

PHAA National Public Health Student Think Tank Competition

2026 APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

The Public Health Association of Australia invites students to take part in the National Public Health Student Think Tank Competition. The competition is a chance for all students to showcase their innovation and enthusiasm for the field of public health and will be judged accordingly. The prompt for the written response is broad to allow applicants to address an area or need of their choosing, and to encourage innovation in their response. We are looking for creative and original ideas which demonstrate the student's future mindedness in the field of public health. We encourage all students at a tertiary level with a passion for public health to apply. This includes undergraduate, postgraduate, part-time, full-time and those studying remotely. We encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, LGBTQ+ students and students with a disability to apply and invite anyone to come forward to discuss with us if they require any special adjustments.

The competition comprises two phases:

Phase 1: Students are invited to submit a written response of no more than 750 words to address the following prompt:

How do we redesign systems to better promote prevention, wellbeing and health equity? Choose one public health challenge and propose a systems-focused solution.

Phase 2: Four shortlisted entries will be invited to develop their response into a presentation of no more than 7 minutes, to be presented in a national live webinar. The winner will be invited to present their response at a PHAA affiliated event.

Prizes:

- The winner will be invited to present their response at the Australian Public Health Conference 2026 in Geelong, Victoria (15-17 September 2026)
- This includes full registration to attend the conference and remittance up to the value of \$2000 towards flights to Avalon or Melbourne from your closest city and four nights' accommodation in Geelong during the Conference
- A one-year student membership to the Public Health Association of Australia.

Three runners up will also receive a one-year student membership to the Public Health Association of Australia.

How to enter: To enter the National Public Health Student Think Tank Competition, please fill out the entry form addressing the prompt:

How do we redesign systems to better promote prevention, wellbeing and health equity? Choose one public health challenge and propose a systems-focused solution.

The guidelines for entry are:

- Your response to the prompt must be **no more than 750 words**. Please note that this does not include in-text citations or reference list.
- Your submission must be submitted as a word document via email accompanied by the [entry submission form](#) (also available from PHAA website).
- You must appropriately provide a reference to any sources you have used to support your response. All referencing to be done in APA 6th Edition.
- Any plagiarism or AI generated responses will not be tolerated, and the entry will be immediately disqualified.
- **Late submissions will not be considered.**

Responses will be judged against a set of predefined criteria, including demonstrated understanding of public health principles, quality of critical thinking, innovation, feasibility, appreciation for the capability of public health leadership, and quality of communication.

Eligibility:

- Applicants must be studying within an Australian Tertiary institution. This includes undergraduate, postgraduate, part-time, full-time and those studying remotely. It is not a requirement that your current study is in public health, however you will need to demonstrate your understanding of the core principles of public health in your response.
- All areas of the [entry submission form](#) must be completed. In addition, a written response to the Think Tank pitch must be emailed to SYPPH@phaa.net.au by **5:00pm AEST on Monday 6th July 2026**. **Late submissions will not be accepted.**
- Applicants must be available and willing to present your response in a live webinar on **Thursday 27th August 2026**, if your application is shortlisted.
- Applicants must be available to present your response in person at the Australian Public Health conference, held on 15-17 September 2026 if you are selected as the winner.

Submission Dates:

- The closing date for phase 1 (written responses) is:
5:00pm AEST on Monday 6th July 2026
- Shortlisted contestants will be notified by Wednesday 31st July 2026.
- Shortlisted contestants will be required to present their response at a live webinar which will take place **Thursday 27th August 6pm AEST**.
Further details about this will be provided to those who are shortlisted.

The winner will also be required to present in person at the Australian Public Health conference held in Geelong, Victoria from Tuesday 15th to Thursday 17th of September 2026.

Criteria:

All Think Tank Submission will be judged using the following criteria:

- **Demonstrates and applies understanding of public health principles**
 - All relevant ideas, concepts, or theories are clearly underpinned by principles of public health, which may include social justice and equity, health as a human right, population-wide approach, evidence-based practice, community participation, etc. (please refer to attached guidance for submissions on page 4 of this document)
- **Demonstrates quality of critical thinking and innovation**
 - Demonstrates clear innovation and critical thought processes in developing a sound, effective argument.
 - The suggested approach is feasible, practical, timely and clearly relevant to current issues.
- **Quality of communication**
 - Message and ideas flow clearly and coherently with appropriate use of paragraphs.
Expression clear, fluent, professional, precise, focused on the topic with minimal errors.
- **Referencing**
 - Uses a diversity of high-quality and credible sources.
 - Appropriate, balanced use of paraphrasing, summarising, and quoting.
 - All source material correctly acknowledged using APA 6th Edition.

