

Local population health measures to prevent obesity (role of MLs)

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In addition to the role that individual clinicians (GPs, nurses, allied health, Aboriginal Health Workers etc) can play, Medicare Locals can make an important contribution at the local level to preventing obesity. A framework has been developed to assist primary health care organisations to approach preventive health care and health promotion [1]. This is based on an understanding of the importance of factors in organisational, social and environmental context in creating health and implementing prevention. It underlines the importance of local partnerships between health services and a range of other organisations including local, state and national government bodies, schools, community groups, media and business.

Approaches to improving the health of communities are most effective when they involve local communities and are tailored to local needs. These strategies have been shown to be effective in increasing access to skills and resources that enable people to adopt more health promoting lifestyles and improve health literacy about how maintain a healthy weight and prevent weight gain [2]. Together with public health and health promotion units, as well as with other sectors such as local councils, Medicare Locals have a role in working with industry and community organisations to create supportive environments that promote health. This includes both the physical and the social aspects of our surroundings where people live, their local community, their home and the built environments within which they live, work and play. For example Medicare Locals are working with local councils and their Healthy Communities Initiative to establish exercise referral programs and facilities for physical activity. Others have seized opportunities to work with programs in schools, preschools and child care centres to promote healthy diet and physical activity such as the 'Romp and Chomp' program for preschool children.

Communities can be supported to work together to prevent illness and promote health [3]. This is particularly important in prevention with

disadvantaged populations. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention program WISEWOMAN successfully developed partnerships between clinical services and NGOs (such as the heart and stroke foundations), local government and local community organisations (including church groups) in the delivery of preventive programs[4]. This has allowed the programs to reach those most in need, and helped to ensure the programs have sustained for almost two decades.

References

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