



# South Australia: A Better Place to Live

Promoting and protecting our community's health and wellbeing 2013

Summary Version

Developed under the provisions of Section 50 of the South Australian Public Health Act 2011



## Introduction

The *South Australian Public Health Act 2011* (SA Public Health Act) is being implemented over 2013. This new Act aims to promote and protect public health and reduce the incidence of preventable illness, injury and disability in South Australia.

This is an Act for the 21st century. It is helping our communities prepare for and meet the health challenges of this century and have a better chance to build stronger healthier communities.

Public health planning is a new and key feature of the SA Public Health Act. Public health planning under the SA Public Health Act is based on a very strong commitment to partnership and collaboration, particularly between State and Local Governments.

The State Public Health Plan: *South Australia a Better Place to Live* (the Plan) sets the scene for action across the state to protect and improve our health. It also provides a framework for Local Councils to use as a guide when they are developing their own public health plans.

This summary version of the Plan emphasises the need to build a better and more coordinated system for public health and public health planning. As the first Plan developed under the SA Public Health Act this building task is a priority so that future plans will be developed on strong foundations.

The Plan highlights a vision and proposes four areas for priority action which will be used to shape and focus our efforts across the state and within local communities. It then proposes a series of recommendations for action in each priority.

Finally it proposes what the next steps can be across the State as well as suggesting some ways that Local Councils can get started with their local plans.

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# Public Health in the 21st Century

The SA Public Health Act defines public health as follows:

- Section (3)** (1) Public health means the health of individuals in the context of the wider community;...
- (2) Without limiting the definition of public health in subsection (1), public health may involve a combination of policies, programs and safeguards designed –
- (a) to protect, maintain or promote the health of the community at large, including where one or more persons may be the focus of any safeguards, action or response; or
  - (b) to prevent or reduce the incidence of disease, injury or disability within the community

Public health is something that every society has sought to protect and improve throughout history. Collectively we have always worked to make sure that our communities are designed and function in ways to keep us healthy through protective measures as well as strategies that maintain and improve our health.

For much of the past several hundreds of years, public health has focused on protection and prevention. This was particularly so when societies were challenged by the threat of infectious diseases. Even though our knowledge of particular germs or viruses was undeveloped until late in the 19th century, it was understood that the conditions in which people lived could seriously undermine their health.

Much of the early action in public health in the 19th century was focused on providing clean water, sewerage, safe disposal of wastes, improved housing and community amenity, cleaner air, more nutritious and safe food, and adequate heating and cooling.

Over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st century our understanding of the causes of illness and disease has grown. Many of the infectious diseases that were major public health challenges until the mid-20th century are now virtually unknown in Australia and similar countries.

South Australia in the 21st century still faces significant public health challenges – making sure that infectious diseases are under control through effective immunisation and other prevention programs; remaining vigilant and prepared to respond to new or re-emerging infectious conditions, particularly those that threaten to become pandemics; and dealing with the growing wave of non-communicable conditions that arise out of a range of common risk factors (e.g. overweight and obesity, reduced opportunities for physical activity, overabundant availability of energy-dense, nutrition-poor foods in combination with poor access to nutritious food).

Further risk factors that threaten our health are related to the excessive use of alcohol and the continuing threat posed by tobacco. In addition, it has been well understood and long known that improving community capacity, resilience, connectedness and the general social, economic and environmental conditions of our communities will significantly improve the opportunities for better health for all.

Public health in the 21st Century has a lot to do with the way our community is organised and how our society shares its benefits and advantages. It's about how we protect ourselves and how we rise to challenges and risks that threaten our communities, whether natural disasters, widespread diseases, or social or economic shocks that strain the very fabric of our communities. It reflects how resilient we are, how we recover from hardships and breakdowns, and how we can together rebuild and restore our sense of wellbeing and community.

