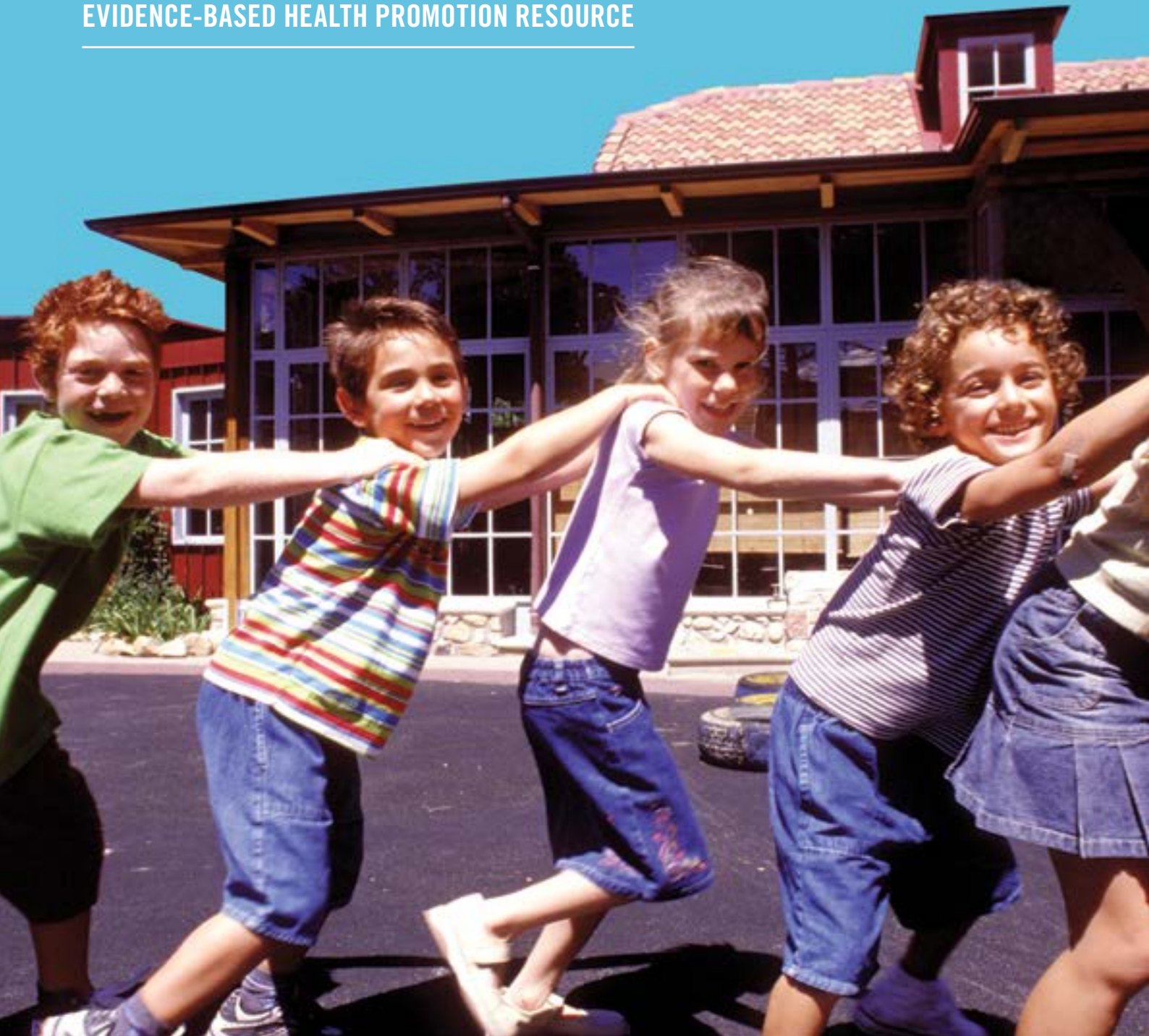


Active for Life

Challenging the status quo to get our children moving more and living active, healthy lives

EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTH PROMOTION RESOURCE



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Foreword

Over the past 50 years in Australia, we have seen a significant shift in our lifestyle, from one that was largely physically active to one that is predominantly sedentary.

Australians are spending more and more time sitting – in cars, in front of televisions and computers, at work and school – and less time being active.

This increasingly sedentary way of life is costing many Australians their health and wellbeing. It's costing our community and our economy billions of dollars each year to address the serious health consequences of physical inactivity.

Sedentary living and its side-effects – obesity, chronic disease and premature death – have become a growing national health issue.

Today, almost two-thirds of Australian adults are overweight or obese, with more than one in four classed as obese (ABS 2012a). In 2008, the Australian Government listed tackling obesity as a national health priority alongside cancer, heart disease and diabetes (Department of Health and Ageing 2008a).

This unfortunate consequence of modern life also impacts our younger generations, with many of our children spending too much time sitting each day and not enough time being physically active.

This is affecting their health and wellbeing, school performance, self-confidence, ability to mix with peers – all with lasting consequences that can continue through adolescence and into adulthood.

We can't afford to ignore the issue. We must think differently and act now to ensure physical activity plays a central role in every child's daily life.

Along with a quality education and a safe, loving home environment, a healthy start in life is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children.

There's no simple or single solution to get children moving more.

But the reality is, the way we're doing things now – at a societal and community level, at school, through sport and in the home – is not working.

Children are becoming less active and more sedentary and that has to change.

We need to rethink how we embed physical activity in children's daily routines so it becomes a sustainable way of life, rather than rely solely on school physical education classes or a weekend game of sport or dance class (for e.g.) to fulfill their activity requirements.

To tackle the issue, we need to understand and address the barriers preventing children getting enough physical activity.

Some children face specific barriers and challenges when it comes to participation in physical activity, particularly children with disabilities, those from lower socioeconomic and migrant backgrounds and Indigenous children.

However, this resource focuses on the barriers getting in the way of all children, aged 4 to 12 years, regardless of their ability or social or cultural background.

There's no quick fix, no easy answer and no one organisation that can effect the level of change we need to tackle this problem. Its roots are embedded deep in our society, our lifestyles, our communities, our mindsets.

But by working together, we can tear down the barriers that get in the way of our children being active.

We can integrate opportunities for activity into the places children live, learn and play, reduce the amount of time they spend sitting and ultimately set them on the path to a better future.



Jerril Rechter
Chief Executive Officer
VicHealth





What's Active for Life about?

Active for Life is a VicHealth resource that brings together Australian and international research to tell the story of why children are becoming increasingly inactive.

USE ACTIVE FOR LIFE TO:

- challenge current thinking, practice, social norms and habits in relation to children's activity levels
- reinforce the importance of children's physical activity with decision makers, colleagues, parents and others who can influence the issue
- support efforts to influence children's activity levels and inspire others to do the same
- gain a deeper understanding of the issues around children's physical activity
- identify opportunities to integrate and embed physical activity into children's daily lives
- make informed decisions about how to take action using evidence, research and better practice examples
- shift current thinking, policy and practice to help bring about change
- work collaboratively with others to identify and shape a healthy future for our children
- identify further information and resources to guide action.

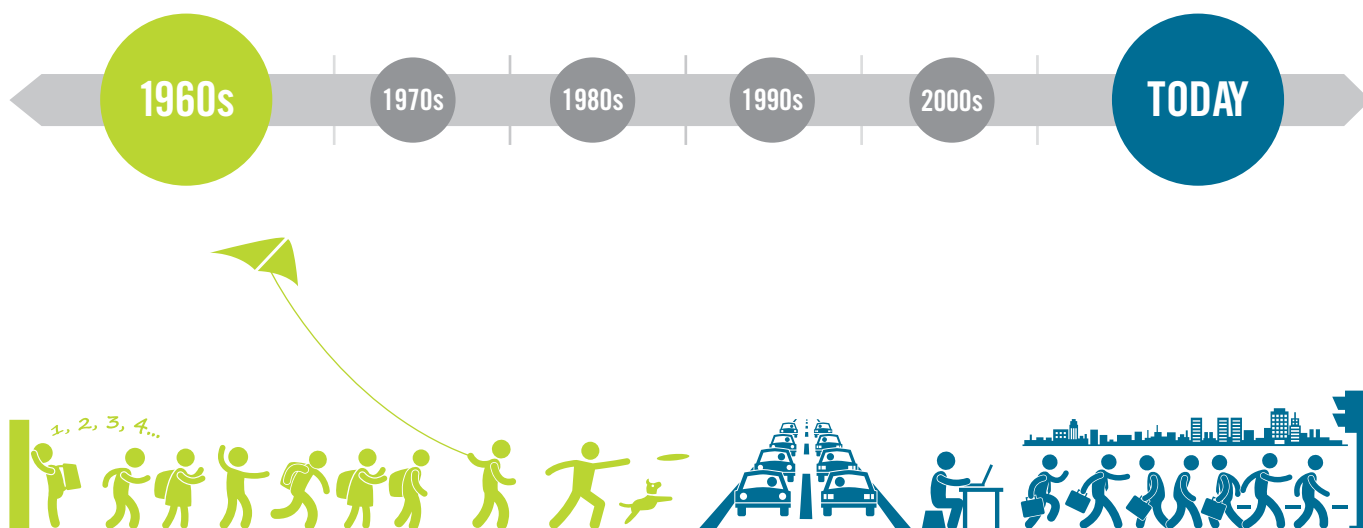
WHO'S IT FOR?

