

# PHYSICAL, HEALTH AND SPORT EDUCATION FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA



## Submission to the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians



Evidence from several sources indicates that an Australia-wide decline in the number of schools teaching physical education and sport has occurred. Recent evidence suggests this decline has been most severe in less well resourced communities, highlighting the probability of an inequitable distribution of community resources and opportunity reaching those who are less privileged. This phenomenon coincides with an unprecedented increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, as well as concerns about the mental well-being, decline in community connection and increasing social isolation among young Australians.

Physical, health and sport education are *significantly* different to other areas of the curriculum. These subjects are unique and offer the only curriculum areas that have the potential to impact on the physical health of young Australians. These subjects offer instruction and knowledge about health behaviour, physical fitness, motor skill development and sport education. For the majority of young people, schools are the main providers of quality instruction in sport, recreation, health and physical activities. Further, these subjects are being used innovatively in Australia and overseas as mechanisms through which students who have exhibited signs of educational disengagement and social isolation can be encouraged to regularly attend school and benefit from the educational and social support services available therein.

Physical, health and sport education have been suggested by some groups as being of low educational priority and should become 'optional' subjects in schools. In support of this suggestion groups have argued that time devoted to physical, health and sport education will be time lost for use in other subjects (ie mathematics, English and science) and this in turn will lead to a decline in the academic performance of young Australians in these subjects. However, a recent review<sup>1</sup> of research-based evidence has shown that:

1. Sacrificing physical education for additional classroom time DOES NOT improve academic performance.
2. Students whose time in physical education and school sport was increased MAINTAINED OR IMPROVED their grades and scores on standardised achievement tests, even though they received less classroom instruction time than students in control groups.
3. Short activity breaks during the school day can improve students' concentration and classroom behaviour.

Worldwide, health agencies are urging that physical, health and sport education be a compulsory part of the school curriculum. Encouragingly, across a broad spectrum of developed nations, many Governments have heeded this call and have *required* that school systems provide physical education and sport physical, health and sport education for young people during the compulsory years of education.

Currently, the draft National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians fails to reach this standard. Without revision to include a clearer description of the place and contribution of physical, health and sport education in the educational experiences of young Australians (i.e. the 'Commitments to Action'), the document may lead to a situation whereby

young Australians are in danger of being denied a world-class educational experience. While the document addresses the right educational goals through the statements outlining how young Australians will be supported to become successful learners, confident individuals and active and informed citizens, the opportunity for this to be achieved is diminished given the poor support and peripheral placement physical, health and sport education have received in the draft. In essence, while the educational goals do address the right outcomes, the achievement of these outcomes will be less likely if physical education and sport are not offered to all young Australians during the compulsory school years. As it currently exists, the document does not do enough to ensure physical, health and sport education will be included as part of the required national curriculum and hence will fail to achieve the world-class standing.

In order to support a comprehensive educational experience to meet the needs of young Australians, the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians should:

1. unequivocally state that all young Australians must receive regular physical, health and sport education as part of their education experience during the compulsory years of schooling;
2. include statements that education, as part of a whole of community approach, has an important role to play in promoting the health of young Australians;
3. include examples of physical, health and sport education throughout the declaration where relevant, as the draft Declaration does not make a strong enough reference to this learning area as it has done with other learning areas, thus leaving the impression that physical education and sport is an 'add on';
4. as has occurred for other subjects listed in the learning areas, include physical education and sport physical, health and sport education in the descriptions used to explain the first two dot points in 'Section e. Developing a world-class curriculum and assessment';
5. list all subject areas in section 3 e. alphabetically, as occurred in the previous Declarations;
6. ensure pre-service and in-service teachers are appropriately trained to deliver physical, health and sport education, including clear guidance on the competencies required to teach physical, health and sport education, as well as the minimum number of days of teaching practicum experience in these areas; and
7. strongly encourage governments to adequately resource schools to deliver quality physical, health and sport education.

Submission Authorised by



Dr. Jeff Walkley  
President,  
The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Victorian Branch Inc.  
1407 Burke Road, Kew East 3102

Tel: (03) 9851 6966  
Fax: (03) 9851 6163  
[www.achper.vic.edu.au](http://www.achper.vic.edu.au)