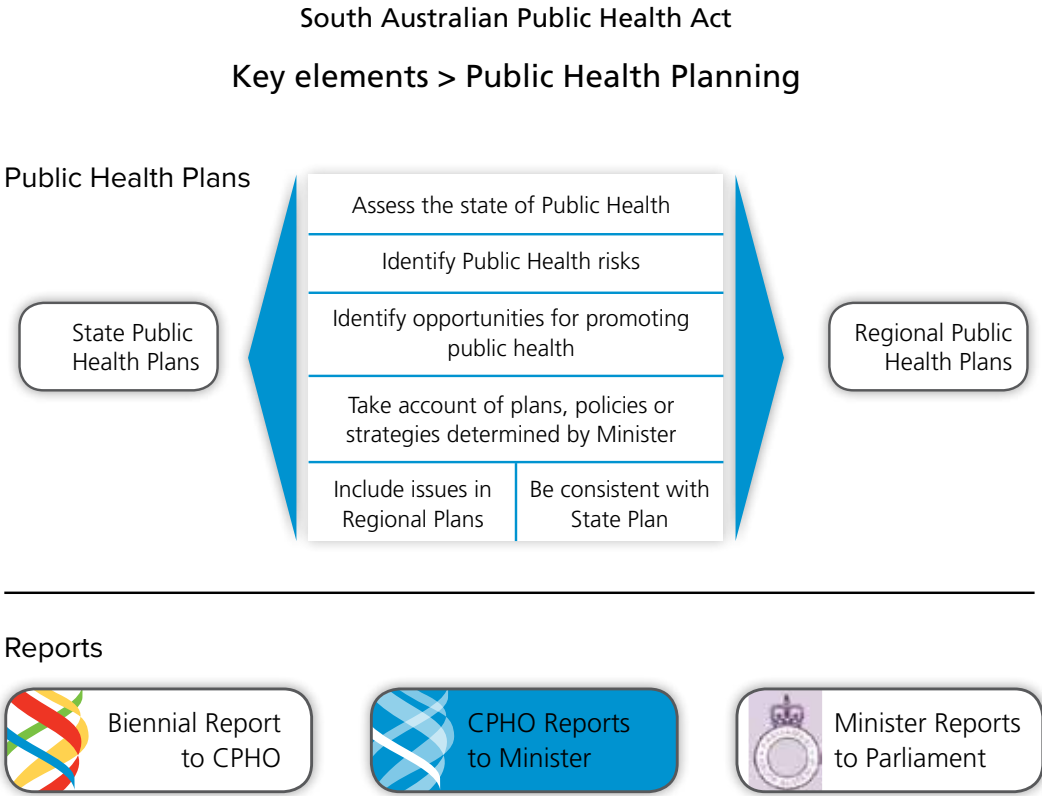
Public health connects with every aspect of our community's life and can be affected by a very wide range of factors and issues. Public health responsibilities are often dispersed across all spheres of government, and many other departments, agencies, organisations and groups. Most of what impacts on public health is actually in the domain of sectors that don't have a specific health role as part of their primary responsibility. Public health is about the social conditions, the environmental character and the opportunities that are available or need developing. It's about the very fabric and structure of our physical and social environments.

Public health is about all of us – preventing the causes that make us sick and building up those things that protect us and improve our health and wellbeing.

# The Public Health Planning System

The Plan has been developed within the context of implementing the planning system contained in Sections 50–52 of the SA Public Health Act. It provides a picture of ‘who does what’ in terms of action on the determinants of health, with a particular focus on spheres of government, including the role of the health system and the important role of Local Councils.

## Key Elements of the Public Health Planning System



The SA Public Health Act identifies Local Councils as the local public health authority for their areas. This means that Local Councils are in the best position to lead and coordinate public health planning for their communities. It does not mean that Local Councils are responsible for every issue affecting their community identified in a plan. Public Health Partner Authorities identified under the SA Public Health Act (SA Health, other relevant State Government agencies and identified non-government organisations) will participate in planning processes led by Local Councils. These Public Health Partner Authorities agree to share the responsibility for implementing relevant aspects of public health plans.

Congruent with the SA Public Health Act, the Plan includes other plans or strategies, identified by the Minister as appropriate, to be considered in relation to public health planning. It also provides for canvassing the range of issues that will be identified by Local Councils from their own assessment of the public health of their communities.