It's for decision makers who can influence the issue where children live, learn and play including:

- school principals and teachers
- kindergarten directors and early childhood educators
- school and community group committees
- State Sporting Associations, sports coaches and sports club committees
- recreation centre managers
- State and local government officers in the areas of planning, health, education, parks and sport and recreation.

Access further information and resources on children's physical activity at VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

Our active past



Limited television viewing and access to technology, fewer work demands, more time for sport and outdoor leisure activities, fewer cars, fewer labour saving 'gadgets'

= ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

Highly accessible digital technology, longer work hours and time-poor parents, growing populations, more traffic, less open space, reliance on cars

= SITTING MORE, MOVING LESS

Ask anyone who was a child growing up in the 1960s and they'll no doubt reminisce about playing outside with friends until dark, running around under the sprinkler in summer, riding bikes to the local pool or park, playing cricket in the street.

They'll often remember it as a simple, free time, where children were able to play without parental supervision, just so long as they were home in time for dinner and did their jobs around the house.

Children walked, rode their bike or caught public transport to school. There was less homework, no computers and most families had a television in the living room that they might watch together at night (Agars et al 1980, Free TV Australian n.d.).

Physical education was a key part of the school curriculum and most children played some form of sport on the weekend (Agars et al 1980).

Obesity and its health effects such as heart disease and diabetes were many decades away from becoming major public health issues, with just 1 in 20 Australian children overweight or obese at the time (National Preventative Health Taskforce 2008).

However, the 1960s were also a time of great social upheaval, marking the start of some major changes to the way Australians lived. Television began broadcasting in colour, advances in technology were giving rise to new 'gadgets' aimed at making life easier, fast food was becoming more prevalent and car ownership was becoming increasingly common for Australian families (Agars et al 1980, Robinson & Ustinoff 2012).

We were starting to see the beginning of what our lifestyles are like today.

Since the 1960s, our lives have become increasingly complex.

Globalisation and the rise of technology have broken down many geographic, economic and social barriers and made our world more interconnected.

Our population has grown significantly, with our cities and regions sprawling further outwards and more infrastructure required to meet increased demand.

This has altered the face of our neighbourhoods, with open spaces and farmland giving way to new and bigger roads and other transport networks, apartment and office blocks, shopping centres and hospitals.

The way we work has also changed significantly.

Technology and rising education levels have seen more people employed in white collar professions and service industries, spending much of the day sitting at a desk in front of a computer, rather than engaged in physical labour (ABS 2011).

Important social changes have also influenced family and work life. Women's participation in the paid workforce has grown over the past few decades, compared to the 1960s when men were the primary breadwinners (Robinson & Ustinoff 2012).

Today, many families have both parents working and often for long hours.

We also see a greater variety in family structures – for example, single-parent households account for around 15% of all Australian families (ABS 2013a).

Computers and the Internet have increased the speed at which we can work, but the complexity of our society means there is more work to do – and our easy access to technology means we're now bringing that work home with us.

Technology has also revolutionised our leisure time, with countless television channels, DVDs and computer games to keep us entertained.

Our busy lives have also seen us become more reliant on cars as an efficient and convenient way to move around.

All of these factors add up to us leading increasingly sedentary lives.

Simply put, we're all sitting more and moving less, including our *children*.



[VicHealth 2012c]

How is our increasingly sedentary lifestyle affecting our children?

Ultimately, it is our children who will pay the highest price of our increasingly sedentary lifestyles if we don't make changes now.

AUSTRALIAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR GUIDELINES



at least one hour of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day for children aged 5 to 12 years



no more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment such as playing seated electronic games, using the computer, watching television, for children aged 5 to 12 years [Department of Health 2014]

THE REALITY

Around
1 in 5 

5 to 17 year-olds getting the recommended one hour of physical activity every day
(5 to 17 year-olds who average at least one hour of physical activity per day over a week: just over three in five)

Less than
1 in 3 

5 to 17 year-olds engaged in no more than two hours of screen-based entertainment every day
(ABS 2013c)

THE IMPACT

1960s

1 in 20 children overweight or obese

TODAY

1 in 4 children overweight or obese

BY 2025

1 in 3 children overweight or obese (National Preventative Health Taskforce 2008, Department of Human Services 2008)

We need to integrate opportunities for children to be active in their daily lives if we are to shape healthier attitudes and behaviours and set them on the path to an active, healthy life.

Laying the foundations for a healthy life

A healthy and active childhood can lay the foundations for a healthy and active life.

Obesity in childhood is linked to a higher chance of obesity in adulthood (WHO 2013). Therefore, any increase in rates of childhood obesity will contribute to the already alarming rates of adult obesity and related chronic diseases in Australia.

Similarly, an inactive child is likely to continue on a path of inactivity throughout adolescence and into adulthood (Malina 1996). However, if young children are active, they're more likely to stay active throughout childhood and develop good habits to support becoming healthier adolescents and adults (Department of Health and Ageing 2009).

Being active is like a life insurance policy, reducing a child's exposure to potential disease and illness, improving academic performance, enhancing and expanding social

interactions, and contributing to his or her current and future wellbeing (Kelty, Giles-Corti & Zubrick 2008, US Department of Health and Human Services).

We make sure children brush their teeth every day so they can avoid dental problems. We need to be just as vigilant about getting children to move.

We need to see it as an investment in their future, stemming the rising social and economic costs of inactivity for individuals and the community and freeing up significant government spending on related health services so it can be used on other priorities.

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

57%

57% of Australians (18 years and over) aren't sufficiently active to achieve health benefits (ABS 2013c)

\$14b

Economic cost of physical inactivity – Estimated total annual economic cost of physical inactivity in Australia in 2008 – \$13.8 billion. This represents healthcare, productivity and mortality costs (Medibank 2008)

OBESITY

63%

63% of Australians (18 years and over) are overweight or obese (ABS 2012a)

\$58b

Cost of obesity – Estimated total annual cost of obesity in Australia in 2008 – \$58.2 billion. This represents the financial cost and net cost of wellbeing (Access Economics 2008)

Active versus sedentary living: impacts on children's health and wellbeing

There are many benefits for children in getting up and being active.

Children and adolescents who are physically active are likely to benefit from increased levels of fitness, reduced body fat, better bone health – crucial to preventing osteoporosis in later life – and are at reduced risk of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers as adults (US Department of Health and Human Services 2008).

They're less susceptible to symptoms of depression and anxiety, have a more positive body image and better self-esteem, interact better with their peers and generally experience better mental health and optimism for the future (Kelty, Giles-Corti & Zubrick 2008, US Department of Health and Human Services).

Getting involved in sport and playing games also gives children opportunities for self-expression and achievement, social interaction and relief of tension. It also encourages other healthy behaviours, such as avoiding tobacco, alcohol and other drugs (WHO 2010, NPHP 2005).

More physically active students have also been found to achieve better academic results, while schools with fitter children have been found to achieve better literacy and numeracy results (Telford et al 2012). Physical activity has also been positively linked to concentration, memory and behaviour (Strong et al 2005).

While the health benefits of physical activity have long been known, the negative health consequences of sitting too much are only just becoming clear.

Children who spend more than two hours a day in front of a television are more prone to being overweight or obese, with each additional hour of television viewing likely to heighten that risk. They're also at greater risk of the precursors to cardiovascular disease, among other conditions (Tremblay et al 2011).

Their academic performance is likely to suffer the more time they spend in front of a television, as are their social skills, putting them at risk of social isolation from their peers (Tremblay et al 2011).

These negative consequences to a child's health and academic performance from being too sedentary are likely to occur even if a child engages in the recommended level of physical activity a day (ACHPER Victorian Branch 2013).

So it's important for a child to both move more and sit less to maximise the health and wellbeing gains.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ASSOCIATED WITH

- improved physical and mental wellbeing
 - better academic performance
 - less social isolation

SCREEN TIME ASSOCIATED WITH

- being overweight or obese
- poorer academic performance
 - social isolation



Lifespan of an active twin versus a sedentary twin

By using the analogy of twins, when we compare an active child with a sedentary child we can start to see the potential impacts that their very different levels of activity can have throughout their childhood and adult years.

