



Sustained impact of community-based physical activity interventions:

Key elements for success

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BACKGROUND

Compelling research evidence supports the role of physical activity in chronic disease prevention and health promotion. However, the quality of this evidence is only one piece and certainly not the sole determinant of whether public health interventions achieve their full potential for impact. A number of factors influence the uptake and impact of community-based research.

WHAT WE DID

We evaluated lessons learned from two successful research initiatives to provide insights on how health promotion research contributes to sustained impact of research findings. The two research initiatives used for this analysis were the Action Schools! BC and Active Streets, Active People. We compared the steps taken to develop and implement these research initiatives to our literature review findings which included 74 articles related to health intervention research impact.

KEY FINDINGS

In both the Action Schools and Active Streets, Active People research initiatives, three specific elements were in place which facilitated their success and sustained impact:

RESEARCH WITH IMPACT

ACTION SCHOOLS! BC: an elementary and middle school-based physical activity health promotion model which aimed to provide more opportunities for students to make healthy choices more often. The results of program showed increased physical activity, cardiovascular fitness and other health-related outcomes. The model encouraged buy-in by principals, teachers and parents; political will and public interest assisted in the resonance of the model.

ACTIVE STREETS, ACTIVE PEOPLE: a neighbourhood-based study aimed to describe the association between the social and built environments and older adult physical activity and health. It capitalized on a 'natural experiment' where major infrastructure investments were being made by the City of Vancouver to develop a greenway to encourage physical activity, active transportation and social connectivity. The research team collected mobility, health and social data from 193 older adult participants using mixed method approaches with a pre-/post-design between 2012-2014.

1. Each research initiative took a **social ecological approach**, recognizing the role of individual, community, and societal level in the problems that were being addressed. By appropriately engaging stakeholders at each level, the findings have the potential for greater impact and traction.
2. Both research initiatives applied **participatory action research** methods, ensuring that the stakeholders were fully involved in the model/study design. At every stage of the research and implementation process, communication of key issues and concerns of stakeholders were acknowledged and addressed.
3. The assembly of an interdisciplinary team facilitated the **sustained impact** and success of each research initiative. Interdisciplinary teams are positioned to take more holistic, integrated approaches to complex issues. Collaborators with diverse training backgrounds and expertise lend themselves to a more expansive perspective and collective wisdom.

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

The solution for physical inactivity will not be singular or simple as it is a challenging issue with diverse, changing, and context-specific factors of influence. Complex problems require processes, tools and teams that are attuned to these conditions. Thus, to sustain and maximize the impact of community-based public health interventions in school and neighbourhood environment settings we emphasize that key factors for success are: relationship building at individual, community, and societal levels of the social ecological model; using participatory action research methods; and involving an engaged and committed interdisciplinary team. Drawing on this framework will contribute to the sustained impact of research on health behaviour outcomes.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

If you are interested in learning more about our study, please contact Callista Haggis at callista.haggis@hiphealth.ca

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KEY TERMS

SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODELS address the interaction and interdependency between individuals, multiple settings (e.g. home, school) and levels (e.g. local government, family) that influence behaviour.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH mobilizes community partnerships and engages stakeholders early and across phases of research to ensure opportunities to invest in research design, questions and outcomes.

SUSTAINED IMPACT is the implementation of an evidence based program or policy that has lasting influence on health promoting behaviour.



Action Schools! BC

ASAP

active streets // active people



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