



## Submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Preventative Health Care



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21<sup>st</sup> February 2013

Dear Madame Chairman

**RE: Submission for the Tasmanian Joint Parliamentary Committee on Preventative Health Care.**

Based on the experienced gained through the development, implementation and management of the highly successful award winning preventative health care initiative Active Launceston, please find following comment on the relevant terms of reference (2, 3, 6) for your discussion. The comment below provides a perspective that particularly focuses on the importance of physical activity in our communities.

**2. The need for an integrated and collaborative health care model which focuses on the prevention, early detection and early intervention for chronic disease.**

The following except is taken from the Active Launceston Management Plan 2013-15 where author Lucy Byrne provides the rationale behind the importance of community wide physical activity intervention programs in the prevention of chronic disease. This collection of research is intended to provide the Joint Parliamentary Committee with a 'snapshot' of the available evidence in regards to the priority that should be placed on working in health promoting ways.

For over 60 years, research has proven that the health benefits that can be derived from a physically active lifestyle are extensive<sup>1</sup>. In fact, it is now widely accepted that physical inactivity is a significant predictor of numerous chronic diseases such as obesity, chronic heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers<sup>1,2</sup>.

World Health Organisation (WHO) recognise "physical inactivity as one of the leading global risk factors for morbidity and premature morbidity" WHO also suggests that approximately 3.2 million deaths each year can be attributable to insufficient physical activity<sup>3</sup>.

Increasing levels of physical activity in individuals and the community as a whole has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of our city, state, nation and even the world.

Evidence has shown that increasing physical activity is one simple, preventative strategy that can decrease the likelihood of obesity and other chronic conditions. It also contributes to improvements in overall health and well-being and the building of social capital.

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Physical activity is seen to have wide ranging health outcomes across the lifespan: “physical activity promotes healthy growth and development in children and young people, helps to prevent unhealthy mid-life weight gain, and is important for healthy ageing, improving and maintaining quality of life and independence in older adults<sup>4</sup>.”

The well respected medical Journal The Lancet, recently suggested in the article *Rethinking Our Approach to Physical Activity* that “It is a mistake to view physical activity only in terms of its disease specific associations. The benefits of physical activity are far-reaching and extend beyond health alone. Being physically active is a major contributor to one’s overall physical and mental wellbeing<sup>5</sup>”

It is also interesting to note that nutritional, psychosocial, therapeutic or educational interventions are all said to be less effective lifestyle interventions than simple physical activity participation<sup>6</sup>.

Research suggests there is no quick fix or single approach to improving community and individual health and wellbeing. Rather it recommends that a long term commitment is required from across the sector with multiple initiatives and interventions taking place at all levels.

It is commonly reported that one of the most successful investments in increasing physical activity levels are population based, community-wide, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary programs involving numerous settings and sectors and that mobilise and integrate community engagement and resources<sup>3</sup>.

Supportive environments (trails, footpaths, signage, parks, sports fields, beach access), mass media campaigns (advertising and educational programs promoting the importance of physical activity to the public) and community programs and interventions (supporting community members to try different physical activities by breaking down barriers that exist which hinder their participation) are said to be essential elements to enable effective community wide increases in physical activity<sup>7</sup>.

Social norms also have a role to play in increasing community physical activity levels. In 2010 the International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity published an article entitled *Is Healthy Behaviour Contagious* this study confirmed that “the importance of social norms for physical activity...intervention strategies aimed at promoting physical activity... could incorporate strategies aimed at modifying social norms relating to these behaviours<sup>8</sup>”. As such it can be suggested that if being physically active is ‘normal’ behaviour in one’s community, participation levels will in-turn increase.

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In an Australian context, the burden of chronic disease will increase significantly over the next decade with major impacts on families, communities, the health care system and the economy<sup>9</sup>.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2011-2012 Australian Health Survey, 63% of the adult Australian population are overweight or obese<sup>10</sup>.

Locally, Tasmanians suffer higher levels of chronic conditions than populations in other states and territories and hence the impact of physical inactivity on this state may be greater than in other states of Australia<sup>11</sup>.

The Tasmanian Population Health Survey of 2009 suggested that "almost 1 in 3 Tasmanians do not undertake sufficient physical activity to maintain good health and over half of all Tasmanians reported being overweight or obese."<sup>11</sup>

The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians outline the minimum levels of physical activity required to gain a health benefit.

In broad terms, the Australian Government recommends that being physically active every day is important for the healthy growth and development of 0-5 year olds and this should include up to 3 hours of physical activity for those that are aged between 1 and 5 years old. For 5-12 year olds, a combination of moderate and vigorous activities for at least 60 minutes a day is recommended. 12-18 year olds should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, and Australian adults should do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week<sup>12</sup>.

Physical inactivity is a risk factor for six of the eight National Health Priority Areas, which include type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, osteoarthritis, and osteoporosis. Physical inactivity contributes to over 16 000 deaths per year in Australia, equating to 43 deaths per day or 1.8 deaths per hour<sup>13</sup>.

The extent of problems associated with being inactive is concerning. As suggested above, not only does it have an impact on the health and wellbeing of an individual, but physical inactivity has a substantial negative impact on the economy.

