

Executive Summary of the Second Progress Report, Nov 2005

Overweight and obesity is a key risk factor for chronic disease and has been identified as an important public health problem that carries serious social and economic impacts. The South Australian Department of Health has allocated \$1.5 million over three years to the *eat well be active* (EWBA) Community Programs. EWBA comprises two linked projects – one in Morphett Vale (southern metropolitan Adelaide population 23,500) and one in the Rural City of Murray Bridge (Hills Mallee country southern region population 17,000) – that aim to contribute to the healthy weight of children, young people (0-18 years) and their families through increasing healthy eating and physical activity. EWBA recognise the importance of a community development approach when looking to affect behavioural and environmental change at the community level.

The *eat well be active* Community Programs are implemented by Noarlunga Health Services, as part of Southern Adelaide Health Service and Murray Mallee Community Health Service, as part of Hills Mallee Southern Regional Health Service. South Australia is only the second state in Australia to commence these innovative community-wide programs which are likely to receive considerable media and professional interest at a regional, state and national level. The development of EWBA is uniquely strengthened through the involvement of three well-recognised University Academics with expertise in nutrition, physical activity and community development. A significant commitment to comprehensive evaluation and dissemination of learning has been made through the allocation of resources to the evaluation of EWBA by a team including the University Academics.

The initial focus of EWBA since April 2005 has been to develop a good understanding of each community, develop and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders and consult with the community and across sectors to develop Action Plans that respond to community needs and reflect the best available evidence of effectiveness.

The *eat well be active* Community Programs have described the existing infrastructure, programs, policies and capacity of the communities of Morphett Vale and Murray Bridge related to physical activity and nutrition action. This information was gathered through a variety of means, including face-to-face meetings with close to 100 agencies across both sites. These meetings have also been important in forming early relationships with key stakeholders and garnering interest and support for the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity in these communities.

In order to develop relevant and acceptable Action Plans for the EWBA communities, a significant consultation process was implemented. Thirty-six consultation sessions, involving more than 450 individuals, were conducted over a two-month period across both sites. A wide range of local stakeholders with a potential interest in the project were involved in the consultations including, agencies across a range of sectors, education agencies, community members, Indigenous workers and community members, parent groups, primary and secondary students. The consultations gathered participants' views of the barriers to healthy eating and physical activity in their community and their ideas around potential strategies to make it easier to eat well and be active.

The consultation process was based on principles of effective consultation practice to ensure positive outcomes for both EWBA and the participants. The consultation process underwent a continuous improvement cycle throughout the two-month period, with key adjustments made to improve the consultation format. Process evaluation of the consultations indicated a high level of satisfaction with the process from the participants. Some baseline data was also collected from individuals participating in many of the consultations. This data includes information on the high value that participants place on the importance of healthy eating and physical activity for children and their families, participants' level of knowledge of existing activity in this area, and the strength of relationships between differing agencies.

The *eat well be active* Community Programs' consultation process provided detailed and rich data regarding the barriers to healthy eating and physical activity for children, young people and their families living in the Rural City of Murray Bridge and the suburb of Morphett Vale. Commonly identified barriers included poor parental knowledge and skills, high cost and poor access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities, with the relative importance of the barriers differing between the two communities.

The consultations also provided detailed information on potential strategies for increasing healthy eating and physical activity for each community. As the community and its stakeholders identified the strategies, these were clearly relevant & acceptable to the community. Strengthened with the best available evidence of effective strategies, this consultation data has informed the development of a draft Local Action Plan for each EWBA community. The selection of strategies for the Action Plans has been guided by selection criteria, drawn from key obesity prevention and primary health care documents, which highlight the importance of strategies being evidence-based, community-driven, sustainable, intersectoral in action, equitable and feasible. The draft Action Plans will be fed back to the community for further comment and refinement and it is envisaged that implementation of the Plans will commence from February 2006.

The *eat well be active* Community Programs will work towards significant outcomes over the next six months, including finalising the local Action Plans for each site in collaboration with all project stakeholders, establishing appropriate local structures in each site to drive and implement the local Action Plans and developing the Programs' overall evaluation framework, including baseline data collection.

The response from the community and its organisations to the *eat well be active* Community Programs has been extremely positive and suggests the current climate is ideal for work in the area on nutrition and physical activity promotion to prevent obesity and chronic disease.

**Implemented by Southern Primary Health of Southern Adelaide Health Service
and Murray Mallee Community Health Service**