Lifestyle of an active twin

PHYSICAL

- Increased fitness
- Less body fat
- Less risk of cardiovascular disease
- Better bone health

MENTAL

- Reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety

SOCIAL

- More socially active

ACADEMIC

- Better school performance
- Better concentration and memory

CHILDHOOD



CHILDHOOD

PHYSICAL

- Obesity/overweight
- Poor bone density
- Poor muscular fitness

MENTAL

- Heightened risk of depression/anxiety











SOCIAL

- Reduced self-worth
- Poor pro-social behaviour

ACADEMIC

- Poor school performance
- Lower IQ

Lifestyle of a sedentary twin

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	SOCIAL	CAREER/FINANCES	LIFE EXPECTANCY
Less risk of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart disease• Stroke• Some cancers• Type 2 diabetes• Osteoporosis• Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less risk of depression, anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More socially involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater workforce participation, less absenteeism, more income stability• Less health costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less risk of disability or premature death
ADULTHOOD				
				
				
ADULTHOOD				
PHYSICAL	MENTAL	SOCIAL	CAREER/FINANCES	LIFE EXPECTANCY
Greater risk of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heart disease• Stroke• Breast cancer• Colon cancer• Type 2 Diabetes• Osteoporosis• Obesity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater risk of depression, anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less social interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower workforce participation, higher absenteeism, less income stability• Higher health costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater risk of disability, premature death

AIHW 2005, Lee et al 2012, Strong et al 2005, Tremblay et al 2011, US Department of Health and Human Services 2008

What influences are limiting children being active?

To get children moving more, we need to first understand what's getting in the way of them being active in the first place.

School



- Stronger focus on academic achievement has lessened the priority on Physical Education (PE) within the school curriculum (Hajkowicz et al 2013).
- Drop-off in trained teachers to deliver physical education and sports programs (Hajkowicz et al 2013, Independent Sport Panel 2009).
- Limited access to equipment and sport and recreation facilities (Ridgers 2013).
- Children sitting in classrooms at desks for long periods.
- Children driven to school rather than travelling on foot, on wheels or via public transport (Thomson 2009).



**INCREASED
SEDENTARY
BEHAVIOUR**



**Children moving less,
sitting more**

Community



- Stranger danger concerns means parents are less inclined to let children make their own way to school, explore the neighbourhood or go to the park on their own (Thomson 2009).
- Heavier traffic volume and higher traffic speed heightens safety concerns for children walking or riding to school and other activities, compounded by a lack of safe pedestrian footpaths and crossings, poor connectivity of paths and neighbourhood walkability (Giles-Corti et al 2011, Ridgers 2013, Trapp et al 2012).
- Long travel distances to open spaces, such as parks and reserves, and dedicated sport and recreation facilities, such as tennis courts and cricket ovals, along with poor accessibility and limited public transport options (Abbott et al 2008, Gerrard 2009, Hands et al 2004, Kelly, Giles-Corti & Zubrick 2008, Sunarja, Wood & Giles-Corti 2008).



**INCREASED
RELIANCE
ON CARS**



**Children moving less,
sitting more**

There's no straightforward answer to this, as what a child does in his or her day is shaped by a wide range of external influences, from societal norms and pressures, to the community they **live** in, the school they **learn** at, the sports and games they **play** and, of course, their home environment.

We need to carefully consider each of these influences in order to clearly identify the barriers preventing children from moving and find ways to break those barriers down.

Sport



- Time commitment of being part of a club or sports team presents challenges for time-poor parents and children (Bauman et al 2002).
- Support of parents in transporting children to training and games (Ridgers 2013)
- Cost of fees, uniforms and equipment (Hardy et al 2010).
- Lack of volunteers to help run sports clubs, junior sport programs, competitions and teams well.
- Lack of qualified coaches to help develop children's skills and abilities, affecting their enjoyment and participation.
- Inadequate sport and recreation facilities or demand for facilities exceeding availability.
- Potential risk and fear of injury to children playing sport (Sports Injury Prevention Taskforce 2013).
- Lack of parental involvement in their child's participation (Ridgers 2013).



**Children moving less,
sitting more**

Home



- Parents' work commitments and other demands on their time make it difficult for families to find time to be active together.
- Unprecedented access to and use of televisions and computers in children's leisure time.
- Lack of parental restrictions on children's screen time (Ridgers 2013).
- Stranger danger concerns limit children's freedom to explore their neighbourhood independently or go to the park with friends (Thomson 2009).
- Increase in housing density, particularly within inner city areas, and smaller house block sizes limits access to larger backyards (Birrell et al 2012) for outdoor play.



**Children moving less,
sitting more**

Embedding activity into our children's daily lives

Many complex and often interlinked factors affect whether a child is likely to get enough physical activity in their day.

Children's activity levels are influenced by:

- the environments in which they live, learn and play, and
- the lifestyle factors shaping what they do each day.

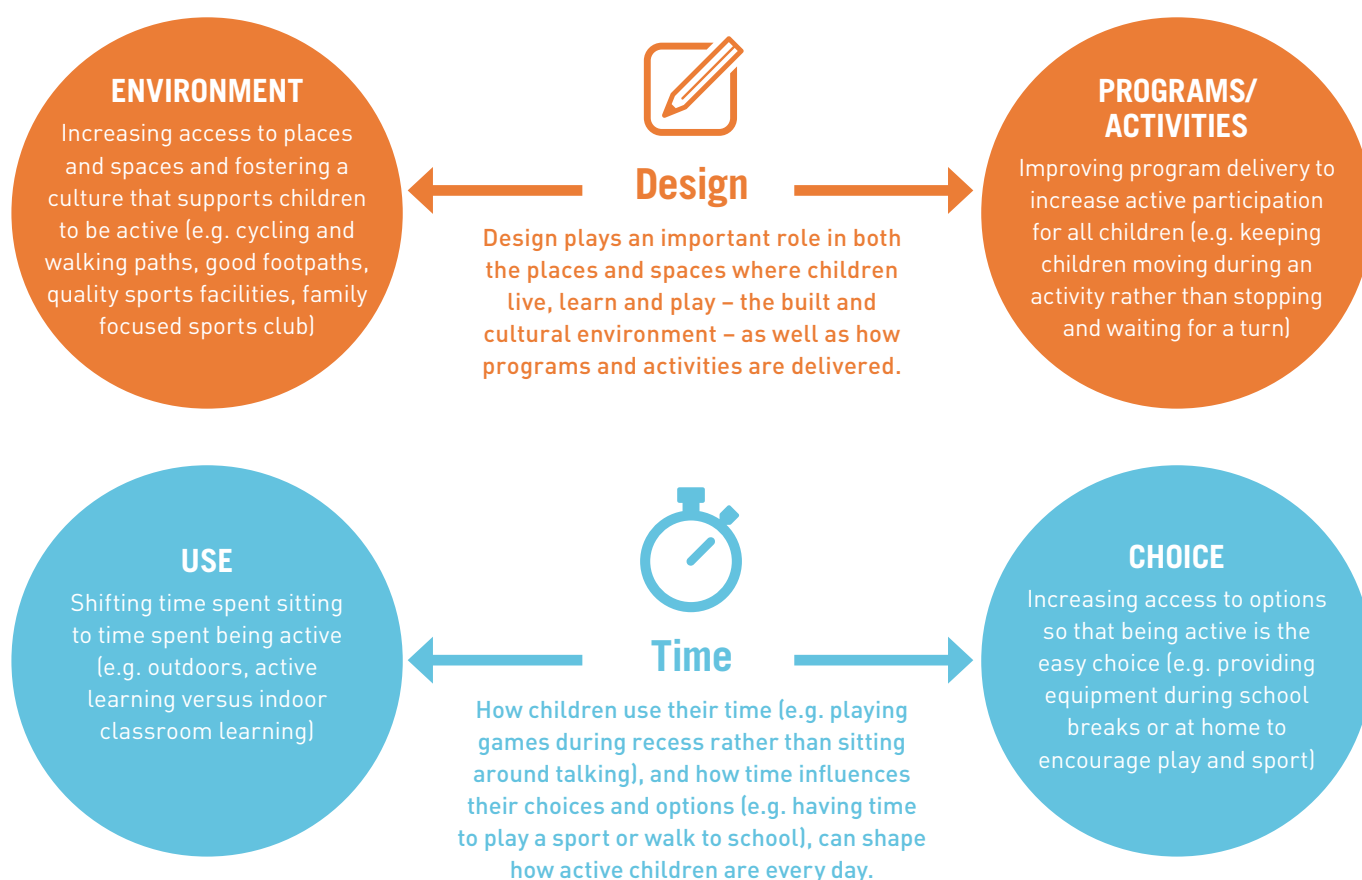
This means: **Everywhere we go and everything we do is affecting children's opportunities to be active.**

We can change this by influencing:

- the design of our children's environments, and
- the way children spend their time in these environments.