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The tasks in establishing and building a system of public health planning require the:

- > strengthening of collaborative efforts
- > reinforcing of coordinating processes
- > development of opportunities to improve communication and common understanding across spheres of government and other sectors
- > identification of opportunities for integration of public health issues within other policy priorities
- > development and strengthening of capacity within and between State and Local Governments embedding of community participation processes in the identification of public health issues and the formulation of responses, and;
- > building of basic mechanisms to support more sustainable public health planning and action.

These basic mechanisms include the:

- > development of consistent planning and reporting processes
- > development and refinement of comprehensive data sets to inform planning
- > continuous gathering and synthesising of research and evidence on effective public health policies and interventions to inform state-wide and local action, and;
- > development of monitoring, evaluation and accountability measures that are meaningful to the ongoing improvement of the public health effort.

The planning system within the SA Public Health Act envisages a five year planning cycle with provision for revision at any time. This provision enables greater integration of public health planning with Councils' strategic management plans after the 2014 Local Government elections.

On that basis the Plan will be subject to review and refinement after the receipt of Council plans and first progress reports, which take up the period to the end of 2014. This means that Councils, as they are commencing their next round of strategic management planning and review, will have access to a refreshed Plan that incorporates more clearly identified public health issues that emerge from their own plans and progress reports.

The Plan concludes by summarising a range of strategies designed to build and sustain a system of public health planning as well as recommendations for specific interventions across the four priority areas. It also identifies the next steps – what the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Chief Public Health Officer, the South Australian Public Health

Council and SA Health will do to implement the Plan, and suggestions for how Local Councils may commence their own public health planning.

## The Health of our State

The SA Public Health Act indicates that the Plan will comprehensively assess the state of public health and wellbeing in South Australia. A similar provision applies to the public health plans developed by Local Councils for their communities. This is an ongoing task that will be incorporated into developmental strategies in the Plan. Because public health is affected by a very wide range of factors from both the physical and social environments, it is important to ensure that the data set to support planning is sufficiently comprehensive. There is ongoing consultation with the South Australian Public Health Council, Local Government and other public health partners to ensure that such a comprehensive data set is developed.

By world standards most South Australians in the main enjoy a high standard of health. This has been achieved by improving living conditions, sustaining our environment, improving and expanding opportunities as well as providing good healthcare and community supports. But this picture is not shared by everybody. Many different parts of our society still experience poor health and disadvantaged living conditions. Good health is protected, maintained and improved through making sure our communities function well and people have the chance to live healthier lives.

Section 23 of the SA Public Health Act requires the Chief Public Health Officer to report on public health trends, activities and indicators in South Australia, the implementation of the Plan and implementation of the SA Public Health Act. The first Chief Public Health Officer Report will be published shortly after the release of this plan and it describes the strength, scope and diversity of public health functions, including the prevention and control of communicable disease and non-communicable disease, epidemiology, environmental health, social determinants of health, health risk factors and the numerous agencies providing public health services. It will provide a snapshot picture of the state of public health in South Australia. The Report of the Chief Public Health Officer – The State of Public Health for South Australia, 2012, can be accessed on the SA Health website, following its release.

## Partnerships for Public Health

There is a wide spectrum of actions that impact on public health – from taking action on the determinants of health at the earliest level of prevention and specific public health actions designed to address prevention and remediation of identified public health threats, through to dealing with the presence of the preventable burden of diseases and injuries once they have occurred. No one agency or sphere of government has responsibility for the whole spectrum.

Because the public health planning system needs to have regard to this spectrum it requires not only cooperation and partnerships between agencies and spheres of government but also partnerships and integration internally within agencies. For example, the coordination of primary health care planning and public health planning is crucial to realising a systemised and integrated platform for population health, especially on specific actions and services required to address the preventable non-communicable disease burden in South Australia.

The South Australian Public Health Act identifies Local Councils as the local public health authority for their areas. This means that Councils are in the best position to lead and coordinate public health planning for their communities. This does not mean that they have prime responsibility for every public health issue identified in their community, but they are best placed to recognise and understand them within the context of the other issues, needs and priorities of their communities. For public health actions to be successful, they need to connect with and be integrated into many other areas of policy and action. Public Health Partner Authorities identified under the Act (SA Health, other relevant State Government Agencies and identified non-government organisations) will participate in planning processes led by Local Councils and share the responsibility for implementing agreed upon aspects of public health plans.

