

• 5x5

Case Study



Healthy Cities
Australia

5x5

Healthy People.
Healthy Cities.

About Healthy Cities Australia

Healthy Cities Australia (HCA) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to improving the health, well-being, and social equity of communities across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions. Established with a vision to create healthier environments for all, HCA focuses on addressing social determinants of health, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and reducing health disparities through innovative, community-driven programs.

Guided by core values of integrity, collaboration, inclusivity, and equity, HCA delivers a range of initiatives that empower individuals and families to make healthier choices, build stronger social connections, and improve their quality of life. Through partnerships with local governments, community organizations, and academic institutions, HCA supports health promotion activities, including physical activity, nutrition education, mental well-being, and social inclusion.

With a long-standing history of impactful community engagement, HCA is dedicated to fostering a culture of health and resilience across diverse populations in the region.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present, and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

• Introduction

5km, once a week, 5 week

The 5x5 program, a dynamic community-based walking initiative by Healthy Cities Illawarra (HCI), is designed to boost physical activity, combat social isolation, and improve mental well-being. Launched in 2015, it invites participants from the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions to walk 5 kilometers once a week for five weeks, creating a supportive, non-competitive environment that encourages sustainable health habits. With an emphasis on inclusion, the program targets sedentary individuals, the elderly, and those battling social isolation, offering them not just an opportunity for physical movement but a platform for meaningful community connection. By fostering ongoing partnerships with local health organizations and community



Key Highlights

- Over 10 communities engaged, with over 800 participants.
- 70% of participants reported increased physical activity levels.
- 80% felt more socially connected as a result of the program.
- The program has successfully promoted mental health and community bonding through weekly walking events and social interactions.
- Strong partnerships with local councils, health organizations, and community centers enhance the program's reach and impact.

Overview

01 Program Features

The 5x5 program is a community-based walking initiative designed to promote physical activity and social connectedness. The program involves a 5km walk, once a week for five weeks in a non-competitive, accessible, and supportive environment. It serves both sedentary individuals and those with low levels of physical activity within the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions. The initiative links participants to ongoing opportunities for physical activity through partnerships with organizations such as Parkrun and Heart Foundation Walking Groups.

02 Program rationale

The 5x5 Program is a weekly, community-based walking event designed to promote physical activity and social inclusion in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions. The event consists of a 5km walk completed once a week for five weeks, with flexibility for participants to walk shorter distances as needed. Its goal is to foster healthier lifestyles by encouraging physical activity among sedentary individuals, offering a fun and supportive environment. This program also enhances community partnerships by connecting health, education, social sectors, and local businesses.

03 Goals

- Increase physical activity: By promoting regular physical activity in a fun, supportive setting; encouraging participants to develop sustainable exercise habits that persist beyond the program's duration; and linking participants to ongoing fitness opportunities (Parkrun, Heart Foundation Walking Groups).
- Promote mental health and well-being: By increasing participants' mental resilience through regular outdoor activity and social interaction; and fostering feelings of belonging and purpose by encouraging participants to connect with their community and make new friends.
- Build community connections: By encouraging social inclusion through a welcoming, non-judgmental environment; and strengthening relationships between local health, education, and community organizations.
- Promote sustainable behaviour change: By facilitating long-term health improvements through accessible, low-cost exercise options; and encouraging continued physical activity beyond the program

04 Structure & development

The program is organized in collaboration with local councils, health organizations, and community centres. A project coordinator oversees each event, ensuring participant safety, organizing volunteers, and promoting the event through social media, flyers, and local community networks.

Health Promotion Officers manage event logistics, while volunteers and local partners help facilitate walks. Community organizations, like Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre, play an integral role in ensuring community participation.

05 Content

The program's primary components focus on physical activity, mental well-being, and community engagement. Activities include weekly walking events, opportunities for social interaction, and health-related workshops. In addition to these in-person activities, participants receive ongoing support through social media and text messages. The 5x5 Program focuses on:

1. **Physical Activity:** Participants walk a 5km route, with options for shorter distances. This encourages regular moderate-intensity physical activity, promoting cardiovascular health and managing weight.
2. **Community Engagement:** The program offers a social environment where participants can connect with others, reducing social isolation and fostering a sense of belonging. Links to other programs provide long-term support.
3. **Mental Health and Nutrition (5x5 Body & Mind):** This extension of the program offers workshops on moving for mental health and eating for mental well-being, emphasizing the holistic benefits of an active, healthy lifestyle.

06 Training & Support

Facilitators of the 5x5 Program are trained Health Promotion Officers and community volunteers who support participants throughout the walk. Volunteers provide logistical support and encouragement, helping to ensure the event runs smoothly. First aid training is also provided to key personnel. Facilitators and volunteers are recruited through partnerships with community organizations and local businesses.

