



Education and Training

Get a move on

The importance of school-based initiatives to increase children's physical activity

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Message from the Minister

The ACT has the right to be proud of our educational and sporting achievements. We lead the nation and, in some cases, the world in educational outcomes and we are the most physically active state or territory in the nation.

Our community has increased our participation in sport and physical activity by 5.9% since 2001 and last year, over 22 000 students participated in district/zone and ACT sporting events. In addition, 778 students represented the ACT at School Sport Australia exchanges or championships across 18 sports.

I am a strong believer in the importance of high quality physical education in our schools and the link this has with increased performance in other areas of education. I do not think it a coincidence that we lead the nation in educational outcomes and participation in physical activity

However, as curriculums have become more crowded and the focus has been on areas such as literacy and numeracy, physical education has taken a back seat in many of our schools.

As concerns about childhood obesity rise, and new evidence emerges that over 25% of our year 6 students are overweight or obese and that as few as one in five report to be moderately or vigorously physically active, now is the time to revitalise school sport and physical education in schools.

The ACT Government has been an enthusiastic supporter of physical education for school aged children. The ACT school policy includes mandated times for the provision of physical activity and I believe we need to make the most of these mandated periods.

In recent years we have focused on increasing the teaching of skill components through activities, games and resources. Teachers have developed their knowledge in areas such as Fundamental Movement Skills, Circus Arts, Dance and Sports Ability.

But the continuing lack of specialist physical education teachers in primary school is one faced at a national and international level. It is important that we continue to improve professional and learning support for teachers, particularly at the primary school level.

I am committed to providing a range of quality opportunities to encourage and support ACT schoolchildren to be physically active. As well as maintaining the range of current initiatives, the ACT Government will be renewing our commitment to sport in our schools.

This paper explores some of the issues surrounding physical education and sport in schools and outlines some initiatives to increase physical activity amongst school children.

With these initiatives, our community will continue to reap the benefits of high quality education and access to school sport and physical education.

As the only Minister in Australia to have responsibility for both the sport and education portfolios, I am keen to see the ACT take the lead in what I hope will be a national focus on the importance of this area in education.

The health benefits will be obvious, but high quality physical education is also about teaching students skills which can lead to improvements in other areas of education and life.

Sport in schools is about education – as much as it is about sport and the increase in sport and physical education we will see in our schools will be of benefit to the whole community.

Key points

National and International research highlights the importance of regular physical activity for children between the ages of five and 12.

This research shows physical activity promotes a child's healthy development, builds cardiovascular fitness and improves flexibility and motor skills. Inactive children are more likely to be overweight and suffer from health problems in later life, including cholesterol, high blood pressure and type II diabetes.

The ACT Government is committed to providing the children of Canberra with the best possible opportunities to become physically educated and active. By encouraging good habits from an early age children will be equipped with the skills they need to remain active and healthy throughout their lives.

The following principles guide the ACT Government's approach to enhancing physical activity opportunities for school children:

- Children benefit from at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.
- Quality physical education programs from preschool to year 6 lay strong foundations for lifelong participation in physical activity.
- In order to maximise children's commitment to lifelong physical activity, activity should be enjoyable to them, as well as develop their fundamental movement skills.
- Children benefit from being active at school, after school and on weekends.
- Schools must take a holistic approach to enhancing the health of students.

As part of its commitment to physically educated and active children, the ACT Government has strengthened the requirement for all schools to teach students, from preschool to year 10, to be physically skilled and active.

The ACT Government is also working in partnership with the Australian Sports Commission to develop physical activity in schools and school links with community through the national School Network and the Active After Schools Community Program

To further its commitment to encouraging physical activity in children, the ACT Government will also be supporting primary schools to deliver quality physical education and sport experiences through the following actions:

- Introducing a Minister's Physical Activity Challenge
- Strengthening the capacity of early childhood and primary school teachers to facilitate play-based activity and teach children fundamental movement skills
- Establishing a Children's Physical Activity Foundation, which will be championed by a Territory Patron and community ambassadors and provide support for government and non-government schools with sporting equipment and project assistance
- Strengthening partnerships between schools and the community to broaden opportunities for children to be physically active

This paper sets out the principles that guide the ACT Government's approach, and the practical commitment it has made, to strengthening physical activity opportunities for Canberra's school children.