Medibank Private estimated in 2008 that the impact of physical inactivity on the Australian economy in terms of direct healthcare costs, reduced productivity and increased mortality, equates to \$13.8 billion each year<sup>13</sup>.

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However Vic Health in 2009 reported that physical inactivity contributes to 6.6% of the overall health burden in Australia, in terms of the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death. Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the health sector \$672 million each year with a further \$1,135 million lost in production and leisure<sup>9</sup>.

Based on this analysis carried out by Vic Health in 2011, Tasmania's Department of Health and Human Services has estimated, if community-wide physical activity campaigns can reduce the number of people who are inactive by 4% the potential annual savings for the Tasmanian Government include, but are not limited to; \$2.9 million in healthcare and \$4.9 million in lost production and leisure<sup>9, 14</sup>.

Most recently in 2012 the value of sport and physical recreation (SPR) to Tasmania was said to bring a 400 per cent return on the dollars invested. Its value conservatively estimated to be \$5.6 billion, delivers over \$4 value for every \$1 invested<sup>15</sup>.

The principal finding of this research was "that although the current levels of investment in SPR yield a strong return, a more economically efficient outcome can be achieved by increasing the regular rate of participation. For example, a 10 per cent increase in SPR participation would generate an additional \$905.3 million in annual benefits<sup>15</sup>"

In America it has been suggested that for every \$1 invested into evidence-based prevention programs (e.g. targeting smoking, physical activity, nutrition), an estimated \$5.60 in savings is delivered back into the community within five years<sup>16</sup>.

The rationale for community-wide physical activity interventions is clear. To encourage and support people to increase their physical activity levels will improve individual health and wellbeing, and in-turn, the overall prosperity of the community in which they live.

### **3. The need for structural and economic reform that promotes the integration of a preventative approach to health and wellbeing, including the consideration of funding models.**

As is outlined above, a preventative approach to health and wellbeing makes sense on both a social and economic level.

As members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee will be aware, major reform is vital if we are to prevent the crumbling of the state's economic future under the weight of future health budgets.

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Prevention is better than a cure, but it is a much slower process, requiring a long term commitment from both the individual and the community.

When it comes to the golden word of '*sustainability*' it is believed that the sustainable participation in healthy lifestyle choices and in turn, the sustainable self-management of health, is the key to reducing the ongoing burden on the state's health budget. It is believed that for preventative health care to be effective in our communities there will always be some reliability on the public purse.

As a state, it is believed we need to ensure a priority is placed on supporting and financing services that prevent the onset of chronic disease in our communities. The major recommendation of this submission, is for the Tasmanian State Government to work in partnership with providers, via a contribution of recurrent funding for effective preventative health care initiatives.

Well managed services and programs can be the ultimate hospital avoidance measure that we are all looking for, and it is commonly accepted a much cheaper and more efficient option. However it is believed that with the current systems there are numerous challenges for service providers which inhibit their ability to effectively deliver their programs for the long term.

Challenges include but are not limited to;

- Government and other funding body resources are wasted paying wages of personnel to continue to seek funding and write grant applications.
- Short term projects have the risk of duplicating previous projects and they also risk the loss of the engagement of community if projects keep changing based around funding cycles.
- In terms of preventative health and in particular physical activity, there are limited options for seeking government funding and often a complicated process which again takes valuable time and resources away from servicing the community.

The review above discusses the importance of social norms. If we were born in Norway for example, we would all ride a bike to school or work because that is the 'normal' thing to do. The challenge for Tasmania is to ensure choosing a healthy lifestyle is just the 'normal' thing to do.

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## 6. Any other matter incidental thereto

The following provides a summary of the Active Launceston project and the new initiative Active Tasmania to provide an example to the Joint Parliamentary Committee of what can be achieved through the development of partnerships and collaborations in Tasmanian communities. It is vital that recurrent state government baseline funding is provided to these types of projects to ensure their ongoing sustainability because without it, we face the demise of successful program, the loss of a huge knowledge base and the deterioration of the health of our communities.

### Active Launceston Summary:

Active Launceston is a community driven partnership with the vision of improving the health and wellbeing of the Launceston community through physical activity.

Active Launceston's mission is to mobilise the community to increase their participation in physical activity by; filling gaps in provision, reducing barriers and targeting those with the highest need.

As the sole university in the state, the University of Tasmania (UTAS) has a responsibility to actively contribute to the economic, cultural and social environment in Tasmania. In 2008, UTAS, the Launceston City Council and Sport and Recreation Tasmania formed a partnership to develop the Active Launceston health promotion initiative. Although membership has changed over the years, the Active Launceston partnership, committee and stakeholder network has always been comprised of organisations that believe the initiative is working in line with their own strategic directions.

Active Launceston has become a multi award winning community driven partnership that has developed a strong community profile, an excellent reputation, and a highly-recognisable brand and community identity. The partnerships events, programs, website, organisational structure, partnerships and levels of community engagement have gained accolades at a state, national and international level.

