



From the Heart Foundation

Move more, sit less! Time for a national physical activity action plan

Physical inactivity, at 21.2%, is ranked second only to high blood pressure as a contributor to the cardiovascular disease burden in Australia (<http://www.aihw.gov.au/burden-of-disease>).

The World Health Organization has identified inactivity as one of the “big four” risk factors, joining tobacco, alcohol and obesity as the priorities for action following the United Nations political declaration on non-communicable disease in 2011.

What is surprising is that so little has been done by successive Australian governments to promote physical activity. Of the 34 countries members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Australia is ranked in the lowest third in preventive health expenditure, yet with minimal outlay (compared with current and projected health care costs), investment in physical activity can result in substantial future savings.

In September 2015, the Heart Foundation coordinated a national physical activity forum at Parliament House with 100 leading policy experts and key stakeholders from organisations across government

and the public health, education and community sectors.

Nine priority action areas to address physical inactivity were identified: children, seniors, workplaces, transport, cities and neighbourhoods, health care, public education, clubs and sport, and communities (<http://heartfoundation.org.au/active-living/healthy-active-communities>).

Medical practitioners play a key role in the promotion of physical activity to patients of all ages, but this is not just the responsibility of the health sector. It is important to have a multisectoral and systems-wide approach that goes beyond health (<http://www.thelancet.com/series/physical-activity>).

A prescription for physical activity is not just a prescription for better health, but a potential remedy for an economy that will be under pressure from a tidal wave of ageing baby boomers. An active Australia should be a critical part of this country’s greatest health solution.

Australia needs to step up and be a world leader in a critical field of health promotion that has been neglected for far too long.

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