Research

Students should spend at least 60 minutes a day in moderate to vigorous physical activity that is developmentally appropriate, enjoyable, and involves a variety of activities.¹

Across Australia there is growing recognition that regular physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. National and international researchers agree that regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence facilitates participation in an active lifestyle in adulthood and helps reduce the risk of chronic diseases in later life.

Children between the age of five and 12 years benefit in many ways from being physically active. Physical activity can:

- promote healthy growth and development
- develop and improve balance, flexibility and motor skills
- improve cardiovascular fitness
- help achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- improve posture
- provide opportunities to make friends and improve self-esteem.²

There is a growing body of evidence linking childhood physical activity with childhood health outcomes, which in turn, are known to influence health status during adulthood.³

Children who are not physically active are at risk of becoming overweight. This makes it harder for them to be active and more prone to other health conditions such as high blood pressure and cholesterol and Type II diabetes during adolescence and adulthood.

There is a growing body of evidence to show that children who do not have fundamental movement skills are less able and often less willing to persist with learning more complex skills and will avoid activities that expose them to failure.⁴ Children who do not enjoy and are not skilled at physical activity do not tend to pursue an active lifestyle.

The ACT Year 6 Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS)⁵ provides information, for the first time, on patterns of overweight and obesity, physical activity and nutrition for ACT children. Key findings indicate that:

- 25.8% of all children were categorised as being overweight or obese
- overweight children were more likely to show immediate physical health outcomes such as tiredness, breathlessness on exertion and heat intolerance. These children also suffered from poor self-esteem and body image and were more like to be teased and bullied
- only one in five year 6 children reported to be moderately to vigorously physically active for at least 60 minutes every day.

¹ *Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds*, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2004

² *ibid*

³ *Discussion paper for development of recommendations for children's and youth's participation in health promoting physical activity*. Prepared for Department of Health and Ageing by Stewart Trost PhD, The University of Queensland, 2005

⁴ *Fundamental Motor Skills Activity Resource for Teachers*, Department of Education, Victoria 1998

⁵ *Report on the 2006 Act Year 6 Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS)*, Population Health Research Centre Health improvement Division ACT Health, 2007

Principles

1. Children benefit from at least 60 minutes of moderate and vigorous physical activity every day.

- This activity need not happen in one session. It can be accumulated during the day by walking or riding to school, participating in physical education at school, active play at home and organised sport after school and on weekends.
- In ACT public schools, all students from kindergarten to year 2 must be provided with at least 20 – 30 minutes of physical activity per day, and students from years 3-10 must be provided with a minimum of 150 minutes per week, of moderate to vigorous physical activity through physical education and/or sport programs.

2. Quality physical education programs from preschool to year 6 lay strong foundations for lifelong participation in physical activity.

- Quality physical education and sport experiences as part of a school's curriculum enable students to develop positive attitudes to physical activity and lifelong habits of participation.
- Children need to be provided with opportunities for regular participation in vigorous physical activity during school time. In the primary school years it is especially important that fundamental movement skills are taught and that adequate time is given for children to practise in order to become proficient at these skills.
- The skills and confidence of classroom teachers in teaching physical education are critical if children are to achieve successful outcomes. Teachers in ACT schools are among the highest qualified and most capable in the country. In recognition that primary teachers are required to teach across all subject areas, extra support and professional learning will be provided to assist them to provide quality physical education programs.

3. In order to maximise children's commitment to lifelong physical activity, activity should be enjoyable to them, as well as develop their fundamental movement skills.

