

Abstract

Lifestyle diseases are non-communicable health conditions that are responsible for the majority of global premature deaths. They also exact a huge financial cost and loss of disability adjusted life years. Physical inactivity is the largest contributor to 'lifestyle disease', which is more than a quarter of the Australian disease burden. This costs the Australian public health system over \$425M each year, and is the leading cause of death. Poor nutrition, the excessive consumption of calories compared with energy expenditure, is a key contributor to lifestyle disease.

Cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, Type 2 Diabetes and obesity were the focus of this study. These diseases were selected on the basis that they are the five major non-communicable diseases attributable to a lifestyle of poor nutrition and inactivity, and the costliest financially and in terms of human health. Community sport-based interventions that target lifestyles diseases can help people improve their health.

The purpose of this study has been to identify the scope and impact of lifestyle disease, explore current practice in terms of community sport-based interventions, and to develop a framework to make it easier for community sports organisations to deliver health interventions for people with lifestyle diseases in a more methodical, evidence-based way. This study used peer reviewed academic literature, government and international sources, to identify the scope and impact of lifestyle diseases in adults, and interventions that have been delivered to address them. Grey literature sources were used to identify and describe more interventions than could be found in the academic literature.

The two outputs of the literature review were a selection of outstanding issues and questions, and a proposed framework to make it easier to design, deliver, measure, evaluate and publish results of community sport-based interventions in a more systematic, evidence-based way. The questions developed from the literature review formed the basis of semi-structured interviews conducted with seven program managers of community sport-based interventions.

A thematic analysis was developed based on the semi-structured interviews. Further refinement of the framework was undertaken based on insights from practitioners, and a discussion of the interview results followed. The research found using community sport to deliver health interventions can improve lifestyle disease, help people overcome barriers to sport participation and good health, increase the accessibility and affordability of service provision. Successful delivery can also provide community sports organisations with alternative forms of community engagement and growth opportunities.

Community sport-based interventions often have positive impacts on lifestyle disease, but may lack of evidence-based design, consistent methodology, rigorous evaluation and publication of results. This makes it difficult to secure long term funding, improve practice, increase provision, earn the trust of the health profession and government. Implementing the refined framework developed in this study to improve design, measurement and reporting will assist program managers, funders, academics and sport organisations to understand the impact and merits of using community-based sport programs to reduce lifestyle diseases.