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Walk to School shifts parents' attitudes on walking

New research has found Victorian parents feel more positively about their kids walking to school instead of being driven after taking part in VicHealth's Walk to School program.

The annual program, held in Term Four last year, saw a record 147,000 kids taking part across the state, walking an impressive 1.7million kilometres.

An independent report into the program found 52 per cent of children who took part in the program were walking to school as part of their routine after finishing the program. This is compared with around 35 per cent of children who didn't take part in the program.

The report also found the program had a positive impact on parent's perceptions of walking, riding or scooting to school, with small but statistically significant improvements in their attitudes towards walking as a way to improve their kids' health and the social acceptability of allowing their kids to walk to school.

The survey found that after taking part in the program:

- Participating parents were five per cent more likely to view active travel as good for their kids' health (90%)
- 70 per cent of participating parents thought other parents hold positive views of kids walking to school compared with 55 per cent of non-participating parents
- 74 per cent of participating parents said their school encourages kids to walk, ride or scoot to school compared with 53 per cent of non-participating parents
- Participating parents were six per cent more likely to think walking to school helps build their kids' independence than parents whose children didn't get involved (82% compared with 76%)

Despite these positive shifts, the research found many parents were still concerned about kids' safety with over half of parents believing it's irresponsible to let kids walk, ride or scoot to school solo.

Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos said that with school starting back this week she was looking forward to seeing more Victorian families walking to school.

"Our Victorian primary school kids have shown they love walking to school with a record number walking, riding or scooting as part of last year's program," Minister Mikakos said.

"I hope families will continue to embrace the healthy habits they've developed during Walk to School by continuing to get active on the school journey this year."

VicHealth Executive Manager of Programs Kirstan Corben said it was encouraging to see the program had inspired families to feel more positively about walking, riding and scooting to school.

"We know many parents are worried about allowing their kids to walk independently to school. While stranger danger and traffic are real fears, we also know that many parents worry that others will judge them as 'bad parents' for letting their kids travel to school independently," Ms Corben said.

"Yet we know that kids who are driven to school miss out on the opportunity to get active, build independence and socialise with their friends.

"The Walk to School program is about making walking, riding or scooting to school easy, safe, fun and importantly a normal part of daily life.

“We know that parents are more likely to feel comfortable about their kids walking to school if the whole community is doing it and kids have the opportunity to learn how to walk to school safely.”

Ms Corben said the success of Walk to School in 2018 showed the importance of promoting active travel to school all year round.

“Kids and families want to walk to school and they want to do it more than one month a year,” Ms Corben said.

“Walking, riding or scooting to and from school every day – even if it’s only part of the way – helps kids get some of the physical activity they need to be healthy.

“It’s increasingly important to get schools and families involved in programs like Walk to School so kids are set up for a lifetime of good health.”

For Walk to School 2018 VicHealth partnered with the AFL Players’ Association to encourage even more kids to get walking, riding and scooting to and from school and establishing healthy habits for life. Also on board was Bendigo Bank, which assisted in providing healthy breakfasts, and even donating more than 1,100 pairs of shoes to selected schools in disadvantaged areas of Victoria.

One winner, one runner-up and one new school has been selected in each of the four Victorian education regions based on the school’s overall participation rate.

Each winning school will receive an Ultimate Footy Fun Experience, including an AFL or AFLW player lead footy clinic and player memorabilia. Runners up and first-time school winners will receive a personalised recorded message from an AFL or AFLW player and Sherrin footballs for classroom activities.

The Walk to School winners, runners-up and new school for each region for 2018 are:

North Western	South Western
Winner: Leitchville PS	Winner: Balliang East PS
Runner up: Kerang Christian College	Runner up: Coimadai PS
First time: Preston PS	First time: Chilwell PS
North Eastern	South Eastern
Winner: Edi Upper PS	Winner: Darnum PS
Runner up: Peranbin Primary College (Strathbogie)	Runner up: Nambrok Denison PS
First time: Eastern Ranges School	First time: St Gerard’s PS

For more interviews, images and more information, including results and participating schools by local government area, contact VicHealth Senior Media Advisor, Rachel Murphy on rmurphy@vichealth.vic.gov.au or 03 9667 1319.