

# Physical Activity: The evidence base for preventing and managing cancers and dementia

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There is a vast amount of data currently available to help us make the case for physical activity health promotion across Victoria. The burden of diseases and conditions prevented and better managed by increasing physical activity is well documented. The Victorian Health Information Surveillance System (VHISS) recently released the report *Your health: A report on the health of Victorians*. The report utilises data from similar studies such as the Victorian burden of disease study<sup>1</sup>, the Victorian population health survey<sup>2</sup>, and the compilation of new data. The full report is available from the Department Human Services website.<sup>3</sup> In addition, fact sheets are also available, presenting major findings from the 2003 Victorian Population Health Survey for physical activity, healthy eating and body mass index for persons aged 18 years or over, broken down by regions. Also available are fact sheets pertaining to patterns of health, wellbeing and community strength, and smoking and alcohol consumption across these areas<sup>2</sup>. In addition, population health profiles are available by breakdown by General Practice Division, from The Public Health Information Development Unit, a collaborating unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare .<sup>4</sup>

A recent edition of *Active Inform*<sup>5</sup> addressed the case for exercise in the prevention and treatment of mental health problems, including depression. In this issue we will look at the case for two cancers (prostate and breast) and dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

According to the data from the Victorian Burden of Disease Study, dementias cause 8,470 years of life lost as a result of disability (YLD), 5% of the total, for males and 13,785 YLDs for females (7.9%), second only to depression for both genders. Prostate cancer is the 6th leading cause of years of life lost as a result of disability for males. It accounts for 5,748 years lost (3.4% of the the total), the most costly of cancers.

For females, breast cancer accounts for 6,385 YLDs (3.7%). However, like depression (the most prevalent of YLDs for each gender), these are rarely mentioned in making the case for physical activity promotion, despite the mounting evidence available that physical activity both helps to prevent, delay and/or manage these conditions and diseases.

1 Published by the Public Health Group, Rural and Regional Health and Aged Care Services Division. Victorian

Government Department of Human Services. Melbourne Victoria. June 2005  
[www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/bod/bod\\_vic.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/bod/bod_vic.htm)

2 Victorian Population Health Survey, Department of Human Services, Victoria 2004.  
[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/vphs\\_current.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/vphs_current.htm)

3 <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/vhiss/index.htm> Published by the Victorian Government Department of Human, Services, Melbourne Victoria, December 2005.

[http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au/hav/admin.nsf/Images/Active\\_Inform\\_Issue\\_7\\_Aug\\_2006.pdf/\\$File/Active\\_Inform\\_Issue\\_7\\_Aug\\_2006.pdf](http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au/hav/admin.nsf/Images/Active_Inform_Issue_7_Aug_2006.pdf/$File/Active_Inform_Issue_7_Aug_2006.pdf)