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AUSactive Budget Submission 2025-2026

Active Body, Healthy Mind

"Every dollar invested in preventive health saves an estimated $14.30 in healthcare and other costs. Up to 38% of the burden of disease could be prevented by reducing risk factors such as being overweight and obesity and physical inactivity".[1]

- Australian Government Budget Data 2023-24 | Health protection, preventive health and sport

Through this submission, AUSactive is asking the government to:

1. Increase preventive health spending to 5%
2. Implement a National Public Health Campaign
3. Reform Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) Policy
4. Introduce Means-Tested Physical Activity Vouchers

This submission outlines AUSactive's proposal to increase physical activity across the nation, which, if implemented, will deliver significant and measurable improvements in public health.

Stanford's Chair of the Department of Medicine says, that "exercise is the single most potent medical intervention ever known",[2] and research backs this powerful claim. Physically active individuals are 15% less likely to develop depression,[3] have a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease[4], and a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes.[5]

AUSactive's intervention aims to harness the power of exercise through a comprehensive public health campaign designed to increase physical activity, underpinned by a proven physical activity campaign, "Million Moves". This has a focus on women and families, and is an innovative community initiative, inspiring participants to be active, completing 75 'moves' a day for 21 consecutive days. The 75 moves represents the 75% of Australians who are not sufficiently active and is designed to be achievable, accessible and enjoyable and could be completed anywhere, within communities, schools, workplaces, at home, outdoors and in health club facilities. It is equivalent to approximately 10 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity. Participants will be supported to increase their movement over time, in accordance with the Australian Government's physical activity guidelines.[6] Repeating this quarterly for three years will reinforce this habit, leading to measurable improvements in public health, magnifying its long-term impact on longevity. Engaging in 10 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise daily has been associated with a 10–20% reduction in all-cause mortality.[7]

A campaign to increase physical activity is critical, given that 75% of Australians are not sufficiently physically active,[8] and Australia, second only to the US, faces a significant health span vs. lifespan gap,[9] the disparity between the years lived in good health and total years lived. Nearly half (45%) of Australians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime,[10] while 50% of the population live with a chronic disease,[11] and 66% are overweight or obese.[12]

These statistics show the urgent need to implement our proposal, including a 20% reduction in new cases of anxiety and depression,[13] a 5% reduction in obesity, cardiovascular disease,[14] and type 2 diabetes across Australia,[15] as well as improved health equity, especially for women, people with a disability, and those in regional areas.

Ultimately, these efforts will lead to reduced healthcare costs, for example, a study conducted in Australia found that higher daily step counts were associated with a 9% decrease in hospital bed-days.[16] Our initiative will help bridge the health span-lifespan gap, turning Australia's longer lives into healthier, more fulfilling years.

The Million Moves campaign will be delivered in community settings to enable social cohesion, increased productivity in workplaces, and schools, where it can also have a significant impact on addressing the growing concern of type 2 diabetes. Recommendation 7 from the recent *State of Diabetes Mellitus in Australia 2024* report calls for urgent action to increase access to regular exercise in schools, recognising that physical activity is essential for both the prevention and management of the disease[17]. This is supported by a recent study showing physical inactivity, rather than diet alone, is the primary factor contributing to overweight and obesity in children, which in turn plays a major role in the rising rates of type 2 diabetes.[18]

Other compelling research reinforces that regular exercise enhances insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism, reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes. Therefore, completing the Million Moves program four times a year could lead to a 20–30% reduction in diabetes risk over time.[19]

This campaign additionally addresses the emerging challenge of weight loss medications used to treat type 2 diabetes and obesity, which are most effective when combined with regular physical activity. While these drugs appear effective on their own, they can lead to decreased muscle mass, lower bone density, and sarcopenia, which in turn can cause balance issues, falls, and a loss of independence,[20] ultimately placing greater strain on the healthcare system through increased hospital admissions and additional support needs. A holistic approach, including a balanced nutrition plan and regular physical activity, is essential when using weight loss medications.[21]

This proposal aims to reduce financial barriers to physical activity, especially for women, low-income families and priority populations, through initiatives like means-tested physical activity vouchers and FBT policy reform for workplace physical activity programs that will bolster small business and increase workforce productivity.

This submission has a focus on women and parents, recognising their role in shaping the health behaviours of families. As the National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030 points out, women are central to the well-being and social development of communities, and the nation. Women, are also disproportionately affected by cardiovascular disease, dementia, and mental health challenges. By addressing the unique barriers they face, such as time constraints, caregiving responsibilities, and potential financial limitations, this plan aims to empower women and parents to prioritise their health. Supporting their well-being will not only improve their own lives but also create a ripple effect, to support healthier children and communities for generations to come.

