



# Section 1: Being a Healthy Lifestyle Worker

This section will provide you with some information about why Healthy Lifestyle Worker positions were created, and what your roles and duties will be.



## How did Healthy Lifestyle Workers come about?

The State, Territory and Commonwealth governments, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), have committed to 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To guide the initiatives aimed at 'closing the gap', COAG has set six targets. As shown in the box below, two of these targets relate specifically to reducing the numbers of deaths among Indigenous people.

As a part of the overall COAG commitment, governments at all levels agreed to provide \$1.6 billion over four years, including \$805.5 million from the Commonwealth, for a range of measures aimed at improving health outcomes for Indigenous people. In addressing the target for life expectancy, COAG has prioritised reducing chronic disease among Indigenous people. In this area you, as a member of a Regional Tackling Smoking and Healthy Lifestyle Team will play a crucial role. Along with Tobacco Action Workers, you will encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve their diets, engage in more physical activity, quit smoking, and cut back on drinking alcohol.

### COAG targets

- Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation (30 years)
- Halve the gap in mortality (death) rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- Ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years
- Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade

## **What is the role of Healthy Lifestyle Workers?**

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience much higher levels of chronic disease - particularly heart disease, diabetes and kidney disease - compared with non-Indigenous Australians. These diseases, which are largely preventable, are the main reasons why Indigenous adults have poorer health and die younger than other Australians.

A number of health risk factors - smoking, poor nutrition, not being physically active and heavy drinking of alcohol - play a major part in causing these chronic diseases. By not smoking, not drinking alcohol or only drinking alcohol in moderation, eating a more nutritious diet and being physically active, people reduce the risk of developing these and other diseases. This will help improve life expectancy.

Your role is to work in a Regional Tackling Smoking and Healthy Lifestyle Team alongside the Tackling Smoking Workers, to encourage healthier lifestyles for individuals, families and communities.

## What are the responsibilities of Healthy Lifestyle Workers?

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In consultation with your team your main responsibilities will be to:

- talk to individuals, families, school students, and community groups about:
  - » how healthy lifestyle choices can help prevent chronic disease
  - » how to make and maintain healthier lifestyle choices
- support, plan and run community events/programs that promote physical activity, healthy eating and responsible drinking
- promote supervised physical activity sessions, or run them yourself
- promote existing lifestyle programs
- encourage people to have Aboriginal Health Checks
- advise people with chronic diseases to see health care professionals for clinical advice

You can work with people in meeting places, community stores, schools and sporting facilities. The region where you work will be bigger than the area usually covered by your employer organisation. You may be required to travel regularly to communities that don't have Healthy Lifestyle Workers - so that the whole of Australia is covered by Healthy Lifestyle Worker teams.



