



ACTION AREA 8 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Provide programs and opportunities to increase physical activity levels among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Authors

R Macniven,¹ K Canuto,² K Page,³

- 1 School of Public Health, University of Sydney
- 2 South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute
- 3 Austin Health

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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Rates of cardiovascular disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reflect unacceptable levels of health inequality.

The case for change is compelling:

- in 2017, 12% of total deaths amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were caused by heart disease⁽¹⁾
- compared with non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were 70% more likely to die from circulatory diseases⁽²⁾
- physical inactivity is a contributor to the rates of chronic disease in this population, accounting for 6% of the total disease burden⁽³⁾
- while there is limited evidence regarding effective physical activity interventions for targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, there is evidence that they experience unique social, cultural and economic barriers to participation, such as negative community perceptions of exercising alone.
- there is also evidence that group programs exclusively for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are appealing and acceptable⁽⁴⁾
- in non-remote areas in 2012–13, 62% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over reported being sedentary or exercising at low levels.⁽⁵⁾

While further research is needed, given the increased chronic disease risks suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the key role of physical activity in reducing risk, physical activity interventions (and their evaluation) should be prioritised in Indigenous communities. Priority should also be afforded to community-driven and owned programs as there are more likely to be sustained.

Numerous examples of community programs are described in the 'grey', or informally published, literature and this is an important source of qualitative information.⁽⁶⁾



WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Participation in physical activity can benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities in many ways:

- making an important contribution to reducing chronic disease
- improving physical and mental health and wellbeing
- improving social factors, such as community connectedness.

In addition, physical activity can provide important cultural links through activities such as dancing, hunting, fishing, bushwalking, intergenerational programs, men's health programs and women's groups.

Implement policies that promote higher levels of physical activity participation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- policy and funding investments in physical activity programs to include an equity focus, with main effort focused on the most disadvantaged communities and groups
- establish a fund to enable programs with proven effectiveness to be sustained and to be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- provide funding to build capacity and skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to design, conduct and sustain physical activity initiatives in their communities
- implement policies and investment in ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training at all three levels of government and in the private sector, particularly for those agencies planning, developing and delivering health services.

Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with access to built environments that are conducive to physical activity:

- provide accessible recreation facilities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- provide attractive open space, shaded areas, basketball rings and safe walking and cycling infrastructure
- promote safe environments and ensure the physical and social environment in the communities is conducive to safe participation in physical activity
- implement physical activity programs that are delivered by qualified exercise staff, while building skills in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to conduct their own program.

Implement social and community interventions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in physical activity:

- develop physical activity opportunities that are affordable and socially and culturally accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- consult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure programs are developed in accordance with the needs and interests of local people
- with respect to local culture, tailor programs to the needs of men, women and children
- ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children receive quality physical education at school and have access to inexpensive recreation and sport participation opportunities in their community.





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For further information contact:

Adj. Prof. Trevor Shilton

Director Active Living

Heart Foundation

T: (08) 9382 5912

E: Trevor.Shilton@heartfoundation.org.au