

# Pre-Olympic call for global action on physical inactivity

July 18 2012

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(Medical Xpress) -- The global issue of physical inactivity should be recognised as pandemic, according to a research paper published today in the prestigious *Lancet* medical journal and launched in a special pre-Olympics event in London.

Professor Fiona Bull, Director of UWA's Centre for the Built Environment and Health, and co-author of the first of a series of five papers on [physical activity](#) published in the *Lancet's* special edition [Olympics](#) issue, said much work needed to be done to address physical inactivity as a public health issue.

The paper, 'Global [physical activity levels](#): surveillance, progress, pitfalls and prospects' presents new [estimates](#) on current levels of physical activity and trends worldwide, alongside analyses that quantify the global impact of physical inactivity on the world's major non-communicable diseases.

[The Lancet](#) series also reviews why some people are active and why they are not, evidence-based strategies for effective [physical activity promotion](#), and how a multi-sector and systems-wide approach that goes way beyond health is critical to increase population levels of activity worldwide.

Worldwide, around a third of adults (about 1.5 billion people) and four out of five adolescents are failing to do recommended amounts of physical activity, placing them at 20-30 per cent greater risk of heart

disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer.

"Societal trends are leading to less not more activity than previously, [and] with few exceptions, health professionals have been unable to mobilise governments and populations to take physical inactivity sufficiently seriously as a public health issue," Lead author Dr Pedro C Hallal, from the Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Pelotas, Brazil said.

In the fifth paper, The [pandemic](#) of physical activity - a call for global action, Dr Harold W Kohl, from The University of Texas Health Sciences Center, said the role of physical inactivity continued to be undervalued despite more than 60 years' evidence of its protective effects and the alarming cost burden associated with current levels of physical inactivity worldwide.

This *Lancet* series highlights an incomplete and unfocused response to physical inactivity in most countries, which has often been understaffed and underfunded, compared to other risk factors for non-communicable diseases.

Professor Bull, a leading expert and advisor to the World Health Organisation, described [physical inactivity](#) as an issue that crossed many sectors and one that required collaboration, coordination and communication with many partners, including city and community planners, transport engineers, school authorities, recreation and parks officials, and the media.

She described Western Australia's now-defunct 'Physical Activity Taskforce' as a good example that provided the cross-government coordination needed to increase participation in activity.

"The Taskforce was a leading role model on how governments need to act together across sectors in a coordinated way to implement strategies

to address physical activity at sufficient scale to support lifestyle changes in the whole community.

"The recent dismantling of the Taskforce in Western Australia is a tragedy and we will pay for this decision in WA coming years," Professor Bull said.

The key authors of the *Lancet* papers argue for capacity building to be prioritised across sectors of influence, including health, transport, sport, education and business. This was agreed to be particularly in countries with low-to-middle incomes where rapid economic and social changes are likely to reduce the domestic, work and transport-related physical activity demands of daily life.

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Pre-Olympic call for global action on physical inactivity (2012, July 18) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

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