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Active Launceston Evaluation

2013-2015

Summary Report

May 2016

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Key Messages

- Between 2008 and 2015 Active Launceston delivered 190 community programs, engaged 11, 887 attendees, attending 30, 342 sessions, amounting to 38, 088 hours of physical activity.
- An economic cost benefit analysis conducted by the Menzies Institute on the program since its inception in 2008 indicates that it has been very cost effective and a good return on investment. Using a Return on Investment of 1.61 (based on a meta-analysis of 51 studies) and a total investment of \$1.9 million from 2008 to 2015, the cost to deliver Active Launceston was \$160 per participant, and the estimated economic benefit and return of Active Launceston was \$416 and \$257 per participant respectively.¹
- Across the range of informants, there were more comments made about the community development benefits of Active Launceston than any other topic. People talked about the importance of community development for Launceston and how Active Launceston was a means to this end. It was considered to have been very successful in generating a high degree of interaction and community involvement, leading to a much closer and socially integrated community.
- Fifty-two percent of Active Launceston participants resided in the three most disadvantaged SEIFA quintiles in 2015 and over one-third had a health care card. Seventeen percent were born outside of Australia. This data indicates that engagement of low income and migrant groups has successfully been achieved.
- The randomised telephone surveys of the Launceston population which were conducted in 2008, 2012 and 2015 indicate that for those who reported participating in physical activity in the previous 12 months, the proportion of people who were sufficiently active for health (defined as 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week) significantly increased from 46.3% in 2008 to 53.5% in 2015.
- In 2015 general community awareness of Active Launceston and its key messages had doubled since 2008. Those who were aware of Active Launceston were significantly more likely to be sufficiently active than those who had no awareness of the program, suggesting a link between increased activity and Active Launceston's promotion of key physical activity messages. Of the 65.1% of people aware of Active Launceston in 2015, 16% had participated in at least one Active Launceston activity since the program's inception. These participants were more likely to be sufficiently active for health than were non participants.
- People who were aware of Active Launceston were 30% more likely to be sufficiently active for health than those who had no awareness of the program.
- The management team came in for considerable acclaim for being very proactive, focussed and consultative. Some informants talked about the team's strong connection with what is happening in the community, their ability to coordinate and leverage off other activities, their organisational skills, and their professionalism. Specific mention was made of their use of evidence based research and evaluation, community consultation and client feedback mechanisms. The composition of the Steering Committee was also praised for reflecting a diverse range of stakeholders.

¹ Si, Dr Lei; Palmer, Professor Andrew J. Report on the Cost Benefit of Active Launceston. Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, Unpublished paper, May 2016.

Introduction

The link between physical activity and health and wellbeing is now irrefutable. Regular participation in physical activity is known to reduce the risk of physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, some cancers and osteoporosis. Physical activity is also known to reduce stress, anxiety and depression and increase overall mental wellbeing. On the other hand, physical inactivity is recognised as a leading risk factor for morbidity and premature mortality.² This is a particular issue in Tasmania which has high levels of chronic conditions and poor overall health status compared with other Australian states and territories and where one third of the population does not undertake recommended levels of physical activity.³

Against this background, Active Launceston was developed in 2008 to improve the health and wellbeing of the Launceston community through physical activity. It is a community driven partnership initially funded through a Commonwealth Government 'Healthy Active Australia' grant and is one of the last projects from this funding that has continued to operate. Active Launceston, managed by the University of Tasmania, has received subsequent funding contributions from the University, Launceston City Council and the Tasmanian Government (which supported the program through Sport and Recreation during 2013 and the Tasmanian Health Service – Northern region during 2014/2015). The program seeks to mobilise the population of Launceston (approximately 110,000 people as of 2014) and increase their participation in physical activity by filling gaps in provision, creating pathways to existing opportunities, reducing barriers to participation, and targeting those with the greatest need. While Active Launceston works to increase physical activity in the community, it is a multi-faceted model that also aims to increase equity of access to physical activity pursuits and mitigate barriers linked to social determinants of health such as low income levels, cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, transport and place of residence.

Active Launceston is one of seven key partnerships that operate under the umbrella of Active Tasmania. Between 2008 and 2015 Active Launceston delivered 190 community programs, engaged 11, 887 attendees, attending 30, 342 sessions, amounting to approximately 38, 088 hours of physical activity. During the same time period, Active Tasmania delivered 360 programs, engaged with 15, 828 attendees who attended 43,107 sessions, resulting in 48,861 hours of healthy lifestyle activities.