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Key Proposal Elements

Preventative health spend

AUSactive is asking the government to increase preventive health spending to 5%. This aligns with the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030*, that recommends increasing preventive health funding to 5%. The government currently allocates around 2% of its $124 billion health budget to preventive health measures programs. Data identified in the 2024-24 Federal Health Budget indicates that every dollar spent in preventive health saves the taxpayer fourteen dollars.

Implement a National Public Health Campaign

AUSactive advocates for the government to implement a National Public Health Campaign (as recommended in the Preventive Health, Obesity and Diabetes Strategies), to increase physical activity, such as the successful "Life Be In It" campaign of the 1980's where 20% of respondents said they took steps to be more active. This will offer significant community benefits by raising awareness about the mental and physical health benefits of exercise, promoting positive behaviour changes, educating the community, influencing attitudes, and ultimately helping to reduce social isolation, prevent mental health issues, chronic diseases and related health problems thereby reducing the burden on healthcare system.

- **A National Million Moves Program:** To support this campaign, and modelled on a successful Queensland pilot program, this innovative community initiative will engage 500,000 inactive Australians, and should be repeated four times a year, for three years. By helping individuals build sustainable physical activity habits, the campaign aspires to deliver long-term health benefits.
    - This program will have a special focus on women and families, the pilot program year was especially successful in engaging women, who outnumbered men 4:1 in participation.
    - The Million Moves model has the option for the government to invest in additional specialised initiatives, for example, to run a program for people with a disability who often experience poorer health, higher social isolation, and more complex needs than the general population. Additional specialised programs include; for children and young people, individuals with diabetes and chronic illnesses, women and older adults.

- Million Moves will be complemented by an app that helps individuals discover a wide range of physical activities, for example, local park runs, ocean swims, tennis clubs, and complimentary access to AUSactive health centres, helping to eliminate financial barriers to physical activity, particularly for low-income families.
- This free access to health club facilities could also play a role in mitigating some of the health impacts of violence in the community. For example, similar initiatives like the "Health Club for Free" program in Birmingham, UK (2014),[22] demonstrated that waiving health club fees allowed a diverse group of individuals to participate in physical activity, reducing stress and anxiety. It also provided valuable support to people affected by violence. Women who had money withheld from them by their partners were able to access health club facilities at no cost, where they found a supportive environment and new networks that helped improve their well-being.
- A central element of the Million Moves model is its ongoing university research and evaluation, which provides valuable data on physical activity levels and insights into effective intervention strategies. This ensures the program continues to evolve and meet the diverse needs of the community.

Replace Gambling Ads with Health Messaging: A component of the public health campaign could address the growing concern that young people are being exposed to harmful gambling advertisements that promote sports betting, becoming the primary way to engage with sports. To counter this, the government could replace these ads with positive messaging focused on physical activity on free-to-air television. This would not only protect young audiences but also alleviate concerns from free-to-air networks about potential revenue losses from gambling ads.

Reform FBT Policy

AUSactive calls on the government to grant all employers an exemption from the FBT on health club memberships, allowing them to offer fitness benefits without financial penalty. Research shows that 91.8% of employers are keen to provide health club memberships,[24] yet current FBT rules disproportionately affect smaller and medium-sized businesses that do not have on-site health clubs, are not NFP entities or Health related organisations. These businesses are required to pay FBT for employees' off-site health club memberships, while larger employers with on-site facilities are exempt. Granting this exemption would level the playing field for businesses of all sizes, supporting employees, especially in light of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. This policy would not only enhance employee attraction and retention but also encourage return-to-office work in city centres, while boosting workplace productivity by improving cognitive function, morale, and reducing absenteeism and presenteeism, issues that cost businesses billions annually. This is supported by a new report from the McKinsey Health Institute Investing in employee health could create US$11.7 trillion in global economic value.[23] While Deloitte estimates a potential cost of $144 million in lost revenue for the government for this proposed FBT exemption, it is expected to be fully offset by increased productivity and a reduction in direct healthcare costs associated with addressing physical inactivity, estimated at $204.8 million.[24]

Introduce Means-Tested Physical Activity Vouchers

AUSactive additionally asks the government to implement annual vouchers valued between $500 and $1,000, means-tested per adult, to remove financial barriers to physical activity. Research shows that cost is the most significant barrier for 72% of non-health club users in Australia, preventing them from taking up memberships. The research indicates that even a modest 10% reduction in health club membership fees could increase participation in health clubs from 23% to up 35%, which would generate $425 million in healthcare savings and $913 million in productivity gains.[24] This reduction would also prevent 59,000 disease cases, boost consumer spending by $1.5 billion, and create 31,300 new jobs.[25]

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Conclusion

The urgent need for a radical shift in addressing mental health and physical inactivity in Australia cannot be overstated. With nearly half of Australians facing mental health challenges in their lifetime and significant barriers to physical activity, AUSactive is uniquely positioned to drive impactful change through a nationwide public health campaign. With a vast national footprint of over 3,000 businesses and 12,000 professionals, AUSactive is well-positioned to lead a successful public health campaign. Our extensive community network and the four million Australians who already use our resources will amplify the impact of this initiative.