Managed by UTAS, Active Launceston has become a foundational project for the university in achieving authentic, integrated and effective community outreach. Importantly, Active Launceston has enabled the development of a strong connection to the community in a non-political (non-governmental) environment<sup>19</sup>.

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The partnership was initiated as an 18 month pilot in June 2008. Due to its success Active Launceston was awarded ongoing funding for a period of three years and has now secured further funding for the subsequent three years from 2013 – 2015. Although it is important to note that at the time of writing this document, to enable Active Launceston to operate at current capacity, further funding will still need to be obtained.

Active Launceston provides free physical activity programs and events for the community. The partnership also seeks to endorse, support and guide new and existing physical activity providers to enhance their service and their connection with the community.

Physical inactivity is major risk factors for chronic disease. By facilitating engagement of all members of the community in physical activity, Active Launceston seeks to encourage behaviour change through providing access to programs, resources and networks to ensure these healthy lifestyle behaviour changes are sustainable and thus reducing the burden of chronic disease on both an individual and community level.

Rather than duplicating or reinventing the wheel, Active Launceston initiatives are designed to add value to existing successful local programs, fill any identified gaps in provision and develop capacity within the community to ensure sustainable participation in physical activity.

Initiatives are in line with the vision of the Tasmania's Plan for Physical Activity 2011 – 2021 developed by the Premiers Physical Activity Council , which is "All Tasmanians experience and enjoy the many benefits of regular physical activity."

Initiatives are designed to overcome barriers community members have to participation in physical activity and these particularly include, a lack of opportunities, low self-esteem, high costs associated with participation, social disconnection and/or a lack of knowledge of the opportunities available in our community.

In line with current health statistics, research and community consultation, Active Launceston targets groups within our community who are identified as having the highest need.

Active Launceston has a diverse range of individual and community benefits and outcomes. These benefits include but are not limited to;

1. Improving individual and community health and wellbeing through increasing the number of physical activities available along with endorsing, promoting and supporting new and existing providers

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2. Encouraging sustainable participation through creating support networks and resources
3. Increasing the knowledge of the benefits, and importance of physical activity, through community advocacy
4. Developing and utilising an innovative, practice informed, evidence based, preventative health care model
5. Reducing inequity in our community through focusing programs towards those in our community who are the most vulnerable, with the highest level of need, and who may not have otherwise participated
6. Empowering people and communities through providing employment, training and leadership opportunities
7. Decreasing social and geographical barriers through encouraging inclusive participation
8. Providing opportunities for evaluation and research into preventive health care
9. Providing a strong return on investment through seeking to securing health for the long term by keeping people out of hospitals thus reducing the burden on the health budget and the individual cost of living
10. Contributing to the vision and goals of Tasmania's Plan for Physical Activity 2011-2021 as well as many other Federal, State and Local Government, NGO and University plans and policies in the areas of preventive health care, employment, cost of living and access to services, children and youth, sustainability, community engagement, and social inclusion
11. Providing a framework that can be adapted to meet the needs of other communities

#### Active Tasmania Summary:

Based on the success of the Active Launceston initiative, Active Tasmania will provide consultancies and a suite of customised resources to improve community health and wellbeing of Tasmanian communities through increased participation in physical activity.

Due to extensive external interest in the Active Launceston project since its inception in 2008, a considerable amount of time has been dedicated to developing the Active Tasmania initiative including commercial business plans and state-wide expansion proposals.

Originally, the members of the Active Launceston partnership approved the development of the Active Tasmania concept with the condition that other communities paid full commercial rates for the consultant's time and the use of intellectual property and copyright materials. However, it has become evident over the last three years that this process was not viable, as Tasmanian Local Government Authorities and Non-Government Organisations (NGO'S) did not have access to the required financial resources.

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In 2013 UTAS have committed to charging Tasmanian communities a small annual licence fee for the consultant's time and use of the customised resources including intellectual property and copyright materials to ensure the Active Tasmania project comes to fruition.

Active Tasmania seeks to share the benefits, framework and knowledge gained through the development and management of Active Launceston with other communities through a capacity building process.

It is hoped that this will allow the evidence based and practised informed model to be embedded within the greater Tasmanian community.

It is envisaged that the support given will allow communities taking on the project, the benefit of extensive experience of coordinating a community-wide physical activity intervention project.

The process for implementing Active Tasmania is currently under development. Consultation has commenced along with the adaption of Active Launceston resources.

It is important to note that each program would need to be tailed to the specific needs of each community. There are many effective initiatives that are currently operating in Tasmania (i.e. Move Well Eat Well, Get Healthy, Active After School Communities, Work Cover Tasmania etc) and one of the key success factors of the Active Launceston framework is how it works with these existing opportunities and does not seek to duplicate or reinvent the wheel rather fill the gaps in provision. UTAS is actively sourcing funding to support the implementation of Active Tasmania across the state but will prioritise the development of partnerships with interested Local Government Authorities and NGO's.

It is seen to be vitally important that any new community projects are owned and managed by local organisations (which must include a financial contribution) to ensure their acceptance and sustainability over years to come.

Yours Sincerely,



**Lucy Byrne**  
Active Launceston Manager



**Janelle Allison**  
Pro-Vice Chancellor (Regional Development)

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