This report focuses on Active Launceston during the 2013-2015 period and follows on from major evaluations of the program conducted in 2008 and 2012.

² WHO Physical Inactivity: a global public health problem. WHO, Geneva 2011.

³ Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines. Australian Government, Department of Health, February 2014.

Gathering the evidence

For Active Launceston, evaluation has been a high priority, both as an accountability mechanism and as part of an ongoing process of service adaptation and improvement. A process and impact evaluation strategy, designed to maximise data validation, has included the ongoing collection of participation statistics, demographic data, information about management processes and promotional activities, a randomised population telephone survey of the Launceston community, an online survey, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, student feedback, and ad hoc feedback from the public.

External consultants were contracted in late 2015 to conduct the randomised population telephone survey, and also to collect and analyse qualitative data and compile this summary report. Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the Tasmanian Health and Medical Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Active Launceston program and its participants

Active Launceston is modelled on international evidence that successful investments in physical activity are population based, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary programs that integrate community engagement and resources. While Active Launceston activities and events are open to all members of the public, the program combines this whole-of-population approach with specific targeting of groups such as those from low income communities, newly arrived migrants and refugees, youth at risk, people with chronic conditions and disabilities, those recovering from illness or injury, older people, and children. Fitness industry personnel and other private providers are contracted to facilitate activities and university students are co-opted to assist with coordination and delivery as part of their practical training experience.

Active Launceston is managed by a small team that sits within the University of Tasmania's Community Partnerships and Regional Development unit and is centrally-located in the Northern Integrated Care Service in Launceston. There, staff operate the Active Launceston Information Hub, enabling public access to information about the program and its activities. The team also have responsibility for other Active Tasmania initiatives. An Active Launceston Committee comprised of representatives from the university, government, community organisations and private providers meets twice per year. On the basis of data and feedback from participants and the community, the Committee determines the strategic direction of the program for the following year.

The program is supported by extensive marketing using radio, print, TV, web and social media to promote activities and events and also spread key messages about the benefits of physical activity. Active Launceston staff present at a wide variety of forums and share their knowledge and expertise with other communities through a capacity building process. The program supports new and existing physical activity providers and offers endorsement for others to use Active Launceston branding.

Between 2013 and 2015, Active Launceston delivered 42 community programs and engaged with 3,122 individual participants who attended a total of 12,640 sessions. In all, 11,603 hours of activity were provided. Most programs ran for 8 weeks. Participant numbers dropped between 2013 and 2014 by 12.2% (from 1,278 in 2013, to 1122 in 2014), then by 35.6% between 2014 and 2015 (from 1122 in 2014 to 722 in 2015). This was commensurate with greater targeting of programs to high needs groups (requiring more intense support) and a large decline in funding in 2015.

Over the 2013-15 period, participants ranged in age from 2 to 92 years, with the average age being 32 years. The gender balance favoured women over men, averaging 65:35 over the period, but with more effort to target men, this had improved to 60:40 in 2015. Fifty-two percent of participants resided in the three most disadvantaged SEIFA quintiles in 2015 and over one-third had a health care card. Seventeen percent were born outside of Australia. This data indicates that engagement of low income and migrant groups has successfully been achieved.

Active Launceston activities have been wide-ranging. All have been free of charge. Some, such as Active Parks and Active Swim, have been designed to breakdown social, geographic, cultural, and ability barriers; others have targeted older people and those with chronic conditions, disengaged young people, sedentary men, or young children and their families.

Endorsed events, programs and organisations grew from 89 in 2013, to 96 in 2014, and 102 in 2015. During this period, the program received two community achievement awards – the Medibank Private Active Tasmania Award, and the Premier’s Physical Activity Council Whole of Community Involvement Award in 2013. Lucy Byrne, Senior Project Manager, was also a finalist for the Telstra Business Woman of the Year Awards in 2015.

Participation data indicates that the program had a broad reach into the Launceston community during the 2013-15 period and was well-received. This contention is supported by data from the online survey (open to the general public), where 76.6% of respondents said that they either agreed or strongly agreed that Active Launceston had encouraged them to participate in community based physical events and programs, and 66.1% who agreed or strongly agreed that due to their involvement with the program their participation in physical activity had increased. Ninety-five percent (95%) agreed or strongly agreed that Active Launceston was well-managed and facilitated.

