

Community-wide programs and physical activity

Key messages

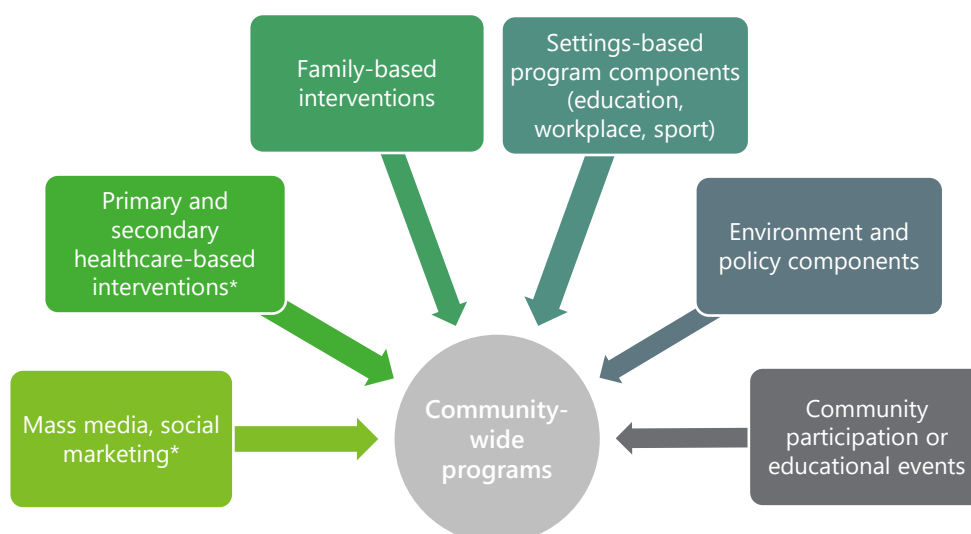
- Community-wide programs apply multiple evidence-based strategies (from the other seven domains) and involve most residents and institutions within localities to increase population levels of physical activity.
- One size does not fit all for communities. The right mix of coordinated strategies is needed to address all the different factors that influence physical activity in each unique community.
- Community-wide programs involve finding ways of adapting evidence-based strategies to the needs of an entire local area, town or city.
- The WHO 'best buys' for physical activity are mass media campaigns and programs in primary and secondary healthcare – these are very good strategies to use as the basis of a community-wide mix of programs.
- Community-wide programs work best when they build on the existing strengths of a community.

Why is it important to address the community domain?

The World Health Organization has identified community-wide programs as the most cost-effective approach to increasing population physical activity. Community-level action also plays a valuable role in reaching and supporting socially disadvantaged people, who are likely to experience greater barriers and fewer opportunities for physical activity in their lives.

What works?

Physical activity in populations is influenced by multiple factors at multiple levels, including individual, interpersonal, organisational, environmental and policy factors. Community-wide programs to promote physical activity must use a mix of coordinated strategies to address these multilevel determinants. Systems thinking and its methods make it possible to identify critical determinants of physical activity within communities and facilitate coordinated action by partner agencies to modify them. Evidence-based actions derive from the other seven domains described in Getting Australia Active III (GAA III) and may include any of the following:



* WHO has specified these components as 'best buys' overall so it is reasonable to suggest that these might be prioritised as components of a community-wide approach.

An assets or strength-based approach

It is recommended to:

- Encourage individuals from within communities to lead and facilitate co-production and delivery of programs and services
- Recognise the unique assets in communities during planning and implementation; this allows for use of the existing capacity and resources in communities and increases a program's likelihood of effectiveness.

What are the recommendations for investment?

Government and non-government agencies can improve the implementation and impact of community-wide physical activity strategies by addressing the following:

Capacity building

- Disseminate evidence, case studies and models for community-wide physical activity promotion to organisations that can provide leadership for community-wide strategies (particularly regional health authorities, local councils and sport and recreation bodies)
- Provide training in systems mapping, co-design and collective impact to improve capacity for effective collaborative action

Intersectoral collaboration

- Develop cross-sectoral partnerships and commitments to physical activity promotion at the state and/or national level that can assist collaboration in communities among important providers of physical activity programs and infrastructure (including those in education, transport, planning, sport and recreation)

Coordination with whole-of-population strategies

- Support the alignment of community-wide programs with strategies at the state or national level and improve their delivery and impact, such as by disseminating and encouraging the use of mass media messages and materials, guidelines for urban design and transport planning, and behaviour change strategies and resources for use in healthcare, education and other settings

What are examples of strategies that intersect with this domain?

Community-wide programs, by their nature, may intersect with all of the other seven domains for physical activity promotion described in GAA III. Mass communication, improvements to the built environment, and education delivered in workplaces and/or healthcare settings form the mainstays of these programs, but other combinations of strategies may be used depending on local needs and resources.

Getting Australia Active III (GAA III) is an Australian guide for policy makers to support the implementation of a whole-of-systems approach to increasing population physical activity. This policy brief summarises key points from **Chapter 3.6** of this guide. For more detailed guidance and supporting evidence, you can access the full report at: preventioncentre.org.au



Funding for this research has been provided from the Australian Government's Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). The MRFF provides funding to support health and medical research and innovation, with the objective of improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. MRFF funding has been provided to The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre under the MRFF Boosting Preventive Health Research Program. Further information on the MRFF is available at www.health.gov.au/mrff