07 Duration & intensity

The 5x5 program runs for 5 consecutive weeks each term, with each walk lasting approximately 1 hour. Additional time is allocated for socializing and accessing health services before and after each walk. Participants are encouraged to continue walking outside of the 5-week event period, and follow-up activities like walking groups are offered to maintain engagement.

08 Funding

Funding for the 5x5 Program comes from local councils, grants, and sponsorship from local businesses. While many resources are reusable for future events, there are initial costs related to marketing, equipment, and event logistics.

09 Partnerships & collaborations

Key partners include local councils, community centers, health organizations, and universities. Local councils provide funding and support for community outreach. Community centers offer venues and resources for program delivery. Health organizations support the physical activity components and provide health resources, while universities assist with data collection and program evaluation. While these collaborations are crucial, many of these partnership elements still require financial investment from HCA.

10 Impacts & outcomes

The 5x5 Program has engaged over 10 different communities within the Illawarra region, and over 800 people have participated since its inception. Many participants have transitioned to long-term walking groups or other physical activity initiatives. Based on an attendance average, this has resulted in over 12,000km walked by participants.

Subgroup analysis indicate that 70% of participants increased their physical activity levels, while 80% reported feeling more socially connected because of participating in the walks. Qualitative feedback highlights improved mental health and stronger community bonds as key benefits.

Key impacts:

- Participants reported walking more frequently and feeling more connected to their community.
- Many participants signed up for the “Get Healthy Coaching Service” after the 5x5 program to receive ongoing health support.
- The event facilitated social interactions, with many participants stating that they felt more connected to their local area.

11 Evaluation

The program's success is evaluated through pre- and post-event surveys, measuring participants' physical activity levels, social engagement, and mental health outcomes. Attendance records and participant feedback are collected after each session, with a final evaluation at the end of the 5-week period.

12 Facilitators & barriers

Facilitators:

- Strong partnerships with community organizations and health sectors
- Accessible and flexible program structure
- Positive participant feedback and high engagement

Barriers:

- Weather-related disruptions to walking sessions
- Difficulty maintaining participant engagement over time
- Limited funding to scale the program

13 Program relation to policy

The 5x5 program aligns various local, state, nation and global policies, focussed on increasing physical activity, healthy food habits and improving social inclusion. More information on this is provided in the Policy summary below.

For more information, visit
healthycities.org.au/programs/community-walking-programs/

The 5x5 program is a free, community-based walking initiative that promotes regular physical activity and social engagement in an outdoor, natural setting. It runs over five weeks, with weekly 5km walks or shorter routes for those with different fitness levels. The program targets sedentary individuals or those with limited physical activity, aiming to improve both physical and mental health outcomes through consistent participation.

Inputs

- Staff: Health Promotion Officers, event organizers, volunteers.
- Partners: local councils, community organisations, businesses (for sponsorship), and health sector collaborations (e.g., National Heart Foundation Walking Groups, Parkrun).
- Funding: Government and community grants, sponsorships from local businesses.
- Resources: Walking route planning, promotional materials, first aid kits, event equipment (sign, flags, folding tables).
- Venues: Public parks, local community spaces.



Outputs

Participants

- Sedentary individuals, socially isolated people with chronic conditions, families with children, and elderly participants.
- Community members interested in walking groups.

Activities

- Weekly 5km walks held over five weeks, offering flexibility for shorter distances and targeting participants of all fitness levels.
- Social Connection: Weekly meetups to foster community bonding, encourage socialisation, and connect participants with local services.
- Volunteers and Community Champions: Recruiting and training of volunteers to help lead walks and facilitate activities, fostering a sense of local ownership.
- Highlighting of native flora, fauna and any Aboriginal culturally significant locations.

Products

- Flyers, promotional materials, maps for walking routes, participant sign-up and feedback forms, social media engagement, partnerships with ongoing physical activity initiatives (e.g., Parkrun).



Outcomes & Impacts

Short term

- Increase in participants' physical activity levels.
- Improved awareness and understanding of the benefits of regular walking and exercise.
- Increased social interactions and reduced isolation through weekly group walking sessions.
- Increased knowledge of the benefits of physical activity, improved mood and social connectedness, creation of social links with other participants.

Medium term

- Establishment of new walking habits and routines among participants.
- Strengthened sense of community connection and belonging.
- Participants develop improved confidence in their physical abilities.
- Participants engage in local health services and walking groups beyond the program.
- Sustained behaviour change towards a more active lifestyle, improved mental health.

