



ACTION AREA 12 – Mass-media strategy

Promote the benefits of physical activity

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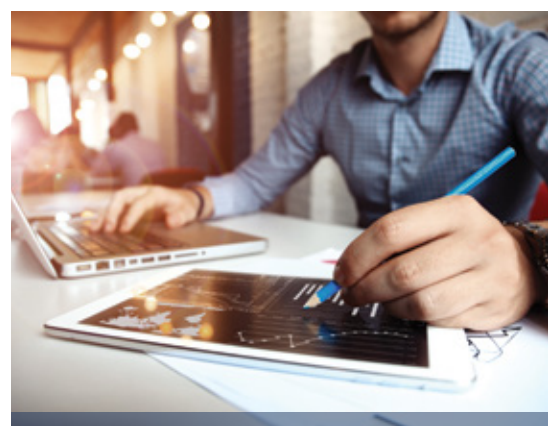


WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The central role of mass media campaigns is to increase whole-of-community understanding of a health issue, shape an agenda for change and influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards physical activity.⁽¹⁾ Mass-media strategies are effective in achieving these objectives when based on sound theory, are adequately resourced and implemented in combination with community physical activity programs, policies and environmental changes. Mass media remains an important tool for reaching whole populations, in creating new healthier social norms and influencing healthy behaviour choices. Contemporary mass media campaigns should always consider the judicious inclusion of new media and digital technology to add to the mass-reach communications components of physical activity campaigns.

Consider the case for change:

- mass media is effective in setting a community agenda around physical activity and in increasing awareness. It serves to inform, remind, motivate and support health-related change⁽¹⁻⁶⁾
- media campaigns have achieved positive results when based on sound theory and research and when combined with community-wide activities, programs and facilities^(1, 3, 6-8)
- a comprehensive approach should comprise multi-platform communications, combining social marketing principles, community-wide programs and initiatives with traditional as well as social and digital media strategies, integrating campaign themes across the overall community-wide physical activity promotion effort^(9, 10)
- the media can increase awareness, change social norms, stimulate increases in help-seeking behaviours (e.g. calls to helplines) and influence beliefs and attitudes⁽¹¹⁾
- online social media, digital and mobile technology has considerable potential for supporting mass-reach communications.⁽¹²⁻¹⁴⁾ A review of 72 unique internet-based physical activity interventions, found 44 (61.1%) reported significant increases in physical activity.⁽¹³⁾ Current evidence indicates that social media-based campaigns in health promotion are suitable to complement but are unproven as a substitute for traditional mass media such as television⁽¹⁵⁾
- a recent review of 18 mass media campaigns implemented on national, regional and local levels with or without supportive community activities, found 11 had a significant impact on physical activity behaviour, one reported unsustained change, and four no significant effects on physical activity behaviour⁽⁶⁾
- a meta-analysis of nine adult campaigns found mass media had a significant effect on promoting moderate intensity walking but may not lead to achieving recommended levels of overall physical activity.⁽¹⁶⁾ However, meta-analytic data may be difficult to interpret for policymakers where exposure (to the campaign) and the physical activity outcomes are quite heterogeneous
- a review of the impact mass-media campaigns on low socio-economic status (SES) groups found mostly equitable or better impacts for low SES groups. However, to reduce inequalities mass media campaigns need to be specifically designed to ensure that images, casting, language and messaging are designed to maximise appeal and relevance for low SES populations.^(4, 5)





WHAT MUST BE DONE?

The interventions proposed in this document should be supported by an integrated and sustained mass-media strategy that promotes the uptake of physical activity throughout the population.⁽¹⁷⁾ This strategy should be sensitive to the needs of different age groups, levels of disadvantage, physical abilities and cultural preferences. Best practice checklists for mass media campaigns addressing physical activity, such as the FLOWPROOF protocol, should be used for planning, implementation and evaluation.⁽¹⁸⁾ Noting that mass media campaigns to promote physical activity are identified as a “best buy” by the World Health Organization⁽¹⁹⁾ the following interventions are recommended:

- include mass media campaigns in national physical activity plans and strategies.^(20, 21) This would require sufficiently resourced and sustained physical activity mass-media strategies that include both traditional and digital media strategies, over a period of 5 years or more
- combine traditional media with social and digital media communication strategies to explore and leverage the potential of communication technologies, specifically the internet, mobile smart phone technology and mobile and digital physical activity tracker devices
- complement mass-media strategies with community-wide activities and programs linked through a well-developed national physical activity plan (including community programs, sport programs, cross-sectoral interventions, and specific mass events) to create a broader social environment designed to encourage a culture of valuing physical activity in Australia.



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