A 2015 telephone survey of 900 randomly selected people aged 15 years and over in the Launceston area indicated a high level of recognition of Active Launceston in the community with 65.1% of respondents being aware of the program. People who were aware of Active Launceston were also 30% more likely to be sufficiently active for health than those who had no awareness of the program.

For the University of Tasmania, Active Launceston has provided an avenue to actively contribute to the economic, social and cultural environment in Tasmania, to provide practical experience for students, and opportunities for community engagement, leadership, research and teaching. The program also contributed to the University through the establishment of a new unit of study, *Foundations for Active Living*, developed in conjunction with the Faculty of Health.

Economic analysis

An economic cost benefit analysis conducted by the Menzies Institute on the program since its inception in 2008 indicates that it has been very cost effective and a good return on investment. Using a Return on Investment of 1.61 (based on a meta-analysis of 51 studies) and a total investment of \$1.9 million from 2008 to 2015, the cost to deliver Active Launceston was \$160 per participant, and the estimated economic benefit and return of Active Launceston was \$416 and \$257 per participant respectively.⁴

The economic multiplier effect of Active Launceston is strongly supported by data. Active Launceston has engaged over 168 suppliers over the 2013-15 period, and has created business for 140 physical activity providers.⁵ It has also made a marked contribution to the social capital of the Launceston community.

2015 data analysis

A total of 1173 people contributed ideas and comments to the evaluation.

Key informants

Data to inform the evaluation came from the sources outlined below.

Four focus groups with Active Launceston participants were held – one, after an Active Swim group included several refugees; the second, after a Netball group, included several young people; the third, after an Active Bike session, was comprised mainly of middle years' men and women; and a fourth was comprised of women attending the Northern Suburb Community Centre. The groups ranged in size from 5 to 12 people, with a total of 33 participants in all. A questionnaire was used to guide free ranging discussion.

A total of 10 key stakeholders from funding agencies and partnership organisations were interviewed. Comments made by 143 of the 189 respondents to an online survey were analysed, as well as extended comments from 24 of the 55 students who had been placed with Active Launceston, and 63 letters and emails written by members of the public

⁴ Si, Dr Lei; Palmer, Professor Andrew J. Report on the Cost Benefit of Active Launceston. Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, Unpublished paper, May 2016.

⁵ In some instances the same provider may have been used on multiple occasions.

What Active Launceston does exceptionally well is introduce and welcome people to options that they might never otherwise be involved in.

Free or discounted is highly valuable, particularly for those of us on low incomes.

No one is flogging anything, it's just flogging a good lifestyle for our city.

They run the team very, very well. It's very professional.

Active Launceston plays a significant role in making exercise accessible, fun and achievable to residents of Launceston... It brings people together from all walks of life.

Their ability to have a really visible face in the community is remarkable. I think they have nailed it in terms of promotion.

regarding Active Launceston.

A randomised phone survey of 900 residents of Launceston was conducted in late 2015 (which had a maximum margin of error of +/-3.25% at the 95% confidence level).

Qualitative data from all informants was analysed to determine key themes, then re-analysed according to these themes.

Features of success

There were very few negative comments about Active Launceston. Most respondents gave it high praise. The fact that activities were free was a key feature for many people, particularly those on low incomes who were participating in programs. They said that the 'free taster' aspect enabled them to 'try before you buy' - helping them decide what activities suited them best and where they might channel future effort. Several respondents mentioned the non-commercial aspect of the Program - the fact that it was run by the University of Tasmania, Launceston City Council and the Tasmanian Government (Tasmanian Health Service) - as being important to its success.

The availability of activities in local areas, the range of activities on offer, and the flexibility of scheduling with a choice of days and times, were also features that people found attractive. The inclusive nature of the Active Launceston program in proactively engaging with people who had become disengaged with physical activity and had very low levels of confidence and skills, as well as people with disabilities and newly arrived migrants, was also frequently mentioned.

Facilitators were highly commended for their friendliness, motivational skills and professionalism, with many people stating how well planned and prepared the activities were. The facilitators were considered to be particularly good at catering for a range of abilities and taking good care of those who were tentative and less experienced. The Program Management team also came in for high praise for their ability to continually expand and diversify the program according to unmet needs in the community.

