

# FOCUS ON

## FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

#### A physically active lifestyle is associated with a number of long term health benefits in children

including strengthening of bones, lower fat accumulation, improved self-esteem, reductions in systolic blood pressure, and reductions in depressive symptoms<sup>1,2</sup>.

#### Physical activity can promote overall psychological wellbeing

and is inversely related to overweight and obesity in young people<sup>3</sup>.

#### Establishing a habit of physical activity early in life is important

in encouraging an active lifestyle in adulthood, as people who start physical activity early in life tend to continue it later<sup>4</sup>.



**60 mins a day**  
of moderate to vigorous activity



**15%**  
Y6 school children

were meeting Australia's physical activity guidelines



**12%**  
secondary students



**2 hours a day**  
limiting screen time



**74%**  
secondary students

exceeded Australia's screen time guidelines during the week



**active travel**  
as transport to school



**54%**  
Y6 school children

use active travel at least once a week



### WHAT DO WE MEASURE?

Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for children (5–12 years) and young people (13–17 years) recommend that for health benefits, **children and young people should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day**, and to reduce health risks they should **minimise sedentary behaviour including limiting screen time** (the use of electronic media for entertainment) to no more than two hours a day.

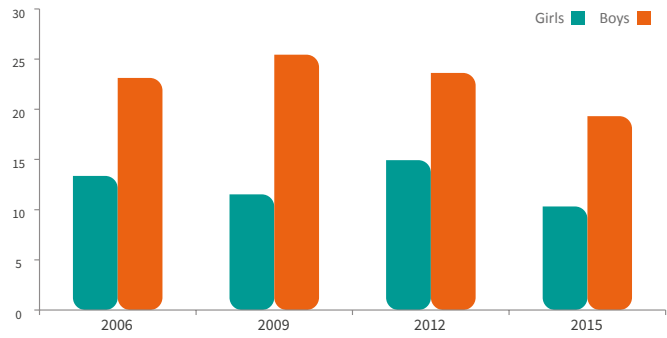
Information about physical activity, screen time, and active travel as transport is collected in a number of population health surveys in Australia and the ACT.

This Focus On report presents the proportion of children and young people meeting physical activity and screen time guidelines, the proportion of children participating in organised sport, and the proportion of children using active travel as transport to school.

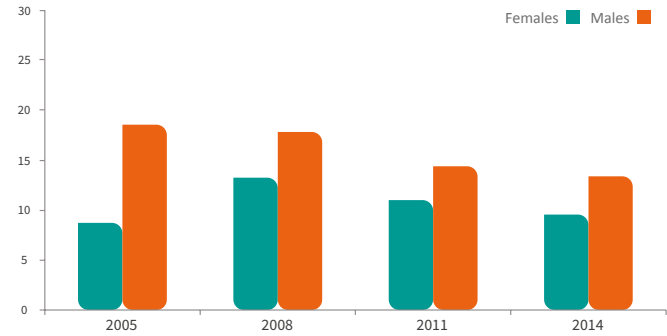
## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



- 15% of Year 6 school children (2015) and 12% of secondary school students (2014) were meeting Australia's physical activity guidelines (hereafter 'guidelines').
- Boys were consistently more likely to meet the guidelines than girls (**Figures 1 and 2**). This was more pronounced in year 6 where almost twice the proportion of boys met the guidelines (19% compared with 10%).
- The proportion of male secondary students who met the guidelines declined significantly over time, from 19% in 2005 to 14% in 2014 (**Figure 2**).
- The proportion of all children (5-17 years) meeting the guidelines in the ACT was slightly higher than for Australia (22% compared with 19%) (Australian Health Survey 2011-12).
- The vast majority (87%) of year 6 students reported playing at least one organised sport, with no significant differences between boys and girls.



**Figure 1:** Year 6 students meeting the physical activity guidelines  
Source: Year 6 ACT Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS)

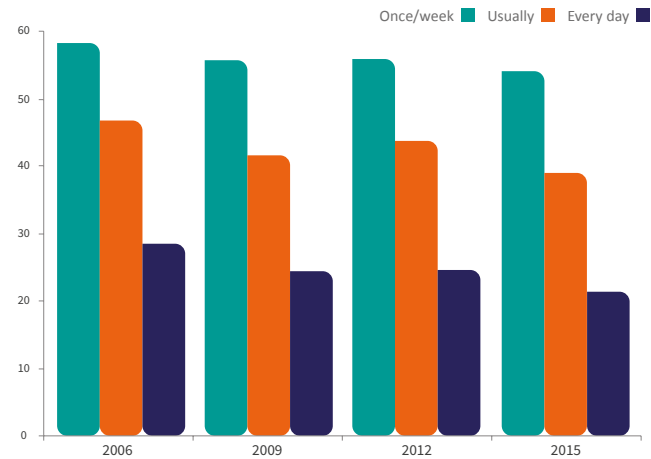


**Figure 2:** Secondary school students aged 12-17 years meeting the physical activity guidelines  
Source: ACT Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSAD)

## ACTIVE TRAVEL



- Just over half (54%) of children in year 6 report using active travel at least once a week to get to or from school, 39% usually use active travel (5 out of 10 trips) and 21% use it every day (**Figure 3**).
- Year 6 boys are more likely to use active travel to get to and from school than girls.
- The proportion of year 6 children using active travel every day decreased between 2006 and 2015.