Doing this will help us **identify new ways to integrate movement into children's daily lives and shape the choices they make so that being more active is the easy choice, rather than an 'add on' to their day.**

KEY DECISION MAKERS CAN INCREASE CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THROUGH:



Settings for action

Four key settings present the greatest opportunities for children to become more active in their daily lives.

Consequently, they present the greatest opportunities for decision makers to influence children's levels of activity. It's important to consider these settings as interconnected rather than isolated; forging strong links and relationships across settings is crucial to success.

Across all of these settings – school, sport, community and home – opportunities for activity need to be maximised and the convenience of sitting reduced if our children are to reap the benefits of an active life.

At school

This could be through structured activity, such as physical education classes, school sporting events or after-school programs, or unstructured activity, such as walking/riding to/from school or playing with friends during recess and lunch.



Through sport

This usually refers to competitive, rules-based, activity in a club, community or school environment, such as playing football, cricket, netball or tennis.



Within the community

This includes structured activity such as swimming or dance lessons, or unstructured activity such as playing safely with friends in the street or at the park, kicking a football at the local sports oval, mountain bike riding or walking to the shop.



In the home

This largely involves unstructured activities such as playing backyard cricket or jumping on a trampoline.

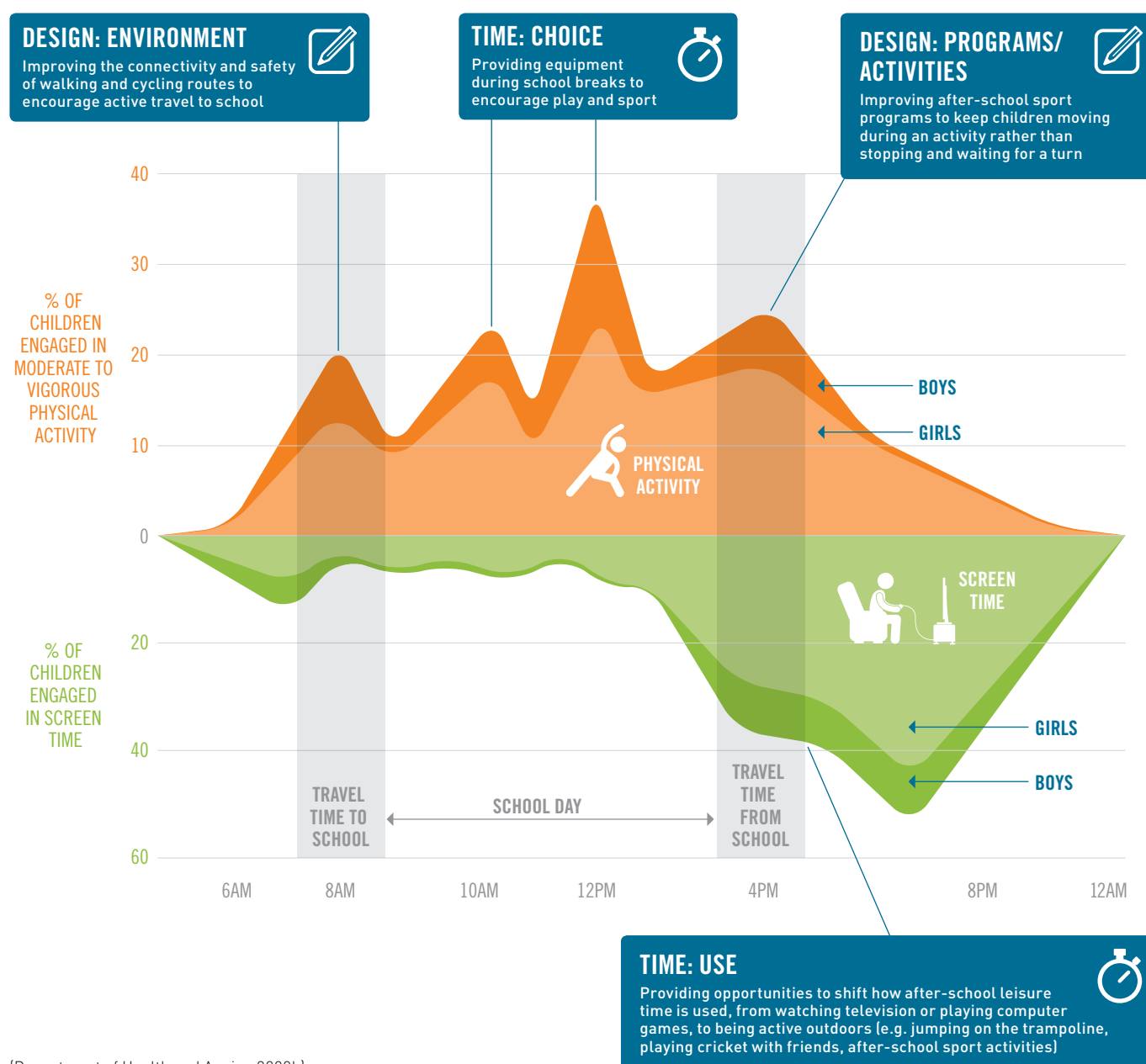
A day in the life of a child

Looking closely at a child's daily routine helps us to understand current patterns of activity and sedentary behaviour and, consequently, where there are the greatest opportunities for making a difference.

Using an example of a child's school day, we can begin to map a child's interactions with the places where they live, learn and play – across each of the school, sport, community and home settings.

Working within that structure, we can begin to consider the concepts of design and time to get children moving more and sitting less, from the time they get up in the morning to when they go to bed.

We can see that opportunities for physical activity are influenced by the structure of their day.



[Department of Health and Ageing 2008b]

At school



Outside of the home environment, children spend the bulk of their time at school, so this presents one of the best places for encouraging activity.

There are many specific challenges to increasing levels of physical activity in the school environment.

Victorian government schools must meet mandated time requirements for physical and sport education for students in Prep to Year 10 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013).

However, educators within schools are expected to focus strongly on students' academic performance which has seen physical education become less of a priority. There is also the perception that time spent on physical education and recess will undermine learning (ACHPER Victorian Branch 2013).

Some schools are no longer employing trained physical education teachers to deliver programs and may not be meeting national curriculum guidelines in relation to physical education and sport (Hajkowicz et al 2013, Independent Sport Panel 2009).

As a result, children are less likely to be taught fundamental movement skills, such as throwing, catching or kicking a ball – the foundation stones for a range of sports, games and activities (Hardy et al 2013).

The traditional school structure, where most learning occurs in a classroom setting, also leaves children with limited opportunities to be active during school hours.

Outside of class times, if children don't have access to the right facilities, such as sports ovals and play areas, and the right equipment, such as bats and balls, their opportunities to be active are further reduced (Ridgers 2013).

Early childhood settings provide an important place to introduce and encourage good habits through active play, which contributes to a child's development, including their social and language skills (Department of Health and Ageing 2009).

Benefits to schools of having active students

The integration of physical activity in the school environment has the potential to enhance student engagement and academic performance, develop students as leaders and create a more positive learning environment.

A focus on quality physical education and sport within schools can enhance students' knowledge of the importance of physical activity and promote positive behaviour change.

Consequently, a quality physical education and sport program has potential to raise a school's profile within the community.

'A comprehensive, well-resourced health and physical education program teaches students necessary fundamental movement skills, game and recreational capabilities, and develops knowledge and behaviours that can lead to a healthy and active life'

HILARY SHELTON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION (ACHPER) VICTORIAN BRANCH

'Recent Australian work shows that schools with well-conducted physical education and where children are fitter have higher than average National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores. Time away from the classroom for physical education and sport should not be seen as time away from learning but an integral part of learning'

PROFESSOR RICHARD TELFORD, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA



Practical actions for building physical activity into the school environment

Shifting the concepts of *design* and *time* within a school environment can create more opportunities for children to be active in a school day.



ACTION

Introduce variety into play spaces, temporary play equipment or structures to stimulate children's imagination and interest and encourage play-based activity.



Consider:

- Introducing pop-up play spaces to provide new play experiences.
- Using a variety of equipment or objects, such as car tyres, to stimulate creative play.
- Encouraging multi-use of spaces for a variety of sports, games and activities, such as putting temporary tennis nets on a basketball court.

Having access to sports equipment, such as bats and balls, play equipment and playground markings during lunch and recess times has been linked to increases in physical activity, through play and games (Ridgers 2013, Ridgers et al 2013).



What spaces and places within your school grounds can be better used or modified to create a variety of opportunities and experiences for play?



ACTION

Explore alternative options for delivering sport and physical education, to enhance students' fundamental movement skills, enjoyment and participation.



