By the seventies the four major causes of death in Australia were traffic accidents, lung cancer, coronary heart disease, and suicide. This list focussed attention on the effects of lifestyle on the nation's health and strengthened calls for preventative health strategies. The decade saw campaigns against narcotic drugs, smoking and excessive alcohol intake.

Another feature of the seventies was the growing voice of the consumer. The women's movement was under way with demands for the right to legal abortion and women's refuges. Indigenous calls for the right to determine their own future began to be heeded. In 1973 the Government, initially through the Office of Aboriginal Affairs in the Prime Minister's Department, made its first grant to the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern, set up independently by Aboriginal people in 1971.

Much of the new emphasis on community involvement in Government activities can be traced to the 1966 Henderson Report on poverty in Melbourne. The subsequent national inquiry sparked a debate on the need to change social service and health funding. In 1972, the new Whitlam Government launched an ambitious reform program drawing on the work of Henderson and other external advisers such as Dr Dick Scotton and Dr John Deeble. In the field of health the emphasis was on universal access and greater public administration of the system.

In December 1973 the Government set up the Hospital and Health Services Commission to build a bridge between service providers and the funding sources, as well as to improve preventative activities. Its chairman, Dr Sidney Sax, was determined to move from institutional to community care wherever possible. This was the motivation behind the Community Health Program which experimented with making more health services available in the local community and offering greater continuity of care.

The Community Health Program received a mixed reaction from the medical profession. Some supported the reforms, but more saw them as an attempt to introduce a salaried general practice, if not to actually socialise the system.

The Government's Medibank scheme, ushered in by the Minister for Social Security, Bill Hayden, offered health cover to all Australians. It aroused opposition from the Australian Medical Association (AMA) who fought to defend the status quo. The private health insurance funds also resisted change in order to keep their share of the insurance market. Together they lobbied the Opposition that dominated the Senate, and successfully delayed the introduction of Medibank until the final year of the Whitlam Government in 1975. The management of Medibank payments was made the responsibility of a new Commonwealth agency, the Health Insurance Commission…

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The scheme was soon altered by the incoming Fraser Government, which was determined to reduce expenditure in the face of high inflation. Its promise to retain Medibank was kept by creating Medibank Private to compete with the private insurance funds. The Government also commissioned the Jamison Inquiry into hospital efficiency, which resulted in the States being given block grants to fund their health activities.

In the first half of the decade, Australia was particularly active in the World Health Organization (WHO). In 1971 Sir William Refshauge, Commonwealth Director-General of Health, was elected president of its 24th Assembly. In 1975 the Minister for Health, Dr D.N. Everingham, was elected vice president. The next Director-General of Health, Dr Gwyn Howells, also became a member of WHO's executive board.
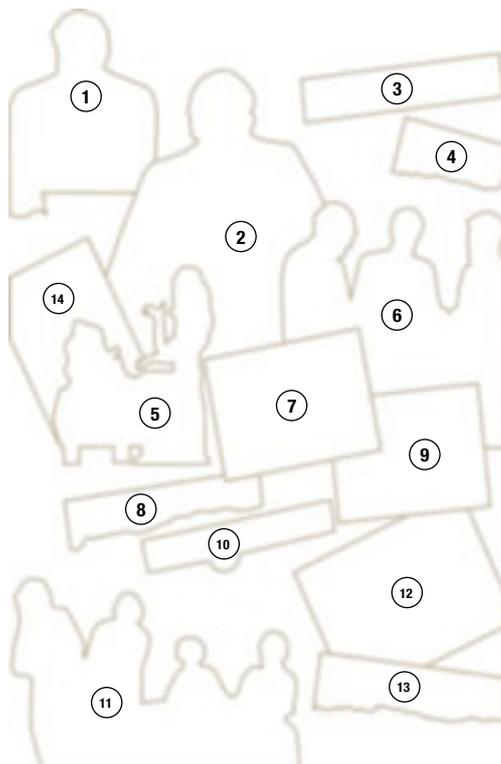
In 1973 Australia sponsored a WHO resolution that called on all nations to halt atmospheric nuclear weapons testing. The resolution stressed the concern of the people of the Pacific region about the health hazards such tests could produce. During this period the Australian Radiation Laboratory monitored the French nuclear weapons tests above Polynesia.

Another international issue with profound effects for Australia was the exodus of refugees from the war in Indochina. The first 'boat people' landed in Darwin in late 1976. By 1978, 22,000 refugees had arrived in Australia. For the Department of Health's quarantine stations, the 'boat people' caused an exponential rise in their workload. Most refugees, however, entered in a more orderly fashion, being screened before departing the camps for Australia. Health officers were placed in 15 posts around the world to check all potential migrants. In December 1978 the Department set up a migrant health unit to cooperate with the Department of Immigration and with the States in providing the necessary services to new migrants.

Two territorial responsibilities were lost during the 1970s. In 1975 Papua New Guinea was granted independence, and in 1979 the Northern Territory assumed responsibility for its own health activities.

History Montage Services
Poster 7: **1970 – 1979 : Focus on Community**

1 – Photograph – Sir William Refshauge, Director General of Health
2 – Dr Sidney Sax, Chairman of the Hospitals and Health Services Commission
3 – Heading extract – Conference for identifying Women's Health Needs
4 – Text extract – Cooperating with the medicine man
5 – Cartoon brochure image – 'The more or less diet: a food guide to good health', by the Commonwealth Department of Health in association with 'Life be in it', 1987
6 – Photograph – L – R: Dr Richard Scotton, Bill Hayden, Dr John Deeble, Scotton and Deeble presenting the 'Green paper' to Bill Hayden in 1973
7 – Photograph – Narrabundah Health Centre
8 – Extract from Annual Report, Dir Gen of Health 76-77 pg38 – Aboriginal Health Workers
9 – Photograph – Darwin, NT – Self Government
10 – Departmental News Release Letterhead
11 – Photograph – Sister Victoire brings new hope to the aged in Darlinghurst, 1972
12 – Photograph – Children's advertisements for anti-smoking, children designing poster – campaign posters in the background
13 – Extract from WHO Health 1973
14 – Medibank and you booklet, 1975

To view the series of montage posters representing the history of the Commonwealth Department of Health on the Internet, go to **www.health.gov.au/history.htm**