

Cost-Effectiveness of Interventions to Promote Physical Activity: A Modelling Study

In emerging economies and high-income countries, a growing number of people are not achieving the recommended levels of physical activity (PA) necessary for good health. This increases the risk of ischaemic heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, breast cancer and type 2 diabetes as well as obesity. Nevertheless, there is a suite of behaviour change interventions to encourage exercise. This ranges from tailored advice and counselling from a general practitioner to population-wide approaches, including media campaigns. Although recognised that a combination of approaches, involving both the government and general practitioners to cultivate meaningful change, the cost-effectiveness of packages of interventions is still unknown. This research uses a standardised approach to assess the cost effectiveness of 6 interventions to promote PA in Australia (2003). In doing so, it adds to the emerging evidence base in the United States and the United Kingdom to devise an optimal pathway to improving population health.

The 6 interventions assessed for cost-effectiveness were as follows: GP prescriptions, GP referrals to an exercise physiologist, mass media campaigns, Travel Smart (an active transport program), pedometers & internet. In doing so, the cost to both government, patients, including time and travel costs were included.

The results indicate that interventions that encourage PA are cost effective, due to cost-savings incurred from a reduction of treatment needs for cancers, heart disease and diabetes. The most advisable means of communicating behaviour change messages include mass media campaigns and campaigns that encourage the use of pedometers. Regardless of the nonsignificant effects on PA behaviour, it will still improve health at a population level.

NICE (2006) Modelling the cost-effectiveness of physical activity interventions. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Available at: <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/FourmethodsEconomicModellingReport.pdf>. Accessed 1 August 08