

# Evaluation of a pilot school-based physical activity challenge for primary students.

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## **EVALUATION OF A PILOT SCHOOL-BASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CHALLENGE FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

**Issue addressed:** Physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour among children are growing public health concerns. The Culture Health Communities Activity Challenge (hereafter known as the Challenge) is a school-based pedometer program in which classes compete to achieve the highest class average daily steps in an 8-week period. The Challenge aims to encourage physical activity in primary school students, with a focus on engaging Aboriginal students. The program was piloted in 15 classes in New South Wales in 2014.

**Methods:** The evaluation aimed to explore students' and teachers' experiences of the Challenge, and assess its impact on the students' physical activity levels. Data sources were a pre- and post-intervention survey of students' physical activity levels and sedentary time ( $n=209$ ), qualitative interviews with teachers ( $n=11$ ) and discussions with 10 classes.

**Results:** Fifteen Year 5 and 6 classes comprising 318 students participated. Fifty percent of participants were girls, the average age was 11 years and the majority (57%) were Aboriginal students. Participation in the Challenge was associated with a slight but statistically significant increase in students' physical activity levels ( $P<0.05$ ), and a significant decrease in weekend screen time ( $P<0.05$ ). However, when stratified by Aboriginality these changes were not statistically significant for Aboriginal students. Qualitative feedback from teachers and students indicated high levels of engagement and satisfaction with the Challenge. Teachers and students reported positive impacts, including increased motivation to be physically active, and improved student attendance and engagement in class activities and teamwork.

**Conclusions:** Participation in the Challenge was associated with increased physical activity and decreased screen time for some students. Students and teachers also reported a range of positive social and educational outcomes.

**So what?:** The findings highlight the importance of primary schools as a setting for health promotion activities, and demonstrate that school-based physical activity programs can be engaging and appropriate for classes with high proportions of Aboriginal students.

**Key words:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, children, program evaluation.

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