EXERCISE IS MEDICINE AUSTRALIA

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2018-2019
THE PROBLEM:

Australia currently faces a growing health problem with chronic diseases now the leading cause of ill health and death in Australia. In 2014–15, more than 11 million Australians had at least one chronic diseases, and one-quarter of the population had two or more [1].

Approximately 31% of the burden of chronic disease can be prevented through reducing exposure to modifiable risk factors including tobacco use, harmful alcohol use, high body mass, physical inactivity and high blood pressure [1].

Physical inactivity, in particular, not only increases the risk of chronic disease but is the fourth leading risk factor for all deaths [2].

Physical inactivity has been linked by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to seven diseases and is found to contribute to substantial proportions of the disease burden [2]:

- **19% FOR DIABETES**
- **16% FOR BOWEL CANCER**
- **16% FOR UTERINE CANCER**
- **14% FOR DEMENTIA**
- **11% FOR BREAST CANCER**
- **11% FOR CORONARY HEART DISEASE**
- **10% FOR STROKE**

A small increase in daily exercise and physical activity could significantly reduce this burden [2].
Over half of Australian adults (56.4%) did not meet the recommended level of physical activity in 2014-2015. And a higher proportion of adults in regional primary health network (PHN) areas (62.4%) did not meet the recommended level of physical activity, compared with adults in metropolitan PHN areas (53.3%) [3].

Over 85% of the population visits a General Practitioner (GP) at least once a year; however, in 2013 only 18% of patients received physical activity advice and less than 1% of at-risk Australians are referred for exercise interventions [4].

Research indicates that medical students are provided with between 5 and 12hrs of physical activity training across their entire curriculum. Understandably, GPs can be reluctant to raise issues if they are not convinced they have a management option which is going to help. A review of guidelines for managing patients in general practice found that guidelines, although providing a plethora of information, did not offer clear, concise, practical advice on how GPs should manage their patients [5].

Rates of clinical advice and counselling for physical activity is significantly lower in regional and rural areas. Rural GPs have less access to other healthcare professionals limiting referral services and creating a shortage of opportunities for professional education and support in managing patients with chronic disease [5].

Additionally, primary health care nurses have an important role to play in chronic disease prevention and management with a key role in early intervention and structured management for chronic disease prevention. However, a recent survey of Australian nurses indicated that although they perceive that physical activity promotion is part of their role, few have specific knowledge of physical activity guidelines. Knowledge and understanding of the guidelines doubled the odds of encouraging physical activity in patients [6].
THE SOLUTION:

“If we had a pill that conferred all the confirmed health benefits of exercise, would we not do everything humanly possible to see to it that everyone had access to this wonder drug? Would it not be the most prescribed pill in the history of mankind?”

(Sallis, 2009)

Research shows that regular exercise at the correct intensity can:

- Significantly improve overall health
- Reduce the risk of heart disease by 40%
- Lower the risk of stroke by 27%
- Reduce the incidence of high blood pressure by almost 50%
- Reduce the incidence of diabetes by almost 50%
- Reduce mortality and the risk of recurrent breast cancer by almost 50%
- Lower the risk of colon cancer by over 60%
- Reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease by one third
- Decrease depression as effectively as medications or behavioural therapy

Research demonstrates that patients respond positively to exercise advice from their GP [5] and educational workshops for doctors are successful in enabling them to increase their written prescriptions for physical activity and referral of patients [7].

Exercise is Medicine® Australia (EIM) is a part of a global initiative, managed in Australia by Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA). EIM is focused on encouraging primary healthcare providers to treat physical activity as a vital sign by reviewing and assessing every patient’s physical activity levels at every visit. Patients should be counselled on physical activity, and provided with an exercise prescription or referral to an accredited exercise physiologist, accredited exercise scientist or appropriately qualified allied health professional for specific individual counselling and programming.

