



## iPLAY: Evidence-Based Physical Activity in Primary Schools: Improving Children's Health Through Sustainable Partnerships

Australia's children are among the least active in the world. The consequences are serious: decreased cardiorespiratory fitness, increased risk of obesity, lack of fundamental motor skills (like catching and kicking) and, later in life, more risk of diabetes, heart disease and continued inactivity. The benefits of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) reduce these risks, and increased physical activity has also been shown to increase cognitive ability and engagement with learning.

Primary school is the ideal place to begin tackling this problem, and the Department of Education has now mandated that children should participate in a minimum 150 minutes of physical activity (PA) each week. Yet, many primary school teachers do not have the training to be able to implement PA effectively.

Associate Professor Chris Lonsdale of the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) at the Australian Catholic University was awarded a \$1.3m NHMRC grant in 2016 for a collaborative project with the University of Newcastle, Deakin University and the University of British Columbia to implement iPLAY, a program of professional development for primary school teachers.

iPLAY offers online training, mentoring and practical resources designed to help teachers increase their pupils' PA not only in traditional PE lessons, but also in class and beyond school hours. The activity program not only helps schools implement in-class 'energisers' and increase activity levels during PE, but also to connect with community sports groups and educate parents to increase out of school PA.



iPLAY will be rolled out across 200 NSW schools and follows successful pilot studies that provided evidence for the program's effectiveness and scalability. It is based on the successful SCORES program, a physical activity and movement skills intervention developed by Professor David Lubans and his team at the University of Newcastle (funding from the Newcastle Jets and the Gastronic Lunch through the Hunter Medical Research Institute). The SCORES program was evaluated in eight primary schools in the Newcastle region and was shown to increase children's PA, enhance their sports skills and improve their fitness. In order to implement this intervention on a larger scale, iPLAY will be delivered using an online professional learning system developed and tested by Associate Professor Chris Lonsdale and his team in 14 western Sydney schools (funding from the Australian Research Council).

Working with key stakeholders, including the School Sport Unit from the NSW Department of Education, NSW Sport and Recreation and the NSW branch of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER), the iPLAY project will examine the capacity of this program to be scaled up further, laying the groundwork for a population-scale intervention with the capacity to improve children's activity and health across Australia.

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**Project Title:** Evidence-based physical activity promotion in primary schools: Improving children's health through sustainable partnerships (iPLAY)

**Investigators:** A/Professor Chris Lonsdale, Professors David Lubans and Philip Morgan (University of Newcastle), Professors Jo Salmon and Marjory Moodie (Deakin), Dr Phil Parker (IPPE), Professor Heather McKay (University of British Columbia).

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**End Date:** 30th November, 2020.

**Funding Body:** NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) Partnership with NSW Department of Education, NSW Sport and Recreation, ACHPER, University of Newcastle, Deakin University and the University of British Columbia.

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