By implementing a public health campaign to increase physical activity, removing barriers to physical activity through means-tested physical activity vouchers and Fringe Benefit Tax policy reform for workplace health, as well as leveraging proven models like "Million Moves," we have an opportunity to significantly enhance public health. Engaging hundreds of thousands of Australians, particularly women and priority groups, to undertake 75 moves per day for 21 consecutive days, and to repeat this quarterly will deliver measurable benefits in cardiovascular health, mental well-being, diabetes prevention, increased social connection and reduced healthcare costs. This will support Australians to live longer but healthier, more connected lives.

A detailed budget, to deliver this campaign, can be found at Schedule A.

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Schedule A

AUSactive Federal Budget Submission

All amounts $k

Nationwide Million Moves	Proposal Ref.	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Total
Salaries and Wages					
Program Manager	1	150	158	165	**473**
State / Territory Coordinators x 8	1	880	924	970	**2,774**
Project / Admin Support	1	100	105	110	**315**
Steering Committee (up to 12 members)	1.4	120	126	132	**378**
Activations					
Media Placement, Advertising and Digital / Social Marketing	1.2	500	525	551	**1,576**
Events	1.3	320	336	353	**1,009**
Community Based Activations (with Partners / Members)	1.3		In Kind		
Collateral and Promotion Materials (incl. Education Resources)	1.5 / 1.7	750	788	827	**2,364**
Research and Evaluation					
Academic Research Costs	1.6	200	100	105	**405**
App / Tech / Website					
Development	1.8	750	-	-	**750**
Maintenance	1.8	-	150	158	**308**
General IT support	1.8	120	126	132	**378**
Other Opex					
General Office Expenses / Supplies	1	40	42	44	**126**
TOTAL		**3,930**	**3,379**	**3,548**	**10,857**

All amounts $k

	Proposal Ref.	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Total
Optional Program: Active Kids	2.1				
Program Manager		120	126	132	**378**
Program Delivery (Education / Resources)		100	105	110	**315**
Marketing and Promotion		50	53	55	**158**
Travel		10	11	11	**32**
General Office Expenses / Supplies		10	11	11	**32**
Subtotal		**290**	**305**	**320**	**914**
Optional Program: Combat Type 2 Diabetes	2.2				
Program Manager		120	126	132	**378**
Program Delivery (Trainer Delivery)		600	630	662	**1,892**
Program Delivery (Education / Resources)		100			**100**
Marketing and Promotion		50	53	55	**158**
Travel		10	11	11	**32**
General Office Expenses / Supplies		10	11	11	**32**
Subtotal		**890**	**830**	**871**	**2,590**
Optional Program: All Abilities	2.3				
Program Manager		120	126	132	**378**
Program Delivery (Trainer Delivery)		600	630	662	**1,892**
Program Delivery (Education / Resources)		50			**50**
Marketing and Promotion		50	53	55	**158**
Travel		10	11	11	**32**
General Office Expenses / Supplies		10	11	11	**32**
Subtotal		**840**	**830**	**871**	**2,540**
Optional Program: Heartmoves for Older Adults	2.4				
Program Manager		120	126	132	**378**
Program Delivery (Trainer Delivery)		600	630	662	**1,892**
Program Delivery (Education / Resources)		100			**100**
Marketing and Promotion		50	53	55	**158**
Travel		10	11	11	**32**
General Office Expenses / Supplies		10	11	11	**32**
Subtotal		**890**	**830**	**871**	**2,590**
Optional Program: Women					
Program Manager	2.5	120	126	132	**378**
Program Delivery (Education / Resources)		100	105	110	**315**
Marketing and Promotion		50	53	55	**158**
Travel		10	11	11	**32**
General Office Expenses / Supplies		10	11	11	**32**
Subtotal		**290**	**200**	**209**	**914**
TOTAL (for all Optional Programs)		**3,200**	**2,993**	**3,142**	**9,335**
GRAND TOTAL		**7,130**	**6,372**	**6,690**	**20,192**

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