Consider:

- Student-led classes, to improve students' experiences, skills and ability, develop student leaders and enhance social connections across the school (see Leadership development through school sports case study p 24).
- Sharing trained teachers, sports equipment and temporary play facilities with nearby schools to reduce costs and enhance physical activity opportunities for students.

Having adequately trained teachers to deliver sport programs and physical education (PE) classes has been linked to increases in children's physical activity (Ridgers et al 2013).



What existing resources, partnerships or programs can be leveraged to support and enhance the delivery of sport and physical education in your school?



ACTION

Consider a whole-school approach to physical activity involving students, staff, families and community organisations to encourage positive attitudes towards physical activity in children and more active lifestyles for families (see the Phoenix P-12 Community College case study p 25).



Consider:

- Using existing initiatives to establish partnerships with sport and recreation clubs, local councils or to create new non-traditional community partnerships, for example, with local workplaces.
- Creating greater awareness among parents and children of the opportunities to be active outside of the school.
- Strengthening relevant school policies to support physical activity.

Programs that encourage engagement between a school, parents and the community, such as active travel initiatives like VicHealth's Walk to School campaign (walktoschool.vic.gov.au) are longer term and have been shown to have positive outcomes on children's physical activity levels (Ridgers et al 2013).

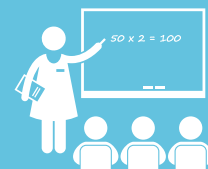


How can schools use physical activity as a focus to strengthen existing and build new community partnerships?



ACTION

Change teaching and learning methods across subject areas and modify the learning environment to integrate elements of physical activity within the existing school curriculum.



Consider:

- Holding outdoor or walking classes.
- Incorporating outdoor activities and projects in subjects such as maths, science and geography.
- Using sport, dance, active play or walking in delivering the school curriculum.
- Using standing lessons to break up extended sitting time.

Reducing the time children spend sitting in classrooms and encouraging learning through activities is an important opportunity to build in more movement during the school day.



How can physical activity be integrated into teaching methods and learning environments at your school, to the same level that technology has been integrated?



ACTION

Engage students to lead the solutions to encourage walking and riding to school, such as through a school project or student committee. This will help to raise students' awareness of active travel options, engage parents in the discussion and strengthen links between the school and local stakeholders, such as councils and public transport operators.



Consider:

- Engaging students in the design and provision of safe and secure bike parking.
- Undertaking school projects focused on active travel, such as walkability audits.

Supporting children to walk, ride, scooter or skate to and from school can increase their level of daily activity and reduce traffic congestion around schools during drop-off and pick-up times.

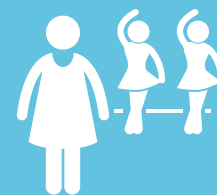


How can active travel be integrated into the school curriculum or school policy, to increase the number of students taking active travel options?



ACTION

Create schools as hubs for sport and dance programs. This can make these activities more accessible to more children by reducing travel times, particularly if they're scheduled to complement school hours.



Consider:

- Shared facility use arrangements with sporting clubs or community groups.
- Using school facilities for community-based activities.

Where programs are delivered has a big impact on whether children can participate, particularly if they're reliant on parents' time and availability to provide transport (Ridgers 2013, Ridgers et al 2013) or access to alternative transport options is limited.



What opportunities are there to make school facilities available for other activities?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

CASE STUDY

Leadership development through school sports

Primary school students in some Victorian schools are being offered a fun, exciting alternative to traditional teacher-led sport programs through the Sport Ambassador Program.

An initiative of School Sport Victoria, the program sees older students undergo leadership training and coaching accreditation so they can lead and deliver physical activity and sports programs to primary school students.

Younger students get to interact with and learn from the student leaders, enhancing their enjoyment of participating in sports and physical activity programs and helping to develop strong connections across students of different ages.

For the older students, the program uses sport as a foundation to build their leadership potential, instilling them with confidence, providing them with important life skills and opening up a possible career path in sport.

Participants move along a clear leadership pathway starting in Year 5 and going through to Year 12, with strong support, mentoring and coaching throughout.

The first stage of the program sees Year 5 and 6 students undergo leadership training and deliver activities and games to Prep to Year 3 students to improve their fundamental movement skills.



CASE STUDY

Phoenix P-12 Community College gets active

Ballarat's Phoenix P-12 Community College is taking a whole-school approach to improving students health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as forging strong links with community services.

In November 2012, the school joined the Achievement Program, a Healthy Together Victoria initiative, supporting the development of healthy schools, early childhood services, workplaces and workforces.

The Achievement Program provides a quality framework for creating healthy learning environments and engaging students, staff and families through a whole-school approach.

As part of their whole-school approach, Phoenix Community College has established a Health and Wellbeing team involving senior management, teaching staff, students and parents, while connections have been made with Ballarat Community Health Services and the City of Ballarat.

A survey of students and families identified physical activity as a key health priority.

On the back of the survey results and a health needs analysis, the school prepared an action plan for making physical activity part of everyday school life by integrating it into policy, plans and classroom lessons, developing a healthy culture and environment and forming partnerships in the community. Strategies include:

- involving students in decision-making around building physical activity into the curriculum
- informing families about local activity-based events and encouraging their involvement
- promoting active transport to and from school
- investigating safe pathways to school in conjunction with the City of Ballarat and communicating the findings to families.

Teaching staff are being supported with professional development to build their knowledge and capacity around physical activity. They are also being supplied with sports equipment in their classrooms to encourage active learning.

As well as running after-school activities and events, the school has partnered with The University of Ballarat to run physical activities in the school as part of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Program.







Through sport

Sport is an important part of the Australian culture and a great way for children to be active.

However, children's participation in sport has declined in recent years (ARACY, 2013) for a number of key reasons.

While some children thrive in sport's traditionally competitive environment, this doesn't suit all children, particularly if they lack the skills to confidently get involved and aren't given guidance by appropriately trained teachers or coaches.

The structure of sport through club and membership models and structured seasons may limit children's involvement if they're unable to commit to a whole season or weekly training sessions.

The cost of playing sport can also be prohibitive for many families, with children from lower socioeconomic areas less likely to participate in team or club sports for this reason.

The distance and accessibility of sports facilities may also restrict families and children from participating. Accessibility may also be an issue for people with a disability or parents with prams.

Children's sport also requires a significant time commitment from parents, in terms of providing transport or helping out at the club.

Despite these barriers, sport remains an important form of physical activity, and sporting organisations and clubs need to consider new ways of attracting, re-engaging and retaining children's participation.

Benefits of new approaches to children's sport

Supporting children to develop their skills at their own pace rather than focusing on winning means they're more likely to have fun playing sport – which in turn can lead to better participation and retention rates.

Opening up future leadership opportunities for children in coaching and officiating roles can also help to encourage their longer term participation in sport.

In 2009, VicHealth undertook research into barriers to participation and ongoing involvement in sport.

The findings provide insight into the family-related barriers likely to be preventing involvement of young people in sport:

- Changing lifestyles mean traditional participation times (week nights and weekends) may no longer be appropriate for many families. As such, there is a need to provide more flexible participation options.
- The social opportunities presented by sport should be as important as the competitive aspect.
- Sport is being re-prioritised below other aspects of people's lives (work/family). There needs to be greater focus on encouraging participation by highlighting the social aspects, opportunities for family involvement and flexible participation.

(VicHealth 2012b)

Rethinking how and where sport is delivered, including providing more flexible options for involvement, has the potential to increase children's access to and participation in sport, as well as increase their activity levels during training and games.

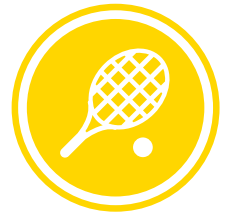
Ensuring sporting clubs are family friendly can also help to support children's participation. This can be done by providing healthy food options, reducing alcohol consumption and ensuring a smoke-free, safe, inclusive and welcoming environment.

VicHealth's Healthy Sporting Environments Demonstration Project was a pioneering program that supported sports clubs to become healthier and more welcoming and inclusive. Evaluation of the program found that with the right support, all community sports clubs have the potential to become healthier, more welcoming places through good governance, leadership, and a culture that supports health and wellbeing.

To find out more about Healthy Sporting Environments visit: vichealth.vic.gov.au/healthysportingenvironments

'Sport in regional, rural and remote areas provides children opportunities to be physically active and connect socially with other children. With changing community demographics and lifestyles, new approaches to involve children in sport are necessary.'

SHANE HUGHAN, CHAIR, REGIONAL SPORT VICTORIA.



Practical actions for encouraging children's participation in sport

Shifting the concepts of *design* and *time* of junior sport programs and activities can create more opportunities for children to be active through sport.



