

## Benefits of Physical Activity

Being physically active is important for the health and wellbeing of Australians.

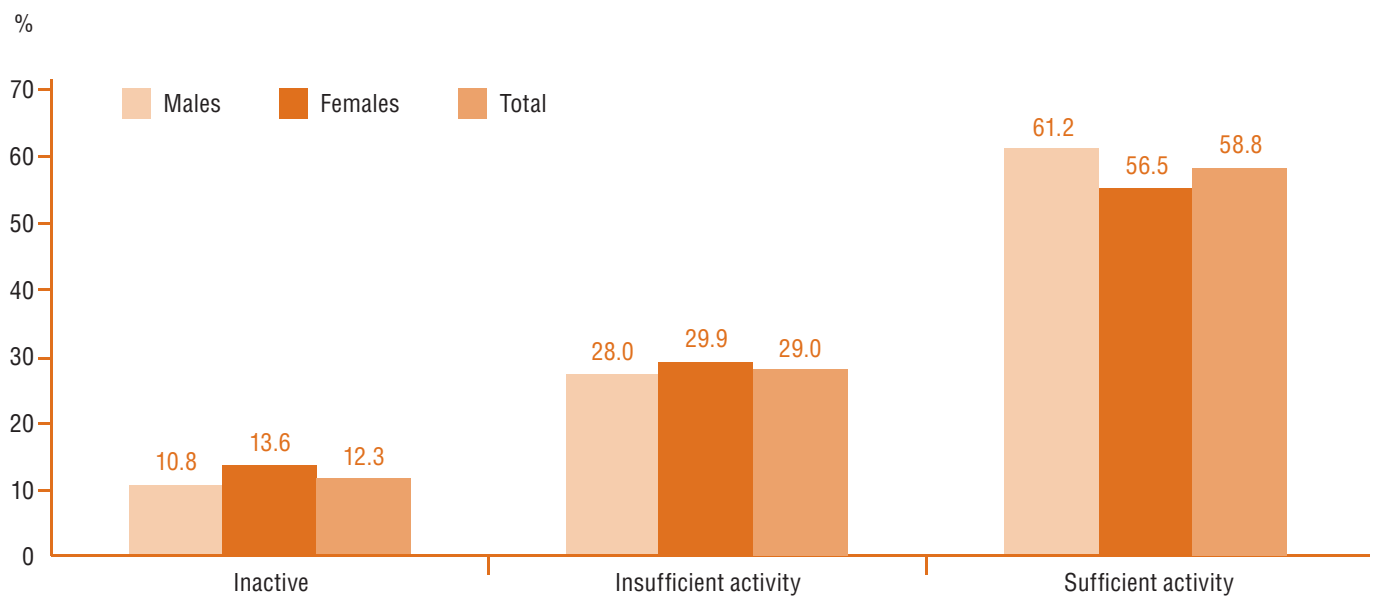
In fact it is of clear benefit in six of the seven current Australian national health priorities; these are cardiovascular health, cancer control, injury prevention and control, mental health, diabetes mellitus, arthritis and musculoskeletal diseases – the only exception is asthma.<sup>1,2</sup>

Just as importantly, physical activity provides a range of social, environmental and economic benefits and therefore has an important role in the wellbeing of both individuals and communities.

### PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In 2006, 58.8% of Western Australian adults aged 18 years and over participated in sufficient levels of physical activity.<sup>3</sup> This is defined as at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week which is frequently interpreted as 150 minutes of moderate activity over at least five sessions.<sup>4</sup>

#### Physical activity levels of Western Australian Adults–2006<sup>5</sup>



National physical activity recommendations for children and young people state that they should participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity every day.<sup>6</sup>

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## BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### Physical health benefits<sup>7,8, 9,10,11</sup>

Physical health benefits of participation in physical activity include:

- Reduced risk of chronic diseases;
- Reduced risk and management/treatment for:
  - Cardiovascular disease – risk reduced by as much as half;
  - Stroke;
  - Diabetes;
  - Colon cancer – halved risk;
  - Breast cancer;
  - High blood pressure;
  - High cholesterol;
- Reduced risk of mortality;
- Improved quality of life;
- Weight management;
- Improved sleep;
- Reduced risk of osteoporosis and falls;
- Improved body weight and composition; and
- Reduced risk of musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoarthritis and low back pain.

