

National Sports Plan

Submission from Cancer Council Australia

July 2017

Cancer Council Australia is the nation's peak non-government cancer control organisation. Cancer Council Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the development of a National Sports Plan.

Contact: Deshanie Rawlings, Public Health Policy Manager, Cancer Council Australia:
deshanie.rawlings@cancer.org.au (02) 8063 4112

Introduction

Collectively obesity, physical inactivity and poor diet are second only to tobacco as modifiable risk factors for cancer in Australia.¹ An estimated 1,814 cases of colon, post-menopausal breast and endometrial cancer diagnosed in 2010 were attributable to insufficient levels of physical activity.² Physical activity can protect against cancer independently as well as contributing to maintaining a healthy weight.

The 2014-15 National Health Survey found that just over half (55.5%) of Australian adults participated in sufficient physical activity in the last week (more than 150 minutes of moderate physical activity).³ Nearly 1 in 3 (29.7%) were not sufficiently active (less than 150 minutes in the last week), while 14.8% were inactive (no exercise in the last week). Given the levels of physical inactivity in the population, addressing this risk factor is an important objective for reducing Australia's cancer burden.

General comments

Cancer Council Australia commends the Federal Government for its initiative to address physical inactivity through a National Sports Plan. However, increasing physical activity levels in the population through increasing participation in sport is not sufficient. It is well recognised that many of the factors influencing physical activity do not sit within the scope of the health or sport sector. Any effective strategy for increasing physical activity levels on a population level will require a national plan focused on promoting physical activity through a variety of areas including active transport, urban planning, as well as sport and recreation.

A National Consensus Forum was held in 2015 and produced the 'Canberra Communiqué' which sets out action areas and policy initiatives to underpin a National Physical Activity Action Plan.⁴ Cancer Council Australia supports the action areas in the communiqué as well as the development and funding of a National Physical Activity Plan.

Low levels of physical activity are associated with lower socioeconomic status, higher body mass and Aboriginality. Different approaches are needed to increase physical activity among people from different ages, socioeconomic groups and backgrounds. Evidence suggests that

an individual's physical environment can influence their physical activity levels. Environments that are 'walkable', characterised by higher residential density, street connectivity, availability of footpaths and perceptions that the environment is safe are associated with decreased obesity and higher levels of physical activity.^{5,6} Similarly, environments designed to facilitate active transport including cycling and public transport, are associated with increased physical activity.⁷ Therefore it is critical that policies and planning regulations relating to housing and urban design and development, as well as transport infrastructure, ensure that physical environments encourage and support people to be more physically active.

Public awareness of the link between obesity, poor diet and physical inactivity and cancer is low. There is an urgent need for the Federal Government to implement a long-term and adequately funded mass media and social marketing campaign, focused on the adverse health outcomes associated with obesity, poor diet and physical inactivity. The value of social marketing as a public education tool – as seen in tobacco control – is in its role in influencing attitudes and shifting cultural norms with regard to health behaviours. Social marketing interventions have been shown to be effective in increasing physical activity.⁸

Comments on the development of a National Sports Plan

It is our view that the development of a National Sports Plan should take into consideration two broad issues 1) sports sponsorship and 2) funding in sport.

Cancer Council Australia is concerned about the impact of unhealthy sponsorship of sport on children. Children are able to match sports with food and alcohol sponsors⁹ and recall sponsors of their favourite elite sports.¹⁰ Recent research found 91% of food and beverage companies sponsoring children's sports were classified unhealthy (namely McDonald's (fast food), Coopers (alcohol) and Schweppes (soft drinks)).¹¹ Similarly both Australian national and state sports organisations have unhealthy sponsorship.¹² Evidence shows that food marketing to children generates positive beliefs about the advertised products, and influences food preferences, purchasing requests and consumption, as well as dietary habits and health statuses.^{13,14,15} Younger children appear to be particularly susceptible with 10-14 year olds reporting that they liked to return the favour to sponsors by buying their products and that they thought sponsors were 'cool'.¹⁰ Sport sponsorship must be independent of unhealthy sponsors in order for sport to promote consistent health messages and improve population health.

A National Sports Plan must address the imbalance of funding to high-performance sports compared to participation sports. The allocation of funding to high-performance sport is 4-5 times that devoted to participation in sport. The Crawford Report highlighted the bias towards funding Olympic sports which make little sense for Australia. It provided the example of more government funds allocated to archery than cricket which has more than 100 times the number of participants.¹⁶ The report also found that the focus has been on winning medals while participation or 'grass roots' sport has been comparatively under-funded. In order for sport to play a role in contributing towards better health outcomes through physical activity, participation must be a priority.

