

The Healthy Living Network: addressing the gap in community-based obesity projects by supporting the development of evidence-based approaches and promotion via an online registration portal

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The recently published article ‘Community-based efforts to prevent obesity: Australia-wide survey of projects’¹ has generated a lot of interest and highlights that ‘effective approaches may go unrecognised due to lack of effective evaluations or limitations in program design, duration or size’.

The Healthy Living Network provides a mechanism that could assist in addressing this gap by: (i) supporting the development of quality healthy lifestyle programs, as well as (ii) being a vehicle for promoting evidence-based healthy lifestyle community-based initiatives.

The Healthy Living Network, funded by the Department of Health under the Healthy Communities Initiative, is an online portal of registered evidence-based healthy lifestyle programs that are aimed at addressing and preventing obesity and are searchable locally to community members via the portal’s directory.

All service providers and programs that are listed on this online portal have completed a rigorous self- assessment process and are then externally assessed by Quality Innovation Performance according to a quality framework before attaining registration. The criteria for assessment stipulates that programs must be evidence based and have evaluation integrated into program design. Programs and service providers that have undergone other quality assessment processes such as EQuIP are exempt from some of the requirements.

In addition, the Quality Framework can be used as a resource to assist in identifying, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating quality improvement initiatives relevant to healthy lifestyle programs,

which may help address the limitations in program design in Australian healthy lifestyle programs.

Service providers and programs listed on the site address one or more of healthy diet and/or increasing exercise at the community level. Successfully registered programs and service providers can then be searched by members of the community and health professionals who are seeking a quality assessed healthy lifestyle program in their local area.

Service providers, program facilitators, primary health care professionals or the general public who would like to access resources in planning an evidence-based community lifestyle program can undergo the registration process or locate an evidence-based healthy lifestyle program can do so here: <http://www.healthylivingnetwork.com.au/>

Although the program grants for healthy communities are now drawing to a close, it is still possible to register programs on the site. A new addition to the site will be the registration of programs implemented in the workplace setting that address: healthy eating, healthy weight, stop smoking, reducing alcohol consumption and increasing physical activity.

References

1. Nichols MS, Reynolds RC, Waters E, Gill T, King L, Swinburn BA, Allender S. Community-based efforts to prevent obesity: Australia-wide survey of projects. *Health Promot J Austr* 2013; **24**: 111–7. doi:10.1071/HE13001