SA Health also has specific services and units focused on public health. These cover a wide range of responses including food and food safety policy and regulation, public and environmental health protection, communicable disease control and support for state-wide immunisation programs, support for community-based services for people living with blood-borne diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, population health monitoring, state-wide screening programs, health promotion specialist programs, and specialist scientific advice on dealing with contaminated sites and other environmental health concerns.

Although the Commonwealth Government and its agencies are not subject to the planning provisions of the SA Public Health Act, they also play a significant role in public health for example, preparing for climate change, emergency management and disaster planning as well as in contributing to public health planning at the regional level by facilitating the participation by primary health care providers, including general practices, through Medicare Locals to ensure that the needs of Medicare Local catchment populations are met.

Public health planning provides a further platform to support the integration of complementary initiatives of Commonwealth, State and Local Governments. Where there are relevant points of linkage, the State Government and SA Health will work to ensure effective coordination with Commonwealth government priorities.

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# Vision

## *South Australia: A better place to live.*

- > Health is part of our lives it helps us achieve all that we want
- > Our health is protected and improved when we work together to develop better neighbourhoods and communities
- > People can be healthier when they have the chance to live healthier lives

### **Four priority areas have been identified. They are;**

- > Stronger and Healthier Communities and Neighbourhoods for All Generations
- > Increasing Opportunities for Healthy Living, Healthy Eating and Being Active
- > Preparing for Climate Change
- > Sustaining and Improving Public and Environmental Health Protection.

These four areas will be the basis for further planning and action by Local Government and public health partners across State Government, the health system and the non-government sector.

The choice of these four priority areas was informed by an assessment of the key public health issues and opportunities in South Australia, and is based on a pragmatic assessment of the conditions required to be developed as part of the Plan. Their selection was informed by a consideration of the following six factors:

1. a realistic place to start – achievable gains able to be identified and early ‘wins’ likely
2. potential to address issues of clear public health concern and amenable to public health intervention, with a preference towards the capacity to address interlocking public health issues simultaneously
3. potential for widespread impact on community health and wellbeing
4. focus on ‘upstream’ determinants and preventive actions leading to the best investment for effort
5. related to already identified policy attention and action across sectors and between spheres of government
6. potential to be integrated into existing planning processes and policies

The four priorities identified in this Plan are to be read and understood not as four separate streams of planning, but are designed, where relevant, to relate to and reinforce each other. For example at the level of specific strategies within a Local Council area, a particular plan or intended action may contribute to the achievement of several of these priorities.

In conjunction with the Local Government Association, SA Health will facilitate capacity development, consistent approaches and, where relevant, coordinated action across these priority areas. This will include the further refinement of specific data sets to support more focused planning in these areas, identifying and synthesising relevant research and developing consistent evaluation frameworks, collecting evidence for effective interventions and strategies to address priority issues, sponsoring and coordinating joint planning among Local Councils and Public Health Partner Authorities, and jointly providing training opportunities for relevant staff in Councils and Public Health Partner Authorities.

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## Specific Actions

This section summarises a targeted number of specific recommendations associated with the four state-wide priority areas.

### **Stronger and Healthier Communities and Neighbourhoods for All Generations**

This public health priority is concerned with the physical and social infrastructure of where we live. It is important to ensure that our cities, towns and neighbourhoods are designed in ways that are mindful of those factors that contribute to health. This places a focus on how to make our communities more liveable, walkable, inclusive and accessible. It can be as straightforward as looking at ways of improving access to parks and playgrounds, improving footpaths and street lighting, increasing cycle ways and improving transport plans generally. It can also include increasing opportunities for social connectedness, volunteering and other forms of community participation, as well as developing and implementing community safety strategies.

- > Local Councils are encouraged to consider the four CHES principles for healthy environments: Connected Environments, Healthy Eating Environments, Safe Environments and Sustainable Environments, and related concepts and factors in their planning to develop stronger and healthier communities.
- > Councils are encouraged to plan for the priority Stronger and Healthier Communities and Neighbourhoods for All Generations in ways that include specific recognition of the needs of different ages and abilities and build community connectedness.