The success of the program in engaging the community of Launceston was also frequently mentioned both by program participants and other key stakeholders. People said that 'Active Launceston' has become a well-known and trusted brand in the community, indicating promotion and marketing strategies had been successful. Strategies noted ranged from word-of-mouth, to visually appealing pamphlets, to social media and TV advertising. Some people suggested that the Active Launceston messages have had a strong impact on the general population and that the sphere of influence of the key messages had extended well beyond those who had been direct participants in the program. These comments were supported by the telephone survey findings that indicated a high level of awareness of Active Launceston in the community (65.1% of respondents) and higher levels of physical activity among those who had heard of the program than among those who were unaware of it.

The benefits are very holistic – people recognising the value of movement and physical activity, prevention of chronic conditions, social and emotional benefits; people connecting with each other, finding new friendships.

It really challenges you and gets you out of the house and out of the rut...

Any ability was catered to, so you would see people with disabilities... it was great to see an inclusive environment. Everybody builds confidence and people help each other.

There are lots of things you may not do if it was left to yourself... If you look at it and think, 'Oh gosh, I'm 80, why would I abseil down the Gorge?' Well you just go and do it!

Active Launceston's role is to act as a catalyst to set something in motion that leads to ongoing benefits,

Benefits for participants

Direct physical health benefits of the Active Launceston program were frequently mentioned by informants to the evaluation. The telephone survey indicated that there has been a notable increase in vigorous physical activity in the community subsequent to the program's introduction. However, focus group participants were more inclined to comment on their increased knowledge and awareness of physical activity opportunities in the community, or on how their participation in Active Launceston activities had helped them to overcome personal barriers and move towards sustainable behavioural change. Some respondents talked about their chronic conditions and how Active Launceston had provided activities that were gentle enough to entice them back into exercise, with subsequent benefits in terms of balance, muscle tone, strength, coordination and mobility. Prior to Active Launceston they had struggled to find suitable activities in the community.

Other barriers that Active Launceston had helped people to overcome were 'being overweight and slow', feeling unsafe when exercising alone, lack of transport to city based activities, needing an incentive to get out in winter, and potential exposure 'to awful loud music and a gym environment.'

Involvement in Active Launceston had helped people to feel more included in their community. Social connectedness was one of the main benefits of Active Launceston mentioned by both stakeholders and focus group participants. Some of the focus group participants talked about people they knew whose only social connection with others was through the Active Launceston activity. Others mentioned their move out of the workplace and into retirement when 'identity and meaning in life' had fallen off, and how they felt welcomed and valued in the group, found new networks, connections and experiences. Some participants particularly valued the connection with people that they would not normally have had the opportunity to engage with, such as new migrants, people with disabilities, and people from different age cohorts.

Interestingly, one of the few negative comments made about the Active Launceston program was a perceived 'obligation to socialise' with people a participant had 'little in common with' and that required him to 'watch his Ps and Qs so as not to unintentionally offend'.

While mental health issues were seldom mentioned directly, people talked in very positive terms about increased levels of self-confidence and self-worth. This had resulted from exposure to new experiences and the discovery that they could do something that they had never imagined themselves capable of doing, such as abseiling or bicycling. Some mentioned that they had re-gained joy in life – that they felt 'really alive and thriving'. Many said that after their Active Launceston activity had finished, they were much more confident to go out by themselves and try something new.

The success of Active Launceston in promoting sustainable behavioural change was a theme across all groups of respondents.

physical, social and psychological.

Active Launceston supports and enhances the building of a healthy, vibrant Launceston community.

It is programs like these that foster a sense of community and encourage active and purposeful citizens within our beautiful city.

I love how it creates a community feeling and safe places in Launceston. It promotes that it's a place where people care about health and wellbeing.

There's a mob of people like me [who don't do sports] and now I am getting benefit from the Council too.

That's probably where they've had one of their larger impacts – their

The phone survey indicated that people that had either heard about the program, or who had engaged in its activities were more likely to maintain a physically active lifestyle. Other informants commented on the value of having the initial structure of Active Launceston, which engaged them in physical exercise and made them feel better, spurring them on to further activity'. Some mentioned more far-reaching 'health gains' in the areas of mental health, nutrition, and the flow-on of knowledge and behaviours to families and how they raise their children. Several groups had continued to organise themselves and meet beyond the duration of the 'taster'.

Benefits for the Launceston community

Across the range of informants, there were more comments made about the community development benefits of Active Launceston than any other topic. People talked about the importance of community development for Launceston and how Active Launceston was a means to this end. It was considered to have been very successful in generating a high degree of interaction and community involvement, leading to a much closer and socially integrated community.

