nationally and internationally. Some of these are noted in the Strategy and the resources used to develop it. Valuable and relevant resources include the following:

   > Tasmanian Audit Office. (26 May 2025) Department of Health's funding of community service organisations. This Auditor's Report is critical of the Department Health and by implication the 'industry' itself as participants in the system. The current system of government funded organisations that act as proxy government agencies that 'deliver services' into communities perpetuate the fragmented approach that the Strategy wants to change. The terminology of delivering services is contrary to vision of the Strategy, the industry model needs to reflect the Principles and intentions of the Strategy. Department of Health's funding of community service organisations - Audit Tasmania

Russell, C., (2025) Exploring the Potential of Community - Center Public Services, New Local. Cormac is an internationally respected practitioner and academic in 38 countries worldwide. He is working in Tasmania with a range of groups, including LGAT and local councils. His real-world examples from large systems offer the Strategy practical approaches that enact the Strategy.
Community-Centred-Public-Services_New-Thinking.pdf

The New Zealand Government's national strategy emphasises the empowerment of communities to identify their own needs and aspirations. The focus is shifted from small individual projects to flexible funding that support overall community wellbeing. Their approach is highly relevant to our Strategy.
Inspiring Communities | Promoting Community-Led Development in Aotearoa

Healthcare Excellence Canada. Enabling Aging in Place Across Canada. This approach was launched in 2024 and brings together 26 health and social service organisations from across the country.
https://www.healthcareexcellence.ca/en/what-we-do/all-programs/enabling-aging-in-place/

4. *The preventive workforce is identified in the Strategy as critically important. Defining the workforce in a new way may be the intention of the Strategy, and it needs to be explicit*. The workforce is more than the current concept of government agency employees and the Community Services Industry. Department of Premier and Cabinet - Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031. The local government workforce already operates across Tasmania in ways that no others do or could. Including it in a whole of system workforce model will unlock a readily available invaluable resource. It is currently not acknowledged.

5. A whole of system workforce model that supports the Strategy vision could also include paid and unpaid workers and the "everyday leaders" included in the prevention team. The suggested learning materials additions to the toolkit can support this workforce and it can be specifically identified in the workforce toolkit.