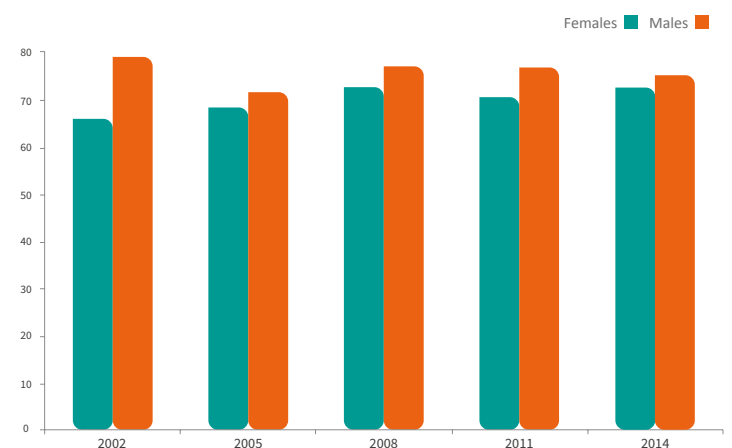


**Figure 3:** Year 6 students who use active travel to and from school  
Source: Year 6 ACT Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS)

## SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR



- Most secondary students (74% in 2014) exceeded Australia's screen time guidelines (hereafter 'guidelines') during the week (**Figure 4**).
- 27% of year 6 children exceeded the guidelines during the week, increasing to 49% on weekends.
- Boys were more likely than girls to exceed the guidelines.
- One quarter (25%) of 5-17 year olds in the ACT met the screen time guidelines on all seven days prior to interview, compared to 29% of Australian children (Australian Health Survey 2011-12).



**Figure 4:** Proportion of secondary students aged 12-17 years exceeding screen time guidelines  
Source: ACT Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey (ASSAD)

## HOW ARE WE PROGRESSING?

The majority of young people in the ACT are not sufficiently active, and become less active between primary and secondary school.

Whilst the vast majority of Year 6 children play an organised sport, very few are doing the recommended amount of physical activity.

Boys are more likely to meet the physical activity guidelines and use active travel to get to and from school; however, they are also more likely to exceed the screen time guidelines.



## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Parents have a strong influence on their children's behaviour in relation to physical activity. Year 6 children who reported that their parents do a lot of physical activity were more likely to meet guidelines, and those who met the guidelines were also more likely to report feeling good about themselves.

It is therefore important that parents assist their children by modelling appropriate behaviour and encouraging a physically active lifestyle.

The ACT Government has a number of other school and community – based initiatives to increase physical activity in young people. These include:

### KIDS at PLAY Active Play

*Kids at Play Active Play* offers free training and resources for ACT early childhood education and care services, to help early childhood educators feel confident to promote active play and teach fundamental movement skills to children aged 3 to 5. For more information visit [www.act.gov.au/KAPAP](http://www.act.gov.au/KAPAP).

### RIDE or WALK to school

*Ride or Walk to School* is a free program run on behalf of ACT Health by the Physical Activity Foundation to build a culture of riding and walking to school. For more information contact visit [www.paf.org.au/programs/ride-or-walk-to-school](http://www.paf.org.au/programs/ride-or-walk-to-school).

### ENTREPRENEURS: It's your move

*Entrepreneurs: It's Your Move (IYM)* is a high school subject, where students use an innovation approach called design thinking as well as systems mapping, to develop and implement a real health improvement project in their school. *Entrepreneurs: IYM* was the winner of a 2017 Australian Good Design Award. For more information visit [www.health.act.gov.au/itsyourmove](http://www.health.act.gov.au/itsyourmove).

### IT'S your move — SAFE CYCLE

*Safe Cycle* is a free program to support high schools to encourage students to ride, walk and scoot to school. Visit [www.health.act.gov.au/itsyourmove](http://www.health.act.gov.au/itsyourmove) - go to safe cycle.

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## Good Habits for Life



The ACT-wide *Good Habits for Life* campaign aims to increase the engagement of ACT parents with young children in healthy lifestyle behaviours across three main messages – ‘Eat well’, ‘Move More’ and ‘Get into Life’. For more information visit

<https://goodhabitsforlife.act.gov.au>

*Nature Play CBR* is an ACT Government initiative developed to reconnect children to unstructured play outdoors and in nature.

For more info visit:

<http://www.natureplaycbr.org.au/>



### References:

<sup>1</sup> Hallal PC, Victora CG, Azevedo MR & Wells JC, 2006, 'Adolescent physical activity and health: a systematic review', *Sports Medicine*, vol 36(12), pp. 1019-30.

<sup>2</sup> Janssen I & LeBlanc AG, 2010, Systematic review of the health benefits of physical activity in school-age children and youth. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, vol 7, pp. 40-55.

<sup>3</sup> Lubans DR, Boreham CA, Kelly P, Foster CE, 2011, The relationship between active travel to school and health-related fitness in children and adolescents: a systematic review, vol. 8 (5), *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 2002, *A Physically Active Life Through Everyday Transport*, WHO Regional Office for Europe.