



Blueprint objective **3. A health workforce that exists to serve and meet population health needs.**

Case example **Doctors in Secondary Schools**

What is the community need or problem being addressed?

Adolescence is a critical period in an individual's life, with unprecedented physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth and change during this time. Adolescence is also when number of health and lifestyle behaviours are established.

But while health needs are significant, adolescents often face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, including cost, time and embarrassment about discussing health concerns.¹

These challenges are compounded for young people living in marginalised communities which may experience additional issues related to lack of safe or adequate housing, inadequate access to financial support, education or employment, and a mistrust of health services.¹

This can lead to young people not accessing care when they needed, with clear consequences for physical and mental health.

What is the approach being implemented?

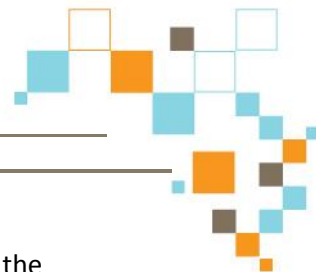
Primary Health Networks (PHNs) are working in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training to implement the [Doctors in Secondary Schools](#) program, which is placing general practice services into 100 Victorian Government secondary schools.

General Practitioners (GPs) provide bulk-billed health services to students up to one day per week, often supported by a practice nurse. Students are able to access services at purpose built clinics on school grounds, either through appointments or on a walk-in basis. GPs are also engaged in general health promotion activities within the schools.

The initial 100 schools were selected based on identified socio-economic disadvantage and need, to target improvements to adolescent health where they are most needed.

Schools across the state have been provided with a GP and early feedback shows that the program has become a popular and valued part of each school's educational environment.





What have been the key enablers to the success of this approach?

Key enablers included:

- Ease of access through on-site services and entry pathways, the comprehensive nature of the confidentiality and privacy measures developed, and school activation of the program as a school health and well-being initiative.
- [Victorian PHNs](#) have had taken an active role in engagement and recruitment of practices, ensuring practices and health care providers well-suited to the needs of the school community.
- Many students are presenting with mental health concerns; hence the program provides a new contact point for early intervention and treatment.
- Training for participating GPs are provided through the University of Melbourne has also driven success, with efforts including clinical workshops and webinars, as well as support to build the GPs local youth care network. Three advice lines for GPs are also available, covering mental health, sexual health and general medical concerns.

What have been some of the challenges to the success of this approach?

The focus on adolescent health and wellbeing recognises the direct link between the health and wellbeing of a student, and their ability to learn. GPs are providing services at schools across regional and rural Victoria. It is acknowledged that this initiative occurs within the context of district workforce shortages which necessitates innovative approaches to ensure timely and accessible primary care.

What is needed to scale-up the successes?

The program was launched with equity design principles in mind. Schools with the highest student family occupation and education index were targeted, with consideration also given to schools in areas with limited access to a GP. The opportunity exists to consolidate insights and draw from the breadth of available offerings in the local community.

More information

Victorian PHN Alliance details: <http://vphna.org.au/doctors-in-secondary-schools/>

Statewide coordination delivered at North Western Melbourne PHN:

Phone - (03) 9347 1188

References

¹ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 201, Youth health services – Improving access to primary care, vol. 41, no. 5, p 339-341, available: <https://www.racgp.org.au/afp/2012/may/youth-health-services/>. Accessed 17 May 2018

The Doctors in Secondary Schools program is supported by the Victorian Government. The Primary Health Networks Programme is an Australian Government Initiative.

