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Most active nation-how walking contributes to SPARC's goal of being the most active nation

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Abstract

SPARC (Sport and Recreation NZ) was established in 2002 to promote, encourage and support physical activity and sport in New Zealand. A crown entity, SPARC seeks to adopt a whole of government approach that emphasises collaborative and coordinated strategies across sectors.

Almost all New Zealand adults (98% or around 2.67million) enjoy some sport and active leisure over the year. 39% of adults are active for 30 minutes a day on five or more days per week (these people most closely meet the physical activity guidelines of being regularly active).

Walking is the main physical activity New Zealanders do in their leisure time with 61% of men and 81% of women "strutting their stuff". Walking is the most popular activity for all ethnic groups although it is more popular with European and Pacific adults than Maori adults or adults from other ethnic groups. Across the age groups walking again dominates as a preferred form of activity until 65 years plus when it comes second to gardening.

This presentation will describe how SPARC has encouraged the growth of walking through:

- Green Prescriptions-the GP referral scheme where about 80% of the referrals are for walking particularly for patients with weight issues, heart disease risk factors and for smoking cessation.
- Push Play-the social marketing campaign that encourages walking for fun and fitness
- Sponsorship of walking events (e.g. Walking events at NZ Masters Games)
- Resource development to encourage walking as a form of activity
- Partnerships with health agencies such as the National Heart Foundation and Diabetes NZ during awareness weeks.
- Whole of community interventions where walking is one tool to encourage community activity, often in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies. These interventions cover a wide spectrum from 10,000 steps programmes to the formation of formalised walking groups.
- Collaborative approach to developing strategy for walking with other government agencies.

- Working with national recreation organisations to ensure the culture of walking is transferred from a leisure time activity into a mode of transport.

Biography

Diana O'Neill, SPARC (Sport and Recreation NZ)

Diana is Senior Advisor-Health for SPARC (Sport and Recreation NZ) having been transferred from the Hillary Commission in 2001. During her years with the Hillary Commission, Diana had several roles including working in the areas of play education, masters and veterans sport, people with disabilities and older adults.

Liaison with the health sector (Ministry of Health and health agencies) is Diana's main role now and since 1997 she has had responsibility for the exercise referral scheme Green Prescriptions.

Diana has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and Sociology and a Masters of Arts Applied in Recreation and Leisure.

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What is SPARC?

SPARC (Sport and Recreation NZ) is a Crown entity established in 2002 and encompassing policy, investment and service roles. SPARC is supported at the regional level by 17 regional sports trusts who deliver initiatives under contract to achieve the key goal of "most active nation". The sports trusts are an essential part of the community based delivery system of many of SPARC's programmes including the social marketing campaign Push Play.

What is a Green Prescription (GRx)?

Green Prescriptions are a way to improve the health of New Zealanders. They increase levels of physical activity in a section of the population currently considered by General Practitioners to be 'inactive' (less than 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week). GRx is New Zealand's only GP referral scheme and has been nationwide since 1998. It is part funded by NZ's Pharmaceutical Management Agency (Pharmac).

General Practitioners and practice nurses issue GRx to patients who have stable medical conditions and will benefit from increased physical activity. Such medical conditions include hypertension, obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, anxiety and depression. Patients with unstable medical conditions are excluded from the GRx programme through the risk assessment process.

Green Prescriptions is a starter programme. Doctors and nurses encourage inactive patients to embark on safe and appropriate physical activity which can be carried out in their own environment and at little or no cost. Patient compliance and health gains are monitored at regular intervals.

Green Prescriptions acknowledges the health message of the US Surgeon-General that an accumulated 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, preferably every day, will improve the health of most people. Patients can "snack" on activity, for example, three ten - minute walks instead of one thirty minute walk.

Research undertaken by Dr Raina Elley et al. and Waikato general practices and published in the British Medical Journal, April 2003, indicates that GRx increases physical activity levels and improves quality of life, without evidence of adverse effects.

Getting New Zealanders Pushing Play

The Push Play social marketing campaign is now in its seventh year. This year it has been extended from a one-day event in November to Push Play Nation – for the month of October.

Television advertisements started screening 17 September in preparation for the month long festival culminating in Push Play Day on Friday 3 November.

Well known media, arts and sporting celebrities are used as role models and "activators", featuring in the television advertisements and on the Push Play website. This year viewers are urged to "join Maggie's' walking group" led by Maggie Barry radio and television presenter and gardening expert.

Resource development

Resources are used to reinforce walking as an easy, low cost physical activity in Green Prescriptions and Push Play. The walking leaflet is the most popular of SPARC's physical activity resources with approximately 50,000 distributed per year.

A six week walking programme chart is also a popular resource with GPs and practice nurses to encourage Green Prescription patients to incorporate walking into their lives. The chart has also been translated into Maori. Resources promoting walking have also been developed in conjunction with the National Heart Foundation and Diabetes NZ for use during their awareness weeks.

NZ Master Games Push Play walks

As well as Push Play Days the Push Play message is promoted throughout the year through community events and activities organised by the 17 regional sports trusts and other community based organisations.

