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Record number of Victorian students walking to school

Almost 1 in 3 primary school kids take part

VicHealth's Walk to School month 2019 has helped shift parents' attitudes around the health and social benefits of active travel for kids, new research has found.

During the health promotion foundation's Walk to School month in October 2019, an estimated 186,600 students – the highest in the initiative's 14-year history – walked, rode or scooted to school, almost 40,000 more children than in 2018. That's around one in three primary school aged kids in Victoria.

An independent survey of Victorian parents and carers revealed those with kids who took part in [Walk to School 2019](#) were more likely than parents of kids who didn't take part, to see active travel as:

- good for their children's health (90 per cent of participating parents/carers, vs 84 per cent of non-participating parents/carers)
- a practical way to help their child get 60 minutes of physical activity a day (84 per cent vs 79 per cent of non-participating parents)
- helpful for developing their child's independence (83 per cent vs 77 per cent of non-participating parents)
- an opportunity for their child to chat with friends (72 per cent vs 60 per cent of non-participating parents).

However, a fear of judgement was a barrier for many parents, with close to half of all parents surveyed feeling that other parents would disapprove if their kids walked to school without adult supervision.

Prizes were up for grabs for schools which used creative or unique ideas to get students involved, gave students multiple opportunities to participate, saw high levels of participation from the school community and worked to create longer-term behaviour change.

Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos said it's wonderful to see a record number of Victorian families walking to school.

"Our Victorian primary school kids are embracing physical activity, building independence and socialising with their friends. It's encouraging to see so many school communities across Victoria walking, riding or scootering to school," Minister Mikakos said.

"I hope families will continue to embrace the healthy habits they've developed during Walk to School by staying active during the year."

VicHealth CEO Dr Sandro Demaio said it's incredibly positive to see thousands of families embracing the Walk to School message.

"Congratulations to all the students, parents and schools – particularly our competition winners – for taking part in Walk to School 2019," Dr Demaio said.

"We know kids are healthier and happier when they're active every day, so you've helped instill positive habits which whole communities can benefit from.

"Walking to school is a great way for kids to get some of the activity they need to be healthy, and we want more families to walk, ride or scoot to and from school all year round.

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“While we understand families face challenges in walking to school - such as time pressures and a fear of allowing kids to walk independently - there are enormous benefits for kids, parents and the whole school community in getting active on the commute.

“It’s exciting to see our Walk to School program growing in popularity every year, with families overcoming barriers to get kids walking, riding or scooting to school more often.”

About Walk to School 2019

An estimated 186,602 students took part in Walk to School in October 2019, 25 per cent more than in 2018.

An impressive 942 primary schools took part, up 26 per cent from 2018 – 128 of which got involved for the first time. The schools were from 71 of the 79 council areas in Victoria.

As part of Walk to School 2019, VicHealth partnered with the AFL Players’ Association to encourage even more kids to get walking, riding and scooting to and from school and develop healthy habits for life.

A winner, a runner-up and a new school has been selected from each Victorian education region.

Winning schools 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 2019 winners, runners-up and new school are:

| North Western | South Western |
|---|---|
| Winner: St Joseph’s Primary School, Kerang | Winner: Avoca Primary School |
| Runner up: Cohuna Primary School | Runner up: Urquhart Primary School |
| First time: Gisborne Primary School | First time: Torquay Coast Primary School |
| North Eastern | South Eastern |
| Winner: Beechworth Primary School | Winner: St Peters Primary School, Bentleigh East |
| Runner up: Sacred Heart Primary School, Tatura | Runner up: Drouin Primary School |
| First time: Sacred Heart Primary, Yarrawonga | First time: Drouin South Primary School |

About the Walk to School 2019 survey

In November-December 2019, 1,671 parents and carers of primary school children across Victoria participated in an online survey to gauge attitudes and behaviours around active travel and the Walk to School 2019 program.

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