EIM Australia workshops, which are endorsed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA), empower GPs and nurses with the knowledge and skills to integrate physical activity and exercise into part of standard chronic disease prevention and management, with the potential to reach large groups of the community, increase community physical activity levels and reduce healthcare costs. The workshops are facilitated by accredited exercise physiologists or physiotherapists.

EIM Australia also provides resources including factsheets to support general practice to assess, and counsel patients with diagnosed conditions on physical activity, as well as support material to help refer patients on to appropriately qualified exercise professionals.
Results so far:

- In 2015, researchers ranked the EIM Australia factsheets second behind the National Physical Activity Guidelines, as the best exercise resources for patients, as published in the Medical Observer.
- **With over 1,000 clinicians completing a face-to-face workshop or online training**, participants have reported they:
  - are more confident in engaging their patients in a conversation about physical activity
  - had access to resources and referral pathways they needed to support long-term behaviour change
  - recognised the benefits of aerobic, strength and flexibility training in the prevention and management of chronic disease
  - are working more in with allied-health professional to provide multi-disciplinary care to patients
  - understood the appropriate safety management of a patient regarding physical activity intervention
- 97% of participants report the training met their learning needs and that the training was relevant to their practice.

Feedback from previous workshop participants

“The speaker delivered very evidence based information which will improve my practice style significantly”

“Confirmed my view as to the importance of exercise as an additional tool”

“Interesting additional approach outside traditional medicine”

“I have learnt how to incorporate exercise in the management of my patients and use the time saving resources available”

“This is very encouraging. This would come into 90% of my consults as a practice nurse”

“Most of this was new to me – I had not heard of an exercise physiologist”

“Extremely interesting workshop and extremely relevant to my role as a practice nurse”

“I will incorporate exercise in management of my patients in light of the time saving resources available”

EIM Australia received $75,000 in 2017-2018 to deliver one EIM workshop through each PHN. Many PHNs have indicated that due to the size of their region they have a need to host additional workshops for their health professional network. With the support of additional funding, the number of workshops can be increased and reach further into rural and regional areas of Australia.
PROPOSAL REQUEST:

ESSA requests funding to support the continued delivery of a continuing education package throughout the country for primary healthcare professionals with a focus on regional and rural GPs and practice nurses.

The interactive 2 hour workshop engages health professionals to learn more about the role of physical activity in the prevention and management of chronic disease and advocates for multi-disciplinary care.

At the end of the workshops, the participants are able to:

- Describe how exercise can be used to prevent and manage patient chronic conditions
- Recognise the importance of graded exercise therapy in relation to patient safety
- Recall key aspects of the Australian physical activity guidelines
- Describe behaviour change strategies specific to the adoption of physical activity
- Outline existing physical activity assessment tools in medical software

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<th>Cost</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation of 50 x 2 hour face to face sessions (facilitator, catering/venue, coordination)</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td>2018 – 2019</td>
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<td>Printing of training resources</td>
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<td>Promotion and marketing (face to face and online module)</td>
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<td>Ongoing accreditation (RACGP &amp; APNA)</td>
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<td>2018-2019</td>
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<td>Online training module hosting and maintenance</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$105,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>Timeframe</strong></td>
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REFERENCES:


“I have been involved with reviewing the Exercise is Medicine Educational Workshops and online material for GPs. I am GP who works rurally and remotely, but am also involved nationally in quality improvement projects in General Practice.

Exercise is integral to good health and is relevant in chronic disease management and prevention. It is a topic which generally does not come up in GPs continuing education programmes and many GPs do not appreciate the benefits of screening exercise levels and discussing how to integrate exercise into patient’s day to day life.

I believe the workshops created by EIM are aimed at the correct level, not too long but with appropriate detail and so are suitable for all the staff in primary care centres. They have been rolled out in main centres, but many GPs have not had access to the workshops due to the limited locations.

I support EIMs endeavours to gain further funding to provide these workshops to a wider audience.

Dr Lynne Davies, GP”