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Promoting awareness, knowledge of and compliance with the National Children's Physical Activity Guidelines

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Abstract

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Promoting awareness, knowledge of and compliance with the National Children's Physical Activity Guidelines

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Introduction: In Australia, public awareness of the physical activity (PA) guidelines for children is disturbingly low. This is one contributor to the fact that only 20% of school-aged children are sufficiently active and meet the recommended ≥ 60 min/day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. The release of the revised Australian Physical Activity Guidelines for Children (5–12 years) in February 2014 prompted the need for a different approach to actively engage children and parents to improve knowledge, attitudes and uptake of the new guidelines to improve child health and wellbeing.

Methods: A multi-component social marketing intervention to promote the PA guidelines was conducted in three pilot schools in a metropolitan city, informed by qualitative research with children, parents and teachers. The intervention promoted key benefits of PA (social and fun) and overcame target audiences' perceived barriers to uptake of the guidelines (inconvenient, expensive and difficult). Nine before-school events were held in three public schools, with up to 230 children at each event engaged in active games. Children took home active toys with tailored active homework and printed information for parents. The PA guidelines were also promoted at a community level via a radio advertisement, a website (www.activeeveryday.org.au), posters, brochures, and postcards distributed to community organisations. The school intervention was evaluated using a pre-post survey of parents at participating schools.

Results: Analysis of matched pre/post survey responses ($n=79$) found significant increases ($p<0.05$) in: parent awareness of the guidelines (from 24% to 59%), knowledge of guideline content (from 45% to 76%), mean scores for reported encouragement of their child to try a new physical activity (from 3.6 to 3.9); and decreases in mean scores for belief that being active for 60 min every day is difficult for children to achieve (from 2.5 to 2.2). Finally there was an overall increase in the mean number of days parents reported their child participated in at least 60min of physical activity (over the past seven days) from 4.3 to 4.7.

Discussion: The social marketing approach proved useful to select and research target audiences and to understand their perceived benefits of, and barriers/competition to, achieving the PA guidelines. The current pilot was successful in moving knowledge and experience of the PA guidelines from the school into the home (e.g. use of toys, trying of new skills, use of active homework) and into the practice of teachers (e.g. prescription of PA homework).