In addition to the above, participation in physical activity provides specific health benefits for children, youth and older adults:

### Physical health benefits for children and youth<sup>12</sup>

Physical activity assists young people to:

- Develop healthy musculoskeletal tissues (i.e. bones, muscles and joints);
- Develop a healthy cardiovascular system (i.e. heart and lungs);
- Develop neuromuscular awareness (i.e. coordination and movement control); and
- Maintain a healthy body weight.

### Physical health benefits for seniors<sup>13,14,15</sup>

Physical health benefits of physical activity for seniors include:

- Weight control;
- Reduced risk and management of diseases/ conditions such as cardiovascular disease (coronary heart disease, stroke), diabetes, cancer, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and hypertension (high blood pressure);
- Improved mobility, flexibility and functional ability;
- Improved balance, strength and endurance;
- Improved coordination and motor control; and
- Reduced risk of falls.

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## **Mental health benefits**<sup>16,17, 18</sup>

Mental health benefits of physical activity include:

- Improved concentration and enhanced memory and learning;
- Reduction in and management of stress, anxiety and depression;
- Improved self-esteem and confidence; and
- Improved psychological wellbeing.

## **Social benefits**<sup>19,20</sup>

Physical activity:

- Encourages family and community connectedness;
- Improves social skills and networks;
- Reduces isolation and loneliness;
- Creates safer places/ communities; and
- Contributes to better performing schools.

### *Social benefits for children and youth*<sup>21</sup>

Physical activity assists young people in their social development by providing opportunities for:

- Self-expression;
- Building self-confidence;
- Social interaction; and
- Integration.

### *Social benefits for seniors*<sup>22,23,24</sup>

Physical activity provides seniors with opportunities for:

- Creating friendships;
- Maintaining social networks; and
- Interacting with people of all ages.

Physical activity also contributes to independent living.

## **Environmental benefits**<sup>25, 26</sup>

Physical activity leads to a range of environmental benefits, especially when walking or cycling replaces car trips. Benefits include:

- Reduced traffic congestion;
- Reduced air pollution;
- Reduced greenhouse emissions; and
- Reduced noise pollution.

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## **Economic benefits<sup>27</sup>**

Physical activity provides economic benefits to individuals, local, state and Federal Governments and businesses. Physical activity:

- Produces health savings;
- Creates employment;
- Attracts tourism;
- Becomes a means of transport;
- Supports local business;
- Reduces absenteeism; and
- Reduces crime.

## **Other benefits to young people<sup>28</sup>**

In addition to the above, it has been suggested that physically active young people:

- More readily adopt other healthy behaviours (e.g. avoidance of tobacco, alcohol and drug use); and
- Demonstrate higher academic performance at school.

## **Benefits to organisations/workplaces<sup>29,30</sup>**

Benefits of physical activity to organisations/workplaces include:

- Reduced absenteeism;
- Increased productivity;
- Increased morale;
- Reduced rates of injury;
- Better employee relations;
- Improved team spirit; and
- Improved job satisfaction.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. National health priority areas. Viewed 17/03/2008. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/nhpa/index.cfm>
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- <sup>3</sup> Milligan, R., McCormack, G. R., Rosenberg, M. (2007). Physical Activity Levels of Western Australian Adults 2006. Results from the Adult Physical Activity Survey. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government. p22.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p17.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. p22.
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Health and Ageing. Australia's Physical Activity recommendations for children and young people. Viewed 27/05/2008. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-active-recommend.htm>
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- <sup>8</sup> Premier's Physical Activity Task Force. Strategic plan 2007–2011. (2007). Perth, Western Australia: Government of Western Australia. Viewed 02/05/2008. <http://www.beactive.wa.gov.au/docs/Strategic%20Plan%202007%20-%202011%20Online%20Version.PDF>
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- <sup>14</sup> Government of South Australia, Seniors Information Service. Physical activity. Benefits of physical activity for people over 50. Viewed 14/03/2008. <http://www.seniors.asn.au/defaultwithrhrbanner.jsp?xcid=317>
- <sup>15</sup> State of Victoria. Healthy ageing – stay physically active. Viewed 14/03/2008. [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/BHCv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Healthy\\_ageing\\_stay\\_physically\\_active?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/BHCv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Healthy_ageing_stay_physically_active?OpenDocument)
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- <sup>17</sup> Premier's Physical Activity Task Force. Strategic plan 2007–2011. (2007). Perth, Western Australia: Government of Western Australia. Viewed 02/05/2008. <http://www.beactive.wa.gov.au/docs/Strategic%20Plan%202007%20-%202011%20Online%20Version.PDF>
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