For the past four years SPARC sponsorship of the NZ Masters Games has been used to promote Push Play 5km, 10km and ½ marathon walks. The NZ Masters Games are held every February and alternate between Wanganui in the North Island of NZ and Dunedin in the South Island. These events attract large numbers of participants aged 35-80 years plus. In 2006 the Dunedin Games event had the following number of walkers taking part.

Table 1 Push Play Walks

Event	Total Entries	Male	Female	Age Range
5km Walk	379	67	312	F – 30-91yrs M – 31-83yrs
10km Walk	412	66	346	F – 30-89yrs M - 32-83yrs
½ Marathon Walk	149	35	114	F – 30-76yrs M – 31-72yrs
Totals	940	168	772	

Active Communities

Territorial local authorities are encouraged to apply to SPARC for Active Communities investment for initiatives to motivate their communities to get active. Stepping Out and City on its Feet are two Active Communities projects.

Stepping Out

The 'Stepping Out' walking project, which has captured the attention of the Northland public is considered to be the first truly collaborative health promotion physical activity project in the Northland region.

The project received a two year \$NZ225,000 investment from SPARC through their Active Communities scheme, but also includes financial and in-kind contributions from the project partners, who include District Councils, Northland District Health Board, Manaia Health, Hauora Whanui, Auckland University of Technology and Sport Northland. Representatives from each of these organisations have formed the Physical Activity Northland Taskforce (PANT) to oversee the project and advocate generally for increased physical activity in Northland.

The project has a number of different strategies, all of which aim to increase the number of steps taken by Northlanders on a daily basis. A promotional campaign leads the strategies, which also involves Maori and youth participation, promotion of walking through health organisations and advocating for active friendly environments. All strategies are underpinned by the concept of the 10,000 steps message, which encourages Northlanders to accumulate 10,000 steps each day.

The 10,000 Steps Northland brand is being heavily promoted to the Northland public, as the Taskforce considers it to be the key component of the project that will motivate sedentary people to increase their activity levels.

The 10,000 Steps Northland concept was launched during the week of 22–26 November 2005 in five areas throughout the region with over 1,000 people actively participating over the course of the week.

All launches were held at 10.00am to coincide with workplace morning teas, and after the concept was explained, an easy 900–1500 step walk occurred, followed by spot prize draws for participants. Many local Mayors, MPs, dignitaries and sporting stars also took part.

Resources produced for the project include stickers, posters, t-shirts, drink bottles and caps. A separate website has also been launched where individuals can download maps, newsletters, physical activity tips and step logs, order pedometers on line, ask questions, access walking club contacts and check out upcoming fun run/walks.

Working closely with Kaipara, Whangārei and Far North District Councils, Sport Northland has initiated 10,000 Steps branded footpaths throughout the region, which indicate approximately the number of steps taken on a particular walking route.

Patients that have been issued a Green Prescription from their doctor or practice nurse are given the opportunity to access a loan pedometer for up to eight weeks. Sport Northland's patient support staff guide patients through the setting of appropriate daily step targets and also help monitor progress.

Stepping Out is a three-year project, which will roll out intended strategies bi-monthly in order to keep awareness and interest high.

For more information www.10000stepsnorthland.co.nz

City on its feet

Tauranga City Council has received a three-year \$NZ430,000 investment from SPARC. 'City on its Feet' is a project that will put in place community interventions to increase physical activity through walking. It is a partnership between Tauranga City Council, ACC, Bay of Plenty District Health Board, Sport Bay of Plenty and SPARC.

Over the next three years two Walking Co-ordinators will be appointed to work with community volunteers and local agencies to promote and co-ordinate active safe lifestyles with a walking focus throughout Tauranga. Initially, the project will be looking to support older adults and mothers with young children in becoming more active through walking.

Further target groups will be identified as the project progresses. The programme will support the Green Prescription programme by connecting patients to accessible walking groups.

The programme offers a great opportunity for Tauranga people to become active through walking while increasing social cohesion. It is a great initiative which also showcases the ability of partners to work together towards common goals.

Walking the Talk

On 24 September the NZ Government announced "Mission On", 10 initiatives designed to address rates of overweight and obesity in New Zealanders particularly in children and young people and their families.

One of the initiatives led by SPARC is the expansion of Green Prescriptions, particularly Active Families; another is called "Government – Walking the Talk".

The aim of "Walking the Talk" is to encourage NZ's state sector to make responsible decisions about the work environment and conditions of employment to encourage healthy nutrition and physical activity choices amongst employees.

Lead officials will encourage departments and agencies to develop healthy nutrition and physical activity plans and provide resources, ideas and support to help them design programmes that will work for them.

It is anticipated that this will involve the formation of workplace walking groups as well as encouraging active transport opportunities. One existing Wellington example

is Capital and Coast District Health Board's 'Get Lost at Lunchtime' walking group that was formed from the development of a workforce-wide Travel Plan to encourage the health professionals to become positive role models.

Getting there – on foot, by cycle

In addition to the above strategies for encouraging and promoting walking as part of a healthy active way of live, SPARC has been involved in the development and implementation of "Getting there' on foot and by cycle" – New Zealand's strategy to advance walking and cycling in New Zealand transport - launched February 2005.