One focus group respondent said that she had proudly worn her Active Launceston hat interstate and overseas and, when people enquired about it and she described the Program, they had expressed considerable envy as their cities did not provide any such opportunities. Another mentioned that her friends in Hobart were amazed that Launceston offered so many activities and she loved 'the fact that it's a one up on Hobart'.

Those who participated in the northern suburbs group talked about being able to change people's perceptions of that area as a result of Active Launceston – of giving people the opportunity to find out what the northern suburbs can offer and the good things happening there.

Active Launceston was generally regarded as having been very successful in targeting the needs of the Launceston community. Informants referred to the way the Program was constantly evolving and diversifying in response to community needs. One example noted was 'Active Blokes' that had been developed when it became evident that participation of men was well below that of women. Other programs had been specifically marketed to people living in low income communities or newly arrived migrant groups. Refugees participating in the Active Swim program expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to learn life-saving skills that they could then pass onto their children. Several people discussed the fact that programs were accessible by people who were not into organised sports and therefore missed out on the benefits of Launceston's premier sporting facilities.

Some of the stakeholders complimented the program management on their ongoing strategic planning and evaluation, enabling the Program to be continually fine-tuned in response to community needs.

awareness-raising and their networking with the different providers.

They've been very good at opening up options for other providers. There has been a growth in other personal trainers...

I think Active Launceston has been a good, constant reminder of the value of physical activity.

What Active Launceston provides is alternative and ongoing options for physical activity for the patients who come through to our services...

Through programs such as Active Launceston we can help people not only live longer, healthier lives but also ease the pressure on our hospitals and our hard-pressed health budgets.

Given the epidemic we are facing with childhood obesity and the need to look to the future health of our older community members, the activities provided are invaluable.

The nominal amount of funding provided is surely more preferable than the huge dollars currently being

The Active Launceston program was generally regarded as having made people much more aware of facilities in the Launceston community such as bike tracks, parks and running tracks, as well as commercial fitness venues and programs. While there had initially been some concern in the community that the program might take clients away from private providers, there was no indication that this had occurred. Rather, several people suggested that all the awareness-raising and community networking that Active Launceston had generated had increased business for private providers and had opened up opportunities for new ventures. The 'come and try' aspect of the program had increased public awareness of what was available locally. Active Launceston was claimed to have been very good at 'working in the gaps' and focusing on those areas rather than duplicating anything that was already on offer in the community. Several private providers commented on the benefits that they had received from Active Launceston in terms of connection with new clients, promotion of their businesses, and the opportunity to become involved in community programs and develop new networks within the fitness industry.

Benefits for the Tasmanian health system

There were many comments, especially in letters submitted to Local and State Government about the program, referring to its benefits for the health system in promoting good health in the community and deflecting people away from the health system, particularly the expensive acute sector. Some of the stakeholders and many of the letter-writers were health workers who made regular referrals to the program as it provided their patients with ongoing and sustainable means to counter their health problems. GPs talked about the benefits of the program for a broad range of patients, including 'those with chronic conditions, the elderly, busy workers, disadvantaged children and families'. Others specifically mentioned its benefits for people with diabetes, kidney problems, age-related deterioration, neurological disorders, and obesity-related issues. One informant, who worked in the Launceston General Hospital, had promoted the program among her staff as by doing so, she 'was investing in their future health and also in the hospital'.

A mental health service provider commented on their limited capacity to address the physical health needs and isolation of their client group. They valued the opportunity to refer clients to Active Launceston, as the activities offered a welcoming, safe, supportive and inclusive environment which engaged their clients in healthy lifestyle choices, while also building a more inclusive community.

People commented on the cost-benefits of the program, considering the costs to be far outweighed by benefits in terms of positive health outcomes. They saw the program as being a very worthwhile investment for local, state and federal governments.

Benefits for the University of Tasmania and its students

The benefits for the University were regarded as being two-fold: getting their brand out in the community in a low key, friendly

spent by State and Federal governments on health issues.

In a relatively low key, friendly way, it starts to build people's awareness of the University of Tasmania.

Active Tasmania has given me a wide range of valuable experiences and learning opportunities to kick-start my chosen career.

I think they're very astute and very good at what they do... I am constantly impressed with the ingenuity of the Manager.

We believe Active Launceston performs an important role and is a great outreach activity [for UTAS]

way; and providing practical, 'real-life' experience for their students.

People in the community who participated in activities facilitated by students received exposure to the University and a 'taste' of courses available through the Faculty of Health.