ACTION

Rethink the places where sport is played and how it is played so it's more inclusive, more accessible and less structured. Enable sport programs and games to be better integrated into the school, community and home settings.



Consider:

- Creating safe opportunities for street-based activities such as street cricket or football to increase access to sports games in local neighborhoods.
- Building stronger links between clubs and schools, where schools can become venues for club training and games.
- Integrating sport into community programs for children (e.g. leadership camps), where it supports the delivery of program outcomes.

Club-based sport can present barriers to participation, given its structured and membership-based delivery model. Allowing for more flexible approaches to playing sport could encourage more children to get involved.



Sport has always been an important part of Australian culture, but how can sport programs, clubs and organisations adapt to meet changes in our lifestyle?



ACTION

Consider ways that junior sport programs can maximise children's participation and activity levels during play, enhance their skill development and enjoyment, and support ongoing participation (see Small-Sided Football case study p 31). This can assist in broadening participation options for children who are less suited to or interested in a competitive model of sport.



Consider:

- The structure of sport programs to reduce time spent waiting for a turn and increase time spent being actively involved.
- Forming teams based on friendship groups rather than player ability.
- Smaller team or group sizes to increase active participation and strengthen the focus on developing individual children's skills and knowledge.
- A culture of participation for all, above a focus on outcomes or results.
- Flexible options of delivery, such as inter-club games.
- Providing different pathways for children based on their ability and desire for competition.

Lack of ability or enjoyment are barriers to participation for children (Abbott et al 2008, Hands et al 2004), including those still developing their skills and ability. A greater focus on participation over winning could enhance children's enjoyment and willingness to participate (see Brunswick Netball Club case study p 32).



How can children's movement during sport programs be maximised to reduce idle time, particularly among team sports where individual players have varied levels of skills and abilities?



ACTION

Explore alternative options for delivering sport programs, so that the burden on a few volunteers or coaches is reduced and children's participation experience is enhanced.



Consider:

- Mentoring programs for developing coaches within clubs.
- Teenage players coaching junior club teams to maintain their interest and build their leadership skills.
- Strengthening links with skilled staff or volunteers at local community organisations, for roles such as coaching or administration.

Having adequately skilled and trained people to deliver sports programs, such as certified club coaches, helps children develop the necessary skills and ability to actively participate, which also enhances their enjoyment (Ridgers et al 2013).



What are the opportunities to attract new or retain existing volunteers in coaching roles and build leaders within the club?



ACTION

Allow flexibility when scheduling junior sport programs and competitions and consider the length of seasons or programs to better meet the time constraints of children and families.

Consider where programs and activities are delivered so they're more convenient to access. More flexible and adaptable delivery models and approaches can lead to greater access to sport programs for children.



Consider:

- Whether game participation is reliant upon compulsory attendance at training, which may present barriers for some players.
- Different models for participating in training or sports activities rather than just via teams or competitions.
- Flexible options for competition scheduling.

As family life has become more structured and children's participation in sport increasingly influenced by busy family schedules, the flexibility and accessibility of sport programs is an important influence on participation.



What are flexible options for when, how and where junior sport programs can be delivered?



ACTION

Make changes to membership models of club-based sport to allow more social, flexible or casual options, so that children and parents don't need to commit to a whole season or term.



Consider:

- Options such as a dual club membership model for seasonal sports such as football/cricket, netball/tennis.
- Flexible club or program fee structures.
- Pathways in participation from a casual to a regular competition.

Time pressures on families as well as the cost of fees, uniforms and equipment present real barriers to children's participation in traditional club-based sport. Allowing for more flexible membership options could help to attract and retain more children.



In considering the requirements for junior sport programs (such as numbers within a team, number of matches), what flexible options can be offered to maximise participation?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

CASE STUDY

More fun for everyone with Small-Sided Football

Football is one sport that has recognised the need to make their junior offerings more inclusive and fun with a focus on skills development over winning.

In 2008, the Football Federation of Australia (FFA) introduced Small-Sided Football to encourage children aged five to 11 years to get involved in football. It's created a more consistent junior program nationally and a more positive experience for young players right across the country.

With approximately 200,000 Australian children playing Small-Sided Football, it's certainly achieving its goal of increasing participation in the sport.

As the name suggests, Small-Sided Football features smaller teams competing on a smaller sized field, so every player gets more contact with the ball. Playing numbers vary according to age, with four to six year-olds playing four per side, eight and nine year-olds playing seven per side and 10 to 11 year-olds playing nine a side.

While the model is club-based, games aren't scored and winning isn't the primary focus. Rather, it's a way to introduce children to the game in a fun, inclusive way.

And with fewer team members, there's a stronger focus on developing each child's skills and technique.

There's also flexibility in the way clubs can offer games, depending on what works best for them.

For some that might mean inter-club competitions. For others, this might be difficult to manage, so there's the option to offer intra-club games. Likewise, clubs can choose to run training programs or to simply offer games on the weekend.

With education and training from the FFA, Small-Sided Football has been widely embraced by the football community as an effective, inclusive way to teach children fundamental movement skills and get them hooked on the world game.



CASE STUDY

‘Team unity’ focus for Brunswick Netball Club

Team unity and building the potential of individual players has been the ethos of the Brunswick Netball Club since it was founded by local parents in 2000.



It's a unique model with an emphasis on fostering strong team bonds rather than grading players and ranking teams.

The approach originates from the way the club was founded, when a group of local parents decided they wanted their daughters, who were all friends, to give netball a go.

Today, the club continues to form teams around friendship groups, supplemented by players on the waiting list.

Players start and continue to play with the same team, which enables participation with friends, fosters leadership roles for players of higher ability and provides a supportive environment for those of lesser ability.

The model has proved popular, with the club now fielding 25 teams in the local competition ranging from Netta to Under 17 and Open. Many of the original players are still part of the club, playing in the senior teams.

The club's players enjoy competition as much as any other team, but it's not what drives their interest in playing.

Rather, it's the chance to connect with their friends and explore their potential at their own pace and in their own way.

In practical terms, this means being given the chance to try out different positions and areas of the court, rather than being pigeon-holed into one particular position.

Parental involvement is also a key feature of the club, with coach and team manager roles filled by parents, who receive strong support from other parents. The club ensures each family has a clear understanding of expectations around behaviour, with parents asked to adhere to a Code of Conduct.

Coaches are encouraged to attend accredited netball coaching courses and also sign up to a Code of Conduct.

The club takes the time to ask team members what they want out of a coach, with the majority of players saying they're looking for someone who is encouraging, fair, approachable and positive.

With this sort of approach, the club ends up teaching its members more than just netball skills – they also take away important social and life skills.

Within the community



Where a child lives can have a big influence on how active he or she is throughout the day.

A child living in an outer Melbourne suburb with busy roads carrying high-speed traffic, with few public transport options, little open space and poor walking or cycling paths will have limited opportunities to play in the park or ride a bike to school.

A child growing up in a small, close-knit regional town with lots of open space is more likely to ride a bike to places, kick a football around with friends after school or be part of the local netball team.

Having recreational facilities that are close by as well as neighbourhoods that are 'walkable' supports higher levels of activity by children (Ridgers 2013).

On the other hand, poorly designed neighbourhoods can significantly impact on a child's ability to get out and about, particularly if it's hard for them to safely access parks, playgrounds and reserves because of poor pedestrian or cycling paths and crossings – or simply because these facilities are too far away.

Our over-reliance on cars is also putting limits on children's opportunities to be active by walking, riding a bike, scooting, skating or catching public transport to school and other places.

Limiting outside play and independent travel denies children a range of important development opportunities, including exploring, taking risks and making choices, learning through play, problem solving, interacting with peers, building confidence and self-esteem and developing spatial skills (Brown et al 2008, Joshi, MacClean & Carter 1999, Moore & Young 1978, Prezza & Pacilli 2007, Rissotto & Tonucci 2002, Tranter & Whitelegg 1994).

There are a range of complex reasons why children today have fewer opportunities to be independently mobile. There are parental concerns around traffic safety and stranger danger (Thompson 2009).

As our society becomes busier, we are also less likely to take the time to get to know our neighbours or get involved in local activities – this affects the relationship our children have with their neighbours, making them less likely to know other children in the area or feel confident to get out and about independently.

VicHealth supports local councils with a range of evidence-based guides for supporting health and preventing illness in communities.

'Local government action guide number 3' is around increasing participation in physical activity.

'Councils can make an impact on their residents' levels of physical activity by coordinating their work across areas such as:

- infrastructure, street facilities, paths and trails
- open spaces and the natural environment
- active recreation, community programs and participation in community events.

The guide offers a range of actions that councils may consider to increase participation in physical activity when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and other strategies.'

