Is Australia ready for a physical activity surveillance system (PASS)?

Findings from our workshops and survey feedback with policy makers

Physical inactivity requires a systems approach to address its multiple, interrelated drivers.

Surveillance systems for physical activity (PA) should regularly monitor wider sociocultural, environmental and policy determinants, not only individual behaviours.

The current PA surveillance system is fragmented and lacking in nationwide standardisation. We investigated the feasibility of a comprehensive and standardised PA surveillance system in Australia.

What did we do?

1 Held workshops with policy makers in each state and territory to gather information about existing data and reporting obligations relating to PA

2 Synthesised workshop information according to sector/domain and the socioecological model

3 Gathered feedback from the National Physical Activity Network (NPAN) of policy makers on potential model indicators

What did we find?

Individual indicators
were the most highly rated of the model indicators; they were also more commonly available across jurisdictions.
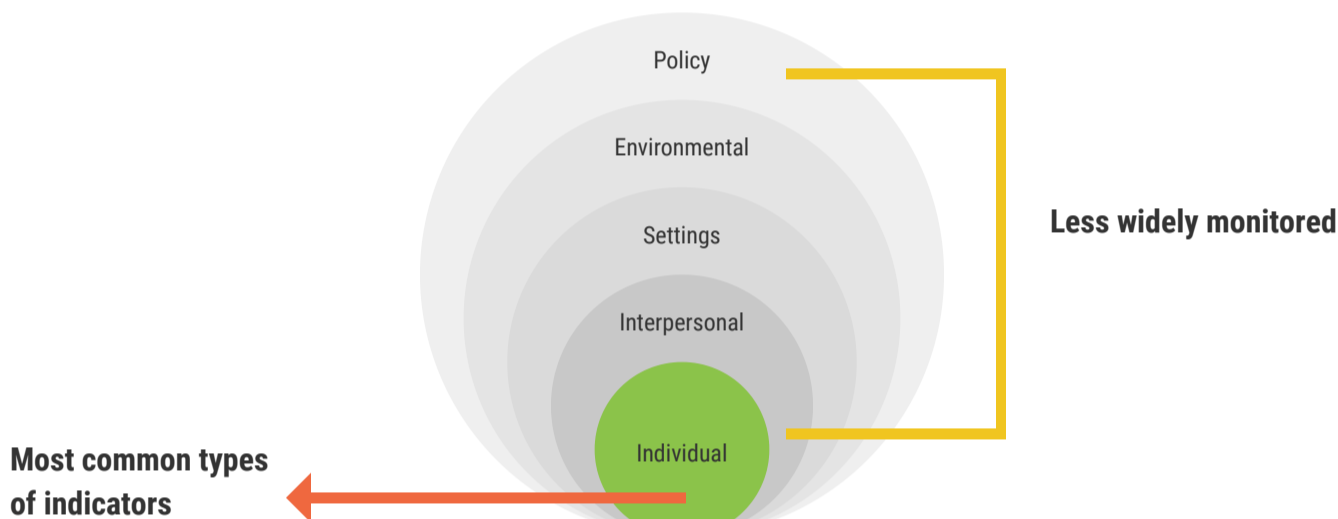
Setting and environment
indicators tended to be moderately rated of the model indicators; they were less commonly available.

Policy indicators
were not considered to be as important as actual measures; also reflected by their low availability across jurisdictions.

1. From the workshops

Policy
Environmental
Settings
Interpersonal
Individual

Less widely monitored

Most common types of indicators

2. NPAN feedback about model indicators for different sectors/domains

Highly rated

Mostly individual indicators for:
- Sport
- Education
- Transport
- Health

e.g. sport and recreation participation; overall PA at school; active travel levels; moderate-to-vigorous PA

Moderately rated

Many indicators relating to:
- Settings
- Environments
- Policy

e.g. PA advice or referral in GP or other health settings; spatial indicators for transport and urban design; implementation of mandates for minimum PE in schools

Lowest rated

Mainly:
- Interpersonal
- Policy indicators for urban design

e.g. community norms; policy indicators for footpath infrastructure, minimum public open space

3. NPAN feedback about model indicators for infrastructure support

Highly rated
- Leadership and coordination
- Monitoring and intelligence
- Funding and resources

Moderately rated
- Governance
- Public reporting and transparency
- Workforce development
- Health in all policies

Lowest rated
- Platforms for interaction

Limitations to note

Workshop findings are based on information shared by participants. May be relevant data systems and indicators not shared or held by sectors not represented at workshops.

Survey results on model indicators are limited by a small sample size (1/3 of NPAN members responded).

Potential barriers to progressing a PASS (e.g. lack of national PA strategy and leadership; disruption to existing data collections or constraints in existing data systems)

What is needed to advance the development of a PASS in Australia?

1 **Further national discussions** and cross-agency leadership and collaboration

2 **Jurisdictions need to share more detail** about existing measures and data systems

3 **Address PA assessment standardisation issues** in population health surveys

4 **Build in stages,** starting with core indicators and expanding when resources and capacities allow

What does this mean?

Workshops reveal areas where data availability is most widespread and areas of deficiency. Survey feedback may support future discussions on domains and indicators to be prioritised for a PASS.

Improvements in PA surveillance will support more informed and accountable decision-making, allocation of resources and efforts, and more effective monitoring of multi-level progress towards state and national PA goals.