Long term

- Sustained physical activity habits that reduce sedentary behavior.
- Improved physical and mental health, including reductions in obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.
- Strengthened community ties and ongoing participation in local wellness initiatives (e.g., Parkrun, local walking groups).
- Participants serve as role models, encouraging friends and family to adopt healthier lifestyles.



Assumptions:

- Participants will find value in the physical and social aspects of the program and will remain engaged throughout the 5-week duration.
- Community partners will continue to support the initiatives by providing health information and promoting ongoing activities.



External Factors:

- Weather conditions that could impact walk participation.
- Availability of walking routes and community centers for hosting sessions.
- Community interest and buy-in from local councils and businesses.
- Proximity of free outdoor gym equipment can provide optional extra opportunity for exercise.

Policy Summary

Linking the 5x5 program to relevant policies is essential for demonstrating how the initiative aligns with broader public health, physical activity, and community well-being objectives. Policies at the local, state, and national levels provide a framework for addressing sedentary lifestyles, promoting health equity, and fostering community connections. By connecting the 5x5 program to these policies, we highlight how it contributes to wider goals, such as reducing the prevalence of chronic disease, increasing physical activity levels, and enhancing social connectedness in underserved areas. The program serves as a practical implementation of the principles outlined in key health and well-being policies, emphasizing prevention, physical activity, and community engagement as central strategies to improve public health outcomes.



The following table outlines key policies, and how they guide or support the program’s goals. By demonstrating these policy connections, 5x5 positions itself as an evidence-based, policy-driven initiative that aligns with broader health promotion and social inclusion agendas at all levels.

Policy	What is the connection?	Local/ State/ National/ Global	Link
Illawarra Shoalhaven: Health Promotion Service Strategic Framework 2023 - 2028	Focuses on health and well-being by promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and reducing social isolation in children.	Local	Health Promotion Service Framework 2023 - 2028 (nsw.gov.au)
Wollongong City Council: Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan	Goals to connect and engage communities and have a healthy community in a liveable city.	Local	Our-Wollongong-Our-Future-Community-Strategic-Plan.pdf (nsw.gov.au)
Play Wollongong Strategy 2014-2024	Focuses on youth health through programs that encourage active lifestyles and mental well-being, while responding to the needs of vulnerable young people.	Local	Play-Wollongong-Strategy-2014-2024.pdf (nsw.gov.au)
NSW Youth Health Framework 2017-2024	Supports the development and enhancement of child-safe practices across all council operations, ensuring compliance with the NSW Child Safe Standards.	State (NSW)	NSW Youth Health Framework 2017-24

Policy	What is the connection?	Local/ State/ National/ Global	Link
The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022-2024	This plan commits to hope for the future, connectiveness and safety, health and wellbeing, environments for joy, and respect and acceptance.	State (NSW)	ACYP_StrategicPlan.pdf (hubspotusercontent-na1.net)
NSW Plan for Healthy Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: 2019-2023	Focuses on promoting inclusive communities by addressing cultural responsiveness and building healthy literacy communities.	State (NSW)	NSW Plan for Healthy Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: 2019-2023
National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030	Aims to improve child health by promoting physical activity, reducing sedentary behavior, and addressing social health inequities	National	National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
The National Obesity Strategy	Builds a 10-year framework to action prevention and reduction of overweight and obesity in Australia.	National	National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032
National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions	Encourages health promotion programs to promote lifestyle changes with for example priority area 1.3 focussing on the critical life stage of the young children.	National	National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
Closing the Gap Initiative	Focuses on reducing health disparities, particularly among Indigenous Australians, inclusion of diverse and disadvantaged groups.	National	National Agreement on Closing the Gap Closing the Gap

Policy	What is the connection?	Local/ State/ National/ Global	Link
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	<p>SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being - promotes physical and mental well-being.</p> <p>SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities - focuses on reducing health disparities.</p>	Global	THE 17 GOALS Sustainable Development (un.org)
World Health Organization (WHO) Health Promotion Framework	<p>Full policy title: “Achieving well-being: A global framework for integrating well-being into public health utilizing a health promotion approach”.</p> <p>WHO’s recommendations on creating supportive environments for health, community-based health promotion, and tackling the social determinants of health.</p>	Global	Achieving well-being: A global framework for integrating well-being into public health utilizing a health promotion approach (who.int)



Australian Social Impact Valuation (ASVB)

Healthy Cities Australia holds a license to use the Australian Social Value Bank (ASVB) for evaluating its programs. The ASVB enables us to assess the social and economic value our initiatives generate, using robust, nationally recognized metrics derived from the HILDA Survey and the Journeys Home longitudinal study.

• Closing Statement

**We invite communities
and partners to fund
and implement the 5x5
program.**



**Contact Healthy Cities
Australia for additional
information on expanding
this initiative in new regions.**

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