The majority of national sports organisations are well resourced and have the capacity to deliver services to the community. Cancer Council Australia has concerns around providing government funding to organisations who are already well placed to deliver services. Recent research published looking at the effectiveness of UK Government investment in sport as a public health intervention found no evidence that sport participation can sustainably increase physical activity participation among the less and least active.¹⁷ Government funds could be better utilised on proven evidence-based interventions for increasing physical activity in the population.

Conclusion

Cancer Council Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the development of a National Sports Plan. Addressing the nation's physical activity levels to reduce cancer burden in Australia is an important and complex public health issue. A comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach including all levels of government across health, education, planning, transport, and sport is crucial to create supportive environments to make physical activity a part of everyone's daily life.

References

- ¹ Whiteman DC, Webb PM, Green AC, Neale RE, Fritschi L, Bain CJ et al. Cancers in Australia in 2010 attributable to modifiable factors: summary and conclusions. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2015; 39(5):477-84.
- ² Olsen CM, Wilson LF, Nagle CM, Kendall BJ, Bain CJ, Pandeya N et al. Cancers in Australia in 2010 attributable to modifiable factors: summary and conclusions. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2015; 39: 458–463.
- ³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 4364.0.55.001 – National Health Survey: First Results – Australia, 2014-15. Canberra, Australia: ABS; 2015. Available from: [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/CDA852A349B4CEE6CA257F150009FC53/\\$File/national%20health%20survey%20first%20results,%202014-15.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/CDA852A349B4CEE6CA257F150009FC53/$File/national%20health%20survey%20first%20results,%202014-15.pdf)
- ⁴ National Physical Activity Consensus Forum. Canberra Communiqué. Melbourne: National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2015. Available from: https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/COR210.v2_Canberra_communique-5_web.pdf
- ⁵ Gebel K, King L, Bauman A, Vita P, Gill T, Rigby A, et al. Creating healthy environments: a review of links between the physical environment, physical activity and obesity. Sydney: NSW Health Department and NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity; 2005 Available at: http://sydney.edu.au/medicine/public-health/coo/pdf/2005_creating_healthy_environments.pdf
- ⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Health and the environment: a compilation of evidence. Canberra: AIHW; 2011 Mar. Report No.: PHE 136. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737418532&libID=10737418531>.
- ⁷ Schoeppe S, Braubach M. Tackling obesity by creating healthy residential environments. Copenhagen: World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; 2007 Available from: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/98697/E90593.pdf.
- ⁸ Xia Y, Deshpande S, Bonates T. Effectiveness of Social Marketing Interventions to Promote Physical Activity Among Adults: A Systematic Review. *J Phys Act Health*. 2016; 13(11): 1263-1274.
- ⁹ Pettigrew S, Rosenberg M, Ferguson R, Houghton S, Wood L. Game on: do children absorb sports sponsorship messages? *Public Health Nutr* 2013;16(12):2197-204
- ¹⁰ Kelly B, Baur LA, Bauman AE, King L, Chapman K, Smith BJ. Food company sponsors are kind, generous and cool: (mis)conceptions of junior sports players. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 2011; 5;8:95
- ¹¹ Watson WL, Brunner R, Wellard L, Hughes C. Sponsorship of junior sport development programs in Australia. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*. 2016;40(4):326-8.
- ¹² Macniven R, Kelly B, King L. Unhealthy product sponsorship of Australian national and state sports organisations. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 2015;26(1):52-6.
- ¹³ McGinnis JM, Gootman JA, Kraak VI. Food marketing to children and youth: threat or opportunity? Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2005
- ¹⁴ Dalmeny K, Hanna E, Lobstein T. Broadcasting bad health: why food marketing to children needs to be controlled. International Association of Consumer Food Organizations; 2003. Available from: <http://cspinet.org/reports/codex/foodmarketingreport.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Cairns G, Angus K, Hastings G, Caraher M. Systematic reviews of the evidence on the nature, extent and effects of food marketing to children. A retrospective summary. *Appetite* 2013;62:209-15
- ¹⁶ Crawford D. The Future of Sport in Australia. Australian Government. Independent Sport Panel. Canberra, Australia. 2009. Available from: https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/334338/CrawfordReport.pdf
- ¹⁷ Weed M. Should we privilege sport for health? The comparative effectiveness of UK Government investment in sport as a public health intervention. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. 2016;8(4):559-76.