Guidance for submissions:

Student Think Tank guidelines for submissions relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and other diverse ethnic/cultural groups.

To ensure additional inclusivity and sensitivity of submissions, where submissions relate to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or other diverse populations; entrants must demonstrate consideration of consultation and engagement with the target community within your response. Where this has not occurred, or has occurred with incomplete consultation, then this fact must be clearly reported in the entry as part of the limitations. Participants must be aware of the risks of, and avoid, disrespectful cultural appropriation in their written submissions and presentations.

For further information and guidance for submissions relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, or other diverse cultural groups, please refer to these documents for assistance:

1. NHMRC: Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/ethical-guidelines-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples>
2. Woodland et. al 2021: A framework for preferred practices in conducting culturally competent health research in a multicultural society: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12961-020-00657-y>
3. Productivity Commission: Indigenous Evaluation Strategy: <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-evaluation/strategy>
4. PHAA: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guide to Terminology: https://www.phaa.net.au/common/Uploaded%20files/SIG%20documents/Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Health%20SIG/PPS%202019/Aboriginal_and_Torres_Strait_Islander_guide_to_terminology.pdf
5. Msoroka & Amundsen 2017: One size fits not quite all: Universal research ethics with diversity: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1747016117739939>
6. The Lowitja Institute: Researching Indigenous Health: A practical guide for researchers: <https://www.lowitja.org.au/resource/researching-indigenous-health-guide/>
7. Working towards culturally sensitive ethical practice in a multicultural society: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/229310181.pdf>

TERMS and CONDITIONS – Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) National Public Health Student Think Tank Competition

By submitting your entry, you acknowledge that you are entering into the PHAA National Public Health Competition and you:

1. Have the rightful power and authority to provide your entry and enter the competition in the name in which it is submitted.
2. Warrant that your entry is your unpublished and original work and that you did not use AI to assist in the writing of your entry.
3. Grant PHAA the right to reproduce, distribute and communicate the essay in printer or electronic medium for judging and promotional purposes of PHAA through all state and territory PHAA branches.
4. Agree that PHAA may contact the institution where you are enrolled to verify your enrolment status.
5. Agree that in no event will PHAA be liable to you or any person in contract or tort (including without limitation and negligence) or otherwise resulting from PHAA's use of your entry, including if Your Entry is the winning entry of the Competition, during and after the Competition Period.
6. PHAA reserves the right to request the prize winner(s) to provide proof of identity and proof of residency at the nominated prize delivery address, in order to claim their prize. Proof of identification, residency and entry considered suitable for verification is at the discretion of PHAA. In the event that the prize winner cannot provide suitable proof, the prize winner will forfeit the prize in whole, and no substitute will be offered.
7. PHAA reserves the right, in its absolute discretion, at any time before the awarding of a prize to cancel or vary the terms and conditions of the Competition or to vary or cancel the award of a prize including, without limitation, circumstances where in PHAA's opinion (which it shall form in its absolute discretion): a. prize winner does not satisfy the Competition entry requirements; or b. PHAA cannot conduct the Competition or award a prize for any reason beyond its control.
8. A decision of PHAA in relation to the conduct of the Competition is binding and conclusive and no correspondence will be entered into.
9. No responsibility will be taken by PHAA for any changes in dates, times or cancellations or other arrangements that may prevent a prize winner from winning a prize.
10. If you are unable to present your response in the live webinar, you are required to give notice no later than 5.00pm AEST Monday 3rd August 2026 and you agree that your submission will be forfeited to the next ranking entry.

11. You confirm you are available to present your response in person at the Australian Public Health Conference 15th-17th of September 2026 if you are selected as the winner.
12. Prizes are non-transferrable. Existing PHAA members will have an additional year added to their membership provided that they will meet student membership eligibility at the time of renewal. Should the winner not meet the student membership eligibility requirements, they will be reimbursed for membership purchase up to the amount of student membership.
13. Entrants enter the Competition at their sole risk. With the exception of liability which cannot be excluded by law, PHAA shall not be liable for any loss or damage which is suffered (including but not limited to indirect or consequential loss) or for personal injury suffered or sustained as a result of taking a prize or entering the Competition.
14. The PHAA is partially funded by the Department of Health and is subject to reporting requirements. The collection, use and disclosure of entrants' personal information collected in connection with this Competition is governed by the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW).
15. PHAA is committed to protecting the privacy of entrants. By entering this competition, you agree to PHAA using and disclosing your personal information for the purposes of conducting and promoting this Competition (including, but not limited to, determining and notifying winners), and for the information to be used so the PHAA can comply with its reporting requirements to the Department of Health.