### **Increasing Opportunities for Healthy Living, Healthy Eating and Being Active**

Councils are encouraged in particular to include considerations for boosting opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy food in their public health planning.

- > SA Health will continue to develop and recommend policy and regulatory responses designed to increase consumer information and choice and to make healthier choices the easier choices.
- > SA Health, through the Eat Well Be Active Strategy 2011-16, will continue to support policy changes, and information and social marketing campaigns, as well as supporting local communities to eat well and be active.
- > SA Health will fulfil its partnerships with Councils to implement Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle (OPAL) programs in their communities.
- > SA Health will work with partners across State Government, Local Councils, local communities, relevant Public Health Partner Authorities and other agencies of State Government to address ways to reduce the harm done by excessive alcohol and tobacco use.
- > Where relevant, Councils may consider coordinating the development of local alcohol management strategies to address community safety and related implications of excessive alcohol use, as part of their public health planning process.
- > Councils are encouraged to incorporate the use of new tobacco control powers relating to outdoor areas and events in public health planning for their communities.

### **Preparing for climate change<sup>1</sup>**

Climate change represents one of the greatest global challenges. It also has implications for communities in South Australia. There is no doubt that climate change will have and is having implications for both the health of the public and public health infrastructure. There is also no doubt that climate change is an issue that warrants concerted efforts both across and between governments and from the whole community.

Climate change will affect our communities in several ways and we have to be prepared to meet all of them, including dealing with extreme weather events and potential disasters related to changing weather and climate patterns. The inexorable longer term changes in climate mean, for example, that we need to plan and redesign our communities for warmer conditions, including better provision for shade and other cooling green infrastructure elements.

- > Councils are encouraged to review their planning for climate change preparedness to ensure that public health implications are recognised and appropriate strategies are designed and implemented to ensure community resilience.
- > When planning for healthier communities and neighbourhoods for all generations, Councils are also encouraged to ensure that the public health implications of climate change are addressed.
- > Councils may need to consider the resilience of their basic public health infrastructure to climate change and extreme events such as sea level rise and storm surges.

<sup>1</sup> [Prospering in a Changing Climate: A Climate Change Adaptation Framework for South Australia. August 2012.](#)



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### **Sustaining and Improving Public and Environmental Health Protection**

Our communities function because of basic public health protection services and strategies. If they were absent or weakened, our health would be severely challenged due, for example, to the dangers of poor water quality, unsafe foods, ineffective waste disposal, falling immunisation rates and the spread of more virulent infectious diseases, poorly designed or unsafe dwellings, and inadequate community infrastructure.

- > SA Health will work in conjunction with Local Councils (through the LGA) and Environmental Health Australia to ensure that the powers and provisions of the new Act are understood and consistently applied.
- > Councils will be assisted to explore and assess regional models of service delivery and other shared service options where appropriate, develop and refine public health policies and regulations to ensure that they are streamlined, and take account of contemporary issues or changes in technology.
- > SA Health will work in conjunction with Councils (through the LGA) and Environmental Health Australia to develop and refine public and environmental health performance standards to support best practice across the state.
- > Councils are encouraged to ensure that the role of public health is identified in emergency and disaster management planning.



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## System Building Actions

These are specific steps aimed at building the public health system, recognising that this Plan is the first, and that support systems for public health planning and action need to be developed. The following initiatives will be developed or ensured by the Minister and the Chief Public Health Officer, in conjunction with the South Australian Public Health Council and the LGA:

