



Partnering to prevent chronic disease

The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre is a national initiative that is finding new ways to prevent Australia's greatest health problem: the epidemic of lifestyle-related chronic diseases.

We work with leading academics, policy makers and practitioners from across Australia to co-produce an ambitious program of prevention research that is relevant and timely. Our aim is to build an effective, efficient and equitable system for the prevention of lifestyle-related chronic disease.



A new way of thinking about prevention

Chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, cancer and diabetes are the leading cause of premature death in this country and restrict how millions of Australians live every day. At least 80% of chronic diseases could be prevented by targeting risk factors such as poor nutrition, smoking, harmful alcohol consumption and physical inactivity.

A lot of work in prevention has targeted individual behaviour, trying to persuade people to eat better, to move more, to not smoke and to drink less alcohol to reduce their risk of illness. But this is not working.

Many things affect our behaviour: where we work, eat, play and live, and our access to work and education. We need to take a broader and deeper view of the social, economic and environmental factors that are combining to drive the increase in lifestyle-related chronic health problems.

The Prevention Centre uses a systems approach in its research. This means we look at all the connected and inter-related issues, at how changing one part will influence other parts, and at how relationships and behaviours change over time. Tackling the whole system means we can create an environment that supports people to make better health decisions and avoid chronic disease.

Our structure

Funding

The Prevention Centre has resources of \$23.8 million over five years from the NHMRC, NSW Health, ACT Health, the Australian Government Department of Health and the HCF Research Foundation.

National reach

More than 150 individuals from 28 agencies nationally are involved in the research. We are administered by the Sax Institute, a national organisation driving the use of research in policy and practice.

Governance

Leadership is provided by Director Professor Andrew Wilson and Deputy Director Associate Professor Sonia Wutzke. Regular input is obtained from our Leadership Executive, Governance Authority and International Scientific Advisory Committee.

Standing capacities

Small hubs of experts offer advice and input as required to policy and practice partners in: evaluation; systems science and implementation; evidence synthesis; and valuing prevention.

Coordinating centre

This key structure is responsible for managing the business of the Prevention Centre, including project oversight, funding and accountability, and enabling the research partnership. It adds value through activities including communications, training events, evaluation, networking, and maintaining relationships.

A new way of researching

Evidence suggests only a fraction of research is ever used in policy and practice. This is partly because the research and policy environments operate independently of each other.

Policy makers may not know what evidence exists, or they are influenced by competing priorities. Academics may not be researching the questions policy makers need answered at the time they need the evidence, or they may not communicate their findings in ways that are easily accessible to policy makers.

Internationally, there has been heavy investment in co-produced partnership research, i.e. research in which academics and the end users of the research work together from design through to implementation.

In Australia, the National Health and Medical Research Council, industry partners and other government agencies have invested more than \$50 million in three Partnership Centres for Better Health. These are national collaborations of policy, practice and research organisations working together to create better health services and health in various priority areas. The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre is one of these centres.

Working within this model means our research focuses on areas of interest to policy agencies. We are able to address complex problems in ways that would not have been possible without the size of the collaboration, its national reach and the diversity of expertise.

Our research

Our 37 research projects span the continuum from discovery to synthesis, communication and action.

- Dynamic simulation modelling that can be used as a 'what-if' tool to support decision making for complex population health problems including alcohol-related harms in NSW; gestational diabetes in ACT and childhood obesity in NSW. Led by Dr Jo-An Atkinson.
 - Working closely with local communities in Albany in WA, Glenorchy in Tasmania, Broken Hill in NSW and the Gold Coast in Queensland in the Prevention Tracker project. This national initiative is describing and understanding local prevention systems and working out ways to improve them. Led by Dr Therese Riley.
 - Identifying what is needed to create a healthy and equitable eating system in Australia by examining the different parts of the food system. This aims to ensure nutrition and health equity goals are integral to federal and state cross-government policies and programs. Led by Professor Sharon Friel.
 - Developing and validating national liveability indicators to provide policy makers and researchers with evidence for understanding environmental factors associated with chronic disease and better health outcomes. Led by Professor Billie Giles-Corti. 

Our objectives

- Strengthen the evidence base to prevent lifestyle-related chronic disease
 - Create and make readily available knowledge, either new or through syntheses of what is already known
 - Build capacity to make more informed choices about prevention at policy, strategy and program levels.

Our outcomes

- New ways for researchers, policy and program practitioners to work together to form strong national networks
 - Internationally significant research about innovative methods in prevention, systems science and communication of prevention
 - Methods and approaches for communicating to governments and the community the value of prevention and the best investments in prevention efforts
 - The development and use of frameworks, tools and strategies to activate an effective, efficient and equitable prevention system
 - Increased capacity of researchers, policy makers and practitioners to use evidence and systems approaches in the design, implementation, evaluation and communication of prevention.

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Our funding partners



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