- Children need to have the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that are fun and suit their interests and abilities. School physical education programs provide opportunities for children to participate in challenging, engaging and enjoyable activities. These need to occur in a supportive and safe learning environment that gives all children an opportunity to reach their potential.
- Physical education programs provide opportunities for children to develop and master fundamental movement skills such as running, throwing, catching, kicking and jumping. Mastery of these fundamental movement skills by students is necessary for the development of higher-level skills and for their ability to participate successfully in a range of games, sports and other physical activities.

4. Children benefit from being active at school, after school and on weekends.

- As well as physical education lessons at school, children need to be provided with opportunities, and encouraged, to engage in physical activity outside of class times.
- Children will also benefit from opportunities to also be physically active after school. Sporting organisations provide a supportive environment, external to school, where young people can participate in physical activity.

- ACT Government agencies will work together and in partnership with community and sporting groups to promote and provide a range of physical activity programs for children.

5. Schools must take a holistic approach to enhancing the health of students.

- School physical education programs need to be complemented by health education programs, and supported by a whole-of-school approach to encouraging students to make positive food choices and to understand the relationship between activity, nutrition and a healthy lifestyle.
- From 2008, all ACT schools will be required to implement a new curriculum framework, *Every chance to learn*, for all preschool to year 10 students. All schools will be required to include essential content in their school curriculum plans to support students to take action to promote their health and well-being, to be physically skilled and active, and to be able to manage self and relationships.

The Government's commitment

The ACT Government is committed to providing a range of quality opportunities to encourage and support ACT schoolchildren to be physically active. As well as maintaining the range of current initiatives, such as strengthening the school curriculum and supporting after-school sporting programs, the ACT Government will take the following actions from 2008.

1. Introduce a Minister's Physical Activity Challenge

In 2008 all primary school students in the ACT will be invited to participate in the Minister's Physical Activity Challenge for the first time. The aim of the initiative is to encourage children to be physically active for at least 60 minutes each day.

All schools will be invited to participate and individual classes will take up the challenge. It will run for 10 weeks each year. There will be three levels of achievement, with all participants receiving some form of recognition and award at the end of the challenge. Equipment kits will be given to schools that successfully meet the challenge requirements.

2. Strengthen the capacity of early childhood and primary school teachers to teach children fundamental movement skills

From 2008, additional support will be provided to assist primary school teachers to deliver quality physical education experiences to their students. This support will include:

- professional learning programs delivered by specialist physical education teachers in the primary school setting. The focus of the professional learning programs will be on the teaching of fundamental movement skills
- expansion of the Australian School-based Apprenticeship program to include opportunities for senior students to undertake VET certificates in Sport and Recreation. These students could provide extra support for primary school teachers
- exploring ways to strengthen the support specialist physical education teachers in secondary schools can provide to their cluster primary schools.

3. Establish a Children's Physical Activity Foundation

The ACT Government will establish a Children's Physical Activity Foundation, which will provide support for schools with sporting equipment, community ambassadors and funding grants. Government, business and community groups will be invited to be members of the Foundation and to commit to supporting initiatives of merit to assist children to lead healthy, active lifestyles. The Foundation will work to promote physical activity to children and to coordinate the distribution of resources and additional support to schools.

A key aspect of the Foundation will be the Territory Patron and Community Ambassador program. High profile sporting figures will be invited to champion the initiative and to provide encouragement to schools, teachers, children and families through strong promotional messages.

Foundation funding will provide project assistance and support pilot initiatives and the development of good practice case studies across all schools in the ACT. The Foundation will also work to ensure initiatives are well evaluated to establish an evidence base for sustainability into the future.

4. Strengthen partnerships between schools and the community to increase opportunities for children to be physically active

Community links will be facilitated through closer links with Sport and Recreation Services and the Department of Education and Training.

Community-based sport and recreation programs and opportunities will be facilitated by Sport and Recreation Services. The range of opportunities through these projects to promote the strengthening of partnerships will include sport leadership training for student led activity in schools, skill development programs culminating in game play and accessible pathways into participation programs and local competitions.

Programs targeting culturally and linguistically diverse groups, children with a disability and Indigenous students will also be enhanced to ensure all primary aged children are provided opportunity to be physically active.