(VicHealth 2012a)

Benefits to the community of having active children

Creating more opportunities for children and their families to engage in active travel can reduce vehicle traffic in local streets and neighbourhoods, as well as easing traffic congestion around local destinations such as schools and shops.

Increasing access to and use of local parks and recreation spaces, as well as getting more people 'out and about', can support a better connected community. This may also contribute to a greater sense of safety for community members.

A more active and healthier community can also reduce the reliance on local health and medical services.

'Walking and playing independently helps children learn how to deal with situations, make decisions, explore and have fun. The physical, social and developmental benefits are enormous.'

BEN ROSSITER, EXECUTIVE OFFICER, VICTORIA WALKS



Practical actions for creating more active communities

Shifting the concepts of *design* and *time* within local communities can create more opportunities for children to be active in their neighbourhoods.



ACTION

Consider alternative and innovative options that give children greater access to spaces and places for play.



Consider:

- Providing pop-up playgrounds, temporary play areas and equipment (see Dandenong Pop-Up Park case study p 37).
- Opening residential streets for safe street play and community connection.
- Closing off streets, or sections of streets, to create new spaces for local parks and public use.

Providing good access to parks, open space and sport and recreation facilities increases opportunities for children to be active in these environments (Ridgers 2013). Children are more likely to use these places and spaces if they're in close proximity and are easily and safely reached via connected walking and cycling paths and crossings.



How can existing spaces and places within neighbourhoods be used differently to facilitate active play?

ACTION

Activate local streets and community spaces to get more people 'out and about' within their neighborhood, walking and talking. This contributes to strengthening community connections and safety perceptions, which have positive influences on children's independent mobility (see Rossmoyne Street case study p 38).



Consider:

- Community barbecues, where local residents come together as a community.
- Civic engagement to improve community environments and places.
- Measures to slow traffic speeds to improve safety and encourage more people to be out walking and cycling.
- Providing permanent features that stimulate children's interest and encourage play, for example along access routes to parks.

Parents perceptions of safety, in terms of traffic and pedestrian safety and stranger danger, are strong barriers to children's independence (Ridgers 2013, Thompson 2009) and therefore opportunities to be active through outdoor play and active travel. Walkable neighbourhoods with people 'out and about' encourage perceptions that it's safe for children to be out playing.



In what ways can community members help to minimise safety concerns?

ACTION

Seek children's views and interests in the design and development of playgrounds and play spaces. This helps to meet their needs and engender strong community 'buy-in', so children and families are more likely to use these spaces to be active.



Consider:

- Working with local schools to engage students in the design and development of play space projects.
- Consultation with children through play.

Having access to good parks and play spaces supports children being physically active. As children age, they're less likely to engage in active play (Department of Health and Ageing 2008b), therefore having environments that provide stimulating play options is important for keeping older children active and encouraging creativity and imagination.



How can the design of playgrounds and play spaces reignite children of different ages and abilities to be active through play?



ACTION

Create more ways in which children and families use existing public spaces and places for unstructured outdoor activities, such as kicking the football in the park, climbing trees, building things in nature or exploring local tracks and trails.



Consider:

- Community events or initiatives that encourage parents and their children to explore local places and spaces.
- The role of new and growing activities, such as adventure and lifestyle sports, in engaging more children in outdoor activities.

There are many benefits for children in playing outdoors and among nature (Gleave & Cole-Hamilton 2012). Providing a variety of opportunities for children to spend time being active outdoors can present new experiences for children and their families.



What new opportunities are available to get more children and families active outdoors?



ACTION

Consider ways to shift people's travel choices away from cars, particularly for short trips to schools, local shops, parks or libraries. Create compelling options that encourage children and families to make the choice to get out and about and explore their neighbourhood.



Consider:

- Providing information on walking and cycling routes and travel distances to local destinations.
- Strategies that support walking and cycling over cars such as promoting pedestrian access to community festivals and events and limiting car parking.
- Enhancing streetscapes, improving footpath connection and providing amenities such as seating, to improve walking access to community destinations.
- Working with key local partners, such as council, schools, businesses, to design and deliver solutions to reduce car use.

Reducing the over-reliance on cars within communities is a positive way to get children walking or riding their bike to places. Reducing cars on the street may also help to alleviate concerns around traffic safety.



Within your community, what types of trips can be targeted to encourage walking or cycling over driving, and how?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

CASE STUDY

Dandenong Pop-Up-Park encouraging being active

A site earmarked for development in a few years' time as part of the Revitalising Central Dandenong project has been transformed into a temporary pop-up park for all Dandenong residents to enjoy.

Previously an unused block of land, the site now features synthetic soccer pitches, a barbecue area, community garden and open spaces.

The park's development is linked into the broader rejuvenation of the surrounding area including a pedestrian precinct connecting the local shopping centre, market and train station.

One of the key objectives in creating the park was to attract and engage hard-to-reach groups within the local community, as well as supporting the health and wellbeing of the broader community through sports programs and activities that encouraged inclusion.

Residents are enjoying the facility in a multitude of ways - for sports games, fitness sessions, outdoor activities, barbecues and picnics with family and friends.

The park has been used for scheduled and unscheduled activities such as soccer, cricket and rugby matches delivered in partnership with professional sporting bodies and community organisations, as well as arts and music events, business team-building activities, charity events and celebrations.

Scheduled sporting activities at the park have been particularly successful in engaging young people, whilst the community garden has appealed to the adult refugee community, and people with disabilities.

Nightly soccer matches have been incredibly important for many of the newly arrived migrant youths in terms of helping them settle into the community and establish social connections.

A number of local unemployed young people were given the chance to work on the park's construction through Mission Australia's Urban Renewal Program, learning new skills and building their self-esteem.

While the park is only intended to be a temporary community facility, the community spirit it's helping to foster will last much longer.

The park is an initiative of Places Victoria and Mission Australia, with funding from the State and Federal Governments, and forms part of the Victorian Government's \$290 million Revitalising Central Dandenong initiative.



CASE STUDY

Rossmoyne Street – building a sense of community

In 2008, a small group of residents in Rossmoyne Street, Thornbury, were concerned their street was in danger of becoming a traffic corridor rather than a living space and wanted to turn that around.

Now known as the Rossmoyne Street Walkability Action Group, the team of committed residents set out to create a street in which local residents felt comfortable walking around and spending time.

They also thought that by joining forces, they'd be better able to advocate for improvements to local infrastructure such as pedestrian/cycling amenities and street furniture.

The group's first initiative was a series of street parties which brought residents together in a fun, inclusive way.

In 2012, their efforts attracted the interest of the local council, the City of Darebin, which selected the street for the pilot Drive With Your Heart program aimed at creating safer streets and stronger neighbourhoods.

The idea at the core of Drive With Your Heart is to get people out and about in their local street so drivers are more aware of their behaviour and slow down. It's a way of letting motorists know that local streets aren't empty corridors to speed along and for residents to reclaim their street as a social space.



The partnership between Rossmoyne Street and Council provided the Walkability Action Group with valuable in-kind support for their efforts to create a safer, more attractive street for residents.

Other initiatives of the group include a car share bay in the street, a trial planter box project and a front yard scarecrow competition. Events to date include pot-luck dinners, a street-long garage sale (Rossmoyne Rummage), an annual Christmas Carol Parade and guided walks along nearby Darebin Creek.

In the space of a few years, the group has well and truly achieved its aim of building a local community around Rossmoyne Street, where social connection and walking are highly valued, for the benefit of all residents.

The group's future plans include lobbying for pedestrian amenities and reduced speed limits intersecting streets, an expansion of the planter box project, and the installation of street furniture.

The Rossmoyne Street Walkability Action Group is supported by Victoria Walks (victoriawalks.org.au). VicHealth funds Victoria Walks because walking is a great way of increasing physical activity and combating obesity, traffic congestion, pollution and a host of preventable diseases. Walking has other benefits too – like helping people make and sustain connections with other people in their own neighbourhoods. Victoria Walks is also supported by the Department of Health in relation to the Victorian Government's Healthy Together Victoria program.

In the home



The home environment is a crucial setting for instilling physical activity as part of a child's daily life.

However, with many parents working longer hours and facing long commutes to and from work, families are finding it increasingly hard to fit physical activity into their daily routine.

As a result of our lifestyles, children's physical activity is often structured, revolving around sports or other planned programs or activities. There is less opportunity for spontaneous and unstructured play, such as backyard cricket, playing tag, jumping on the trampoline or using a skipping rope, which helps promote important development skills, including fair play, decision-making and resilience.

Our strong focus on academic achievement also means children are spending more time on homework and study, leaving less time for active leisure and play.

Ready access to technology in the home means that children's leisure time is all too often taken up with computer games, watching television or using social media to communicate with friends rather than getting out into the backyard to throw a ball or climb a tree (ABS 2012b, ABS 2013b).