Students involved in facilitating activities were generally very enthusiastic, finding the experience very positive, challenging and fun. Benefits were far-reaching. One mentioned his exposure to language and cultural differences and how he would use this knowledge in future when teaching diverse groups; another mentioned the reward of witnessing the growing confidence of newly arrived migrants.

Other student 'learnings' included leadership skills; working with people with disabilities; planning, time-management and organisational skills; communicating with children and parents; knowledge of the different motivators for different people; and working with groups with very diverse ranges of abilities requiring the student to regress and progress exercise levels in accordance with these abilities. One student noted his 'behind-the-scenes' experience in data entry, promotion of activities, and organising focus groups. The mentoring students received from their 'very approachable and supportive supervisors' was also highly valued.

Governance and management

The connection of Active Launceston to both Launceston City Council and the University of Tasmania was considered by some focus group participants and stakeholders to be a very positive aspect of the program, giving it strength and legitimacy in the community. However, in their role as key funder, there was some questioning by University staff of the program's 'fit' within the University – whether it should continue to be governed within Community Partnerships and Regional Development or sit within a specific faculty - and how it measured up in the face of competing priorities. One stakeholder commented on reduced support from government as a 'very sad thing'. Several people suggested that the program ought to be funded and supported within the health sector, particularly given the Tasmanian Government's goal 'to make Tasmania the healthiest population in Australia by 2025'.

The management team came in for considerable acclaim for being very proactive, focussed and consultative. Some informants talked about the team's strong connection with what is happening in the community, their ability to coordinate and leverage off other activities, their organisational skills and professionalism. Specific mention was made of their use of evidence based research and evaluation, community consultation and client feedback mechanisms. The composition of the Steering Committee was also praised for reflecting and engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders.

They're running this stuff on a shoestring.

Projects such as Active Launceston need long-term consistent funding to achieve the cultural change that's needed.

Coordination is always difficult because you can't always find the right location and the perfect timeslot to suit everyone.

Challenges

By far the biggest challenge facing Active Launceston was considered to be its dwindling funding base and the need for sustainability into the future. Reduced funding from the Tasmanian Government in 2016 was foreseen to have a very negative impact on the program and its reach into the community. Some informants, including those from low income communities, had valued their involvement to the extent that they had tried to make online donations to the program, but reported that the process had been somewhat complicated and unwieldy.

Other challenges related to access – when and where to offer activities, and for how long. Responses from the focus groups and online respondents indicated that it was not possible to please everyone in terms of timeslots and locations. Some people would have liked activities to continue for longer, while others understood the ‘taster’ nature of the program and saw value in participants assuming responsibility for organising themselves. One group who had gone down this path had found though, that all the paperwork and legal requirements of self-managed activities were a real impediment – for example, the need for First Aid certificates and police checks when ‘you just wanted to have a kick around with a few blokes for a couple of hours.’

Two complaints about the program related to a lack of immediate response to telephone enquiries, perhaps reflecting a lack of understanding of the limited resourcing available for program management.

Gender balance and diversity were also issues raised by some program participants. Men were less likely to attend non gender-specific programs than were women, though the Active Blokes activities had a strong following. While the program’s success in achieving diversity in terms of race, ability, and social grouping was praised by many, one dissenter from this view complained that everyone in her group was ‘anglo’.

One stakeholder referred to some views he had heard expressed in the community that the program had ‘passed its use-by date’ and was no longer reaching its target audience. He named this up as a constant challenge for the program – one in which he said it was not alone, as ‘if it were that easy, Tasmania would not have some of the worst health statistics and low levels of physical activity in the nation.’

Informant recommendations

Not surprisingly, given the level of support among informants for the program, the most frequent recommendation was to keep Active Launceston going, with appropriate and recurrent funding. Primary targets for ongoing base funding were considered to be the Tasmania Government and Launceston City Council. Some people called on the Council to increase funding, referring to the amount of money the Council allocates to the Aurora Stadium which ‘supports a limited few’ as

Just keep it going, funded and supported. A fabulous initiative!

Just bloody fund Active Launceston – healthy people save the community money.

Just MORE! More events would be brilliant!

I would prefer a midday Active Parks on Mondays.

It's a model that should be grabbed and rolled out throughout Australia.

That's where the money and the focus should be – for us to continue.

compared with Active Launceston which they perceived as having a broader reach and being better value for money. There were several well-meaning suggestions about gold coin and online donations and the need to facilitate these processes. An online respondent suggested that local business leaders could be invited to become ambassadors for the program and make contributions.

