

# 10,000 Steps Australia: a community-wide eHealth physical activity promotion programme

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## BACKGROUND TO THE PROGRAMME

The programme originated from a landmark whole-of-community multistrategy intervention designed to increase adult physical activity in the regional city of Rockhampton, Australian in 2001–2003.<sup>1</sup> The project used a social ecological framework, focusing on strategies that promoted physical activity at the individual, population, environmental and policy level. The two fundamental aspects of the programme are<sup>1</sup>: goal setting (10 000 steps per day) and<sup>2</sup> self-monitoring (the use of a pedometer to track daily step counts). A project website ([www.10000steps.org.au](http://www.10000steps.org.au)) allowed members to record their physical activity, and provided a platform for dissemination of project resources to workplaces and community groups.<sup>2,3</sup>

## WHY DOES IT WORK?

### The message is simple and clear

The project name, with its distinctive logo (Figure 1) and tagline ('every step counts') provide a clear and prescriptive target for the physical activity 'dose'.<sup>1,4</sup> The intervention encourages participants to establish their baseline daily steps, and gradually increase activity to achieve the 10 000 steps a day target. Considerable evidence supports the use of 10 000 steps per day as a target for healthy adults, with a focus on accumulation of steps throughout the day.<sup>5,6</sup>



Figure 1 10,000 Steps logo.

### Ongoing website development with resources to support implementation

The project website provides free access to a range of resources to facilitate the implementation and adoption of the project. One example is the 'Workplace Challenge' which encourages employees to form teams to complete a challenge (eg, accumulate more steps than other teams in 6 weeks). The accompanying 'Workplace Challenge Guide' shows how to: gain organisation-level support and approval; develop promotional strategies; and how to use the 10,000 Steps website to create a tailored workplace challenge. Between July and December 2016, 200 workplace challenges were started. They included 2004 teams with 13 920 members. Evaluations conducted for the project funder (Queensland Health) indicate that participation in the *Workplace Challenge* significantly increases the proportion of employees who report sufficient physical activity, engages employees who are at higher risk of chronic disease (eg, low active) and creates 'friendly competition' among employees, which keeps them engaged and motivated. Employees also frequently cite feeling supported by management to increase their physical activity during the challenge.

### Broad reaching and effective strategies are used to leverage social support

To engage individuals, the website provides a month-long individual challenge in the form of a 'virtual journey'. Participating members receive regular facts about the journey they are completing. Participating in these challenges increases engagement with the

website and increases physical activity.<sup>7</sup> Individual members can also opt in to the website's 'leader board' to compare their activity levels (steps) with those of other members. The programme uses social media (twitter: @10000Steps; Facebook: @10000Steps.1) to supplement its online reach and presence.

## WHAT ENABLED THE LONGEVITY OF THE PROJECT?

The online presence of the project is supported by staff who provide technical support, and engage in activities that contribute to the broader profile of the project (eg, marketing campaign, attending events, disseminating resources, media interviews). This two-pronged approach has contributed to the high levels of awareness (73.3% in 2014) of 10,000 Steps in Queensland, relative to other Australian public health campaigns.<sup>8</sup> Ongoing project evaluation strategies are also interwoven with service delivery practices. These evaluation activities, the success of the original project and the carefully managed partnership with Queensland Health have all contributed to the long-term (18+ years) continuous government support for the project. The longevity of this funding is remarkable for a state government funded project in comparison to the relatively short-term funding periods associated with many health promotion initiatives.

## WHY IS IT UNIQUE AND WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNT?

Throughout the life of the project, it has been important to be responsive to the changing technology landscape, and where appropriate use technology to enhance the project.

For example, the project was an early adopter of website technology (2001) to improve project reach, and also developed and integrated an accompanying smartphone app (2009) to expand project reach further. 10,000 Steps also integrated popular activity trackers (ie, Fitbit) into the website that can automatically sync steps with website and app (2017) in response to the growing popularity of these devices. A key aspect has been to maintain an online presence that is supported by project staff who implement project strategies, and who provide resources and support to help individuals and organisations overcome barriers to implementation and adoption of these strategies. It has also

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been important to seamlessly integrate programme delivery and evaluation, to enable routine collection of evidence that can be used to lever ongoing programme support.

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