

MEDIA RELEASE:

'Green Prescription' an easy pill to swallow

We may be on track to blitz gold at the Commonwealth Games, but a staggering 44% of Australians do less than 2½ hours of moderate activity per week.

Now, general practitioners are being encouraged to help get Australians off the couch and onto the exercise bike. In the process, they could save taxpayers millions of dollars.

Green Prescription is a counselling program currently used in New Zealand with great success. It encourages general practitioners to offer physical activity advice to their patients.

With support from exercise specialists, Green Prescriptions could stem the tide of obesity, heart disease and diabetes sweeping the country.

“With the extent of obesity in Australia, we may be facing the first generation that is not expected to outlive their parents,” said Kim Dalziel, a Monash University researcher.

A study led by Ms Dalziel measures the Green Prescription program in dollars and cents and concludes that the program would give tremendous value for money for Australian taxpayers. The study uses the term QALY*, which puts a dollar value on ‘quality of life’.

“What’s most exciting about the Green Prescription program is that its cost per unit is so low,” Ms Dalziel said.

Treating the outcomes of inactivity with conventional drugs could cost up to \$50,000 per QALY, while the Green Prescription is likely to cost only \$2,000 per QALY.

“This makes Green Prescription an extremely cheap intervention compared to a lot of the other treatment options the government funds in healthcare,” Ms Dalziel said.

The program would also be easy to implement in Australia.

“Many lifestyle interventions represent extremely good value for money, but there hasn’t been a clear mechanism to fund them,” Ms Dalziel said.

The Green Prescription program allows general practitioners to focus on improving patients’ lifestyles by offering them clear and cost-effective guidance.

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*QALY: Quality adjusted life year, a year of life adjusted for its quality or its value. A year in perfect health is equal to 1.0 QALY.

For more information about this research, contact the research author:

Kim Dalziel, Health Economics Unit, Faculty of Business & Economics, Monash University, (03) 9905 0739, kim.dalziel@buseco.monash.edu.au

MEDIA ONLY: To receive a PDF of the paper or for more information about ANZJPH, contact:

Sarah Kleinitz, ANZJPH Administration Ph: (03) 9329 3535 Email: anzjph@substitution.com.au