There were lots of recommendations, particularly from online survey respondents, relating to scheduling of activities, and pleas for particular programs to be reintroduced, to continue, to be run more often, or to be extended for a longer time period. Active Dance, Active Parks (particularly Yoga and Tai Chi), GOLD, Active Bike, Zumba, Active Walk Run and Active Aqua received special mention. Other activities recommended for inclusion were skateboarding (targeting young people), active games, table tennis, tenpin bowling and rollerblading.

A number of informants wanted groups to be split into ability levels. This would, however, run contrary to one of the aspects of activities that others particularly liked - their inclusiveness of all levels of ability. Some suggested more targeted activities for people from diverse groups – young people, people with disabilities, migrants, disadvantaged children, and people from low socio-economic areas being named up.

Launceston informants felt privileged to have access to the program, and proposed that it be extended to rural communities (especially those with low health status indicators) or throughout Tasmania, or to the rest of Australia. Several people from outside Launceston wanted the program to be implemented in their areas of residence. One person suggested that Active Launceston staff could work from a Neighbourhood House in order to more fully connect at the grassroots community level.

Some focus group participants and online respondents wanted more support for groups to continue under their own steam when they were no longer being organised by Active Launceston. One group proposed that they be given the opportunity to post details of ongoing meeting times and places on the Active Launceston Facebook site, while another wanted Active Launceston to help with First Aid training, police checks and other requirements for self-managed groups and activities.

Progress analysis

Among 2015 phone survey respondents:

- *Awareness of Active Launceston had doubled since 2008.*
- *People who were aware of Active Launceston were more likely to be sufficiently active for health than were those who were unaware of the program.*
- *People who had participated in at least one Active Launceston activity were more likely to be sufficiently active for health than were those who had never participated.*
- *For those who reported participating in physical activity in the previous 12 months, the proportion of people who were sufficiently active for health had steadily increased since 2008.*

The randomised telephone surveys of the Launceston population which were conducted in 2008, 2012 and 2015⁶ indicate that for those who reported participating in physical activity in the previous 12 months, the proportion of people who were sufficiently active for health (defined as 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week) has significantly increased from 46.3% in 2008 to 53.5% in 2015. Those who were aware of Active Launceston were 30 % more likely to be sufficiently active than those who had no awareness of the program, suggesting a link between increased activity and Active Launceston promotion of key physical activity messages. In 2015 general community awareness of Active Launceston and its key messages had doubled since 2008. Of the 65.1% of people aware of Active Launceston in 2015, 16% had participated in at least one Active Launceston activity since the program's inception. These participants were 44% more likely to be sufficiently active for health than were non-participants.

It is of interest that, while the 2015 phone survey indicated that moderate physical activity in the general population of Launceston had decreased since 2008, vigorous physical activity significantly increased in both 2012 and 2015 compared with 2008. While it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between the Active Launceston program and this increased activity, qualitative data suggests that a correlation exists and it seems reasonable to infer that increased exposure to the key messages of Active Launceston as well as increased participation in 'taster' activities has resulted in some long term behavioural change.

Qualitative analyses of the program that were conducted in 2008, 2012 and again in 2015 indicate that the features of success for the program and its benefits and challenges have been consistent over the years. People have very much valued the free 'taster' sessions and their appeal to those who have previously been disengaged with physical activity, the flow-on physical and mental health benefits, and the social aspects of the program. Promotion of the program and the skills of facilitators have also been praised over the years. While social connectedness and community development were recognised outcomes in the earlier evaluations these emerged as major themes in 2015, indicating increased penetration of the program into the social fabric of the Launceston community. This has resulted from successful marketing and promotion of the program and its key 'Get Active' messages, as well as its progressive reach into more marginalised communities such as those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, those with disabilities, or those living in low socio-economic areas. The program also appears to have been successful in strengthening the capacity of the local fitness industry. The benefits of the program for the health sector and for the University of Tasmania have also been emphasised in the most recent evaluation.

⁶ EMRS. Active Launceston Initiative Research Report, May 2016.

- *Of those who reported participating in physical activity in the last 12 months, the proportion who engaged in vigorous physical activity significantly increased in both 2012 and 2015 compared to 2008.*

The cost-benefit analysis conducted by the Menzies Centre indicated that over the life of the program (from 2008 to 2015) an investment of almost \$1.9 million from various sources has had an economic benefit of \$4.9 million, or \$416 per capita, indicating that it has been very cost-effective.