- > Ensure effective implementation of the South Australian Public Health Act 2011 (SA Public Health Act).
- > Ensure consistent administration of relevant provisions of SA Public Health Act by authorised officers.
- > Develop Regulations, Guidelines, State Public Health Policies and Codes of Practice (under Part 8 of SA Public Health Act) that are relevant to improving public health in South Australia.
- > Enhance cooperative arrangements between Local Government, SA Health, Public Health Partner Authorities, the university sector and the non-government sector. This is to develop a coherent dataset of public health indicators (which are meaningful and relevant to Local Government and Public Health Partner Authorities) to aid in public health planning, monitoring and evaluation, and for the development of an evidence base for effective public health interventions.
- > The South Australian Public Health Council to foster the development of a Public Health Research Agenda for South Australia, focusing on research within the four priority areas identified in this Plan.
- > Foster improved partnerships and coordinate opportunities for greater engagement between Local Councils, Local Health Networks and Medicare Locals where relevant.
- > Continue to strengthen the role of Councils as public health authorities for their areas, and in particular strengthen their public health planning and reporting capacity.
- > Work to establish agreements with relevant agencies and organisations to become Public Health Partner Authorities, with a priority focus on those agencies and organisations whose role has particular relevance for the four identified priorities of the Plan.
- > Engage with, support and coordinate the work of Public Health Partner Authorities as they participate in public health planning.
- > Continue to develop and refine guidance and resource materials to strengthen public health planning processes.
- > Develop monitoring, evaluation and reporting frameworks and standards for public health planning.
- > Support the development of governance processes across the State Government sector that specifically incorporate public health factors in planning assessment and policy development through the adoption of Health in All Policies and related approaches.

### **Additionally:**

- > SA Health, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government and Local Government, will ensure that the coordinated provision of immunisation services is able to retain and extend South Australia's high rate of vaccine uptake.
- > SA Health will ensure that effective public health planning and strategies are developed to address essential public and environmental health issues in the Unincorporated Areas of the state, in particular for remote communities.
- > Councils will be encouraged to identify and address inequities in their communities that may impact on the health of particular groups.
- > Where relevant, specific measures can be undertaken in conjunction with Indigenous communities to ensure that their specific issues are addressed within public health plans.
- > The Minister will systematise Health in All Policies approaches and other related processes through the development of procedures to provide advice across State Government. This will be achieved through the implementation of s.17(2) of the SA Public Health Act.
- > SA Health will assist Councils to adopt Health in All Policies approaches, and other relevant processes for assessing health implications, through the implementation of public health planning and the application of s 37(2)(g) functions.
- > In conjunction with the LGA, SA Health will facilitate capacity development and consistent approaches and, where relevant, coordinated action across these priority areas. This will include:
  - further refining specific datasets to support more focused planning in these areas
  - identifying and synthesising relevant research and developing consistent evaluation frameworks
  - collecting evidence for effective interventions and strategies to address priority issues
  - sponsoring and coordinating joint planning between Councils and Public Health Partner Authorities
  - jointly providing training opportunities for relevant staff in Councils and Public Health Partner Authorities.

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## Next Steps: Getting Started

The Plan proposes a number of steps to start the planning process. It identifies a range of tasks for the Minister for Health, the Chief Public Health Officer, the South Australian Public Health Council and SA Health.

Each Local Council or Group of Councils planning together will need to develop different processes that fit their local needs and circumstances.

The Plan suggests a number of ways a Local Council can get started in developing their first public health plan, including setting up clear internal processes for coordinating its development across Council, auditing existing plans and activities to identify their public health implications, consider the guidance material developed by SA Health and the Local Government Association.

The Local Government public health planning provisions in the Act commenced at the beginning of 2013.

Councils are encouraged to develop and submit their plans by the end of 2013.

At the heart of public health in South Australia is a strong partnership between State Government and Local Government. This partnership has been a central feature of this and every public health Act in South Australia since colonial times. The Plan sustains that commitment to partnership and collaboration and focuses on four strategic priorities.

The Chief Public Health Officer, with the South Australian Public Health Council, will coordinate and oversee this Plan. The Chief Public Health Officer, with the Local Government Association (LGA), will monitor and support public health planning by Councils.

A Service Agreement between SA Health and the LGA provides funding and assistance for implementing SA Public Health Act, including the planning provisions within the SA Public Health Act.

SA Health will also continue its core health protection activities including working with Local Councils on areas of common action. For example, public and environmental health, immunisation support and communicable disease prevention and management.

The legislation will be reviewed by State Parliament through the Social Development Committee at the end of the first five years of the SA Public Health Act.





## For more information

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If you do not speak English, request an interpreter from SA Health and the department will make every effort to provide you with an interpreter in your language.



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