While it's difficult to directly influence what happens in individual homes, educators, council staff, community

workers, coaches, school staff and committees can help to influence and educate parents and carers they come in contact with about the importance of children's physical activity and getting active as a family.

The home is also where we can have an influence on children as parents and role models, not just as professionals.

Benefits to families of being active together

Being active as a family has enormous health and wellbeing benefits. Family members can keep each other motivated and encourage each other to stretch themselves.

Getting out and about within the local neighbourhood and broader community opens up opportunities to explore and be creative as a family – and the shared experience can lead to closer connections.

It also lays the groundwork to support children to remain active throughout their lives.

'Parents are our first role models, providing early guidance on what's important and what should be valued. As such, it's crucial that children see their parents or carers being active and have opportunities to be active together as a family – it shows them that physical activity is a valuable part of life.'

DIANA HEGGIE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HEART FOUNDATION VICTORIA



Practical actions for encouraging active families

Shifting the concepts of design and time, can create more opportunities for children and families to be active within their home environments.



ACTION

Consider how technology can be used to support more active lifestyles in children by addressing barriers or providing motivation to be active. This may include social media, mobile applications or websites.



Consider:

- How to increase families' access to information on local physical activity opportunities, such as through a calendar of events.
- Ways to collect data and monitor levels of activity, such as recording trips walked to school or monitoring use and capacity of facilities.
- Engaging community members to collaboratively develop solutions to address barriers to being active.
- Online improvements to make it easier for people to access opportunities, such as court hire bookings, programs or membership registrations.

The use of technology to connect and share has the potential to encourage and connect children to physical activity.



What role can technology play in addressing barriers to children being active?



ACTION

Encourage families to be active together to increase each member's personal activity level and strengthen relationships (see the Integrating active play into family life case study p 42).



Consider:

- Leveraging state-wide family-based activity programs to promote and encourage participation by local families.
- Promoting local activities, places and spaces for families to be active.

Parents have a strong influence on how active their children are. Greater parental involvement is positively associated with higher levels of children's physical activity (Ridgers 2013).



What opportunities are there for families to be active together and how can this be communicated to support changes in behaviour?



ACTION

Provide support to influence the way children spend their leisure time so they're sitting less and engaging more in outside play and sport-based games.



Consider:

- Raising awareness about the health impacts of sitting for children.
- Using existing resources to encourage more active and outdoor play within the home environment, such as sport games in the backyard or establishing and maintaining a home vegetable garden.
- How sport and physical activity is promoted to children and families so that they want to get involved.

Parents setting and enforcing rules around the amount of time children spend in front of computers, televisions and electronic games has been shown to reduce screen-based sedentary behaviour in children, as can limiting access to televisions and computers in the home and particularly in children's bedrooms (Ridgers 2013).



How can children's leisure time be influenced to include more activity?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife)

CASE STUDY

Integrating active play into family life

Glastonbury Child & Family Services has developed an initiative to build children's self-esteem and bring families together through active play.

The Community Active Play (CAP) program, aimed at children up to 6 years of age and their parents, has been delivered through playgroups in the Golden Plains Shire, Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire and City of Greater Geelong.

Initially, playgroup facilitators worked with families to identify priorities for their children and develop relevant plans and activities that could then be incorporated into the home environment.

The aims of the program were to:

- enhance children's development through active play
- strengthen relationships between parents and children
- support families to be involved in local community activities.

Evaluation of the program showed increases in children's activity levels and an enhanced ability to self-initiate active play.

As the program rolled out and the children were better able to participate and create their own activities, the facilitators were able to focus on changing the play environment to give the children more interesting and challenging opportunities for activity.

Activities included walks in the park, exploring natural environments, balancing with objects, using recycled materials and dancing to music – many of which could be delivered at little or no cost.

As well as building children's confidence and enjoyment of activities, the program provided an avenue for reaching out to local families and building stronger community networks.



The program also helped build parents' confidence to continue the activities with their children at home and in their own time.

A CAP resource has been developed so playgroups and parents can continue to provide active play opportunities for their children.

The CAP program was funded by VicHealth under the Active Participation Grants: Regional and Rural Sustainability program.

How you can start to make a difference

VicHealth recognises the importance to us all, including children, of being physically active in our everyday lives.

Encouraging regular physical activity is one of VicHealth's strategic imperatives in the VicHealth Action Agenda for Health Promotion, with a 10-year goal to have more Victorians engage in physical activity.

Getting our children to move more will be integral to the success of this goal.

However, there is no single organisation or individual who can bring about the significant transformation in thinking and practice required to embed physical activity into our children's daily lives.

It's a complex issue requiring a comprehensive response.

That's why VicHealth is keen to partner and work with other key influencers, including schools, sporting organisations and clubs, State and local governments and community organisations to achieve this goal.

We all have a role to play in getting Victorian children moving more in a sustainable, practical way.

Working together, we need to challenge our current thinking and identify the changes we can all make – big and small –

that, collectively, will begin to positively influence how much our children move each day.

The first step is to look critically at what your organisation/school/club/council/agency currently does in terms of supporting and influencing children's physical activity and objectively assess its effectiveness and impacts.

The next step is to look at how the practical actions offered in this resource can guide your thinking and shape your future efforts to enhance physical activity opportunities for all children.

Investing time, effort and resources into policies, programs and infrastructure that support and encourage physical activity among children can bring enormous rewards – not only in terms of improving their health and wellbeing but in stronger, more connected communities, higher performing schools, more vibrant sporting clubs and happier, healthier families.

By working together and taking action today, we can start to create a better future for Victoria's children.

What can you do next to take action?

- Collect relevant information to identify the key barriers to children's physical activity participation in your school, sport or community.
- Set up a workshop or roundtable to discuss barriers to activity with colleagues and stakeholders and brainstorm new approaches to address them.
- Review your existing policies, practices and resources to appraise whether they are enhancing opportunities for activity or putting up barriers.
- Identify which of the *Active for Life* actions are relevant to your organisation/school/club/council/agency and consider how these actions could be adapted to suit your circumstances.
- Consider the relevant further information and references available on VicHealth's website (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife) and use this as a basis for refining or developing your own policies and practices to make children's physical activity a priority.
- Identify local champions who will help to raise awareness, be positive role models and maintain a focus on the issue.
- Identify and establish partnerships with relevant organisations or community groups to address barriers to children being active.
- Consider ways to involve families and other key stakeholders in your efforts to raise awareness of the importance of children's physical activity.
- Leverage initiatives such as VicHealth's Walk to School (walktoschool.vic.gov.au) which encourages Victorian primary school students to walk to and from school, to provide opportunities for children to be active.
- Identify ways in which you and your family can get more movement into your everyday lives.

Glossary

Active play

Unstructured, spontaneous physical activity that provides a child with amusement, entertainment or enjoyment. Examples include climbing a tree or playing 'tag' with friends.

Active travel

Non-motorised transport between destinations such as walking, cycling, scooting and skate-boarding.

Cardiovascular disease

Also known as heart disease, the term refers to a group of conditions such as oedema and heart failure and diseases of the arteries, arterioles and capillaries (ABS 2012a).

Disability

A long-term health condition which restricts everyday activities (ABS 2012a).

Fundamental movement skills

Skills that provide the foundation to competent and confident participation in a range of physical activities. These skills include rolling, balancing, sliding, jogging, running, leaping, jumping, hopping, dodging, galloping, skipping, bouncing, throwing, catching, kicking, striking and propelling the body in water' (ACAR 2012, p 79).

Leisure activities

Recreational activities pursued during free time such as mountain bike riding or bushwalking.

Obesity/overweight

A condition where an adult has a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30.00 or more. Adults are classified as overweight if their BMI is 25.00 to 29.99. There are different cut-offs for children. BMI is a simple index of weight-for-height (ABS 2013c).

Osteoporosis

A condition that thins and weakens bone mineral density, generally caused by loss of calcium, which leads to increased risk of fracture (ABS 2012a).

Physical activity

Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson 1985, p 129).

Physical education

A sequential, developmentally appropriate educational experience that engages students in learning and understanding movement activities that are personally and socially meaningful, with the goal of promoting healthy living. When provided with an appropriate Physical Education curriculum, instruction and learning experiences, students develop a broad spectrum of movement skills, personal and social skills, knowledge, motivation and confidence to engage in healthy activity throughout their lives (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, p 8).

Screen-based activity

Use of a screen-based device such as television, computer, or electronic gaming device (ABS 2013c).

Sedentary behaviour

Sitting or lying down for activities, excluding sleeping (ABS 2013c).

Sport

Activity requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill which, by its nature and organisation, is competitive (Australian Sports Commission n.d.).

Unstructured play

Activities that children engage in on their own without adult guidance. Unstructured free play can happen in many different environments; however, being outside particularly lends itself to exploration and creation.

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