Funding and future sustainability have continued to be the key challenges facing the program, particularly in the 2015 evaluation which was conducted at a time of depleting public resources and major funding cuts. A considerable amount of effort has been expended by program management promoting the program, lobbying governments and other potential sponsors and trying to secure recurrent funding. Should additional funding sources not be forthcoming, providing more with less will be a significant challenge for the future, especially given the extra resourcing required to reach more marginalised groups.

Other challenges continue to be fine-tuning the program and meeting community expectations regarding the types, location and scheduling of activities on offer and their continuity, with some participants perhaps not understanding the 'taster' aspect of the program and wanting sessions to run indefinitely.

Discussion

Over the past eight years the Active Launceston program has grown from a fledgling idea and pilot project into a large-scale community development enterprise with a significant profile in the Launceston community. It is an evidence-based program that has proved to be highly successful in fulfilling its potential to increase physical activity in the Launceston area and has also had significant flow-on benefits for its major funders - Launceston City Council, the University of Tasmania and the Department of Health and Human Services (now the Tasmanian Health Organisation) in terms of community development, social integration, student learning, health promotion and improved health and wellbeing. It has led to the establishment of Active Tasmania and several other component projects under this umbrella. Given sufficient resourcing, Active Tasmania has the potential to increase momentum and expand the reach of Active Launceston to the whole of Tasmania and significantly alter the poor health profile of the State, reducing rates of preventable chronic disease in Tasmania, while also strengthening communities and enhancing their social and economic wellbeing.

Partnership programs such as Active Launceston can be highly successful, with individual contributions and input adding up to economies of scale that achieve much more than can be gained through individual effort, and contributing organisations all gaining traction and acclaim. However, a major issue with partnership programs that cross traditional portfolios is that when funding is tight all partners may back off, claiming that the program is not 'core business'. For the benefits of Active Launceston for the Tasmanian population to be fully realised, it needs ongoing commitment and investment from all partners, strategic leadership from government, and extension to other areas of Tasmania.

The Tasmanian Government, when it came into office in 2014, set a goal that Tasmania would be the healthiest population in Australia by 2025. This goal is further articulated in the Government's 'Healthy Tasmania – Five Year Strategic Plan – Community Consultation Draft (December 2015). Physical activity features strongly in

this discussion paper as a leading preventative measure to tackle risk factors for chronic disease and ill-health, with five of the eleven potential future initiatives outlined in the paper referring to physical activity. Active Launceston would provide an excellent community-driven model for local health promotion programs that could fit within a preventive health commissioning approach and be responsive to local needs, circumstances and capacity.

Active Launceston's umbrella organisation, Active Tasmania, received specific mention in the Parliament of Tasmania's Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Preventative Health Report, released in March 2016. The program fits well within several of the Committees recommendations, particularly those calling for increased investment and recurrent base funding for effective preventative health programs, and recognition of the importance of active lifestyles, healthy eating and physical activity to improving the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians. Active Tasmania, with its multi-sector adaptive modelling, would be a suitable program for a 'Health in all Policies' approach, addressing the social determinants of health.

It seems logical that by providing recurrent funding to Active Launceston to maintain its momentum and support its extension throughout the state via Active Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government could readily progress its agenda to improve the health of Tasmania as well as furthering 'Tasmania's Plan for Physical Activity 2011–2021'. Leadership by the Tasmanian Government in this area would go a long way to ensure that the University of Tasmania and Launceston City Council commit to ongoing support for Active Launceston and that other local governments and organisations are enticed to engage in future Active Tasmania partnerships.

Recommendations below further articulate these ideas.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Tasmanian Government, as part of its goal to make Tasmania the healthiest population in Australia by 2025, commit recurrent base funding to Active Launceston and Active Tasmania and work with the University of Tasmania to progressively adapt and extend the Active Launceston model to other communities throughout Tasmania.
2. Active Tasmania be supported by the Tasmanian Government as part of a comprehensive preventative health strategy for Tasmania.
3. Launceston City Council commit to long term funding of Active Launceston as an integral part of its community development activities.
4. In planning future programs, Active Launceston consider suggestions made by informants to the evaluation regarding scheduling of activities, extension or modification of existing activities, the development of more activities for people from diverse groups, and the provision of some level of ongoing support to enable groups to continue under their own steam.
5. Active Launceston and Active Tasmania continue efforts to promote the programs and secure an ongoing recurrent funding base.