

Urgent demand for better designed programs to halt Gen Y's growing waistlines

December 8 2014, by Verity Leatherdale

The most comprehensive worldwide review ever conducted of programs designed to prevent young people becoming overweight has identified serious flaws with their design and implementation.

The University of Sydney research, recently published in the highly respected *Obesity Reviews*.

Previous research has shown that on average Australian adults aged 25-34 gained 6.7 kilograms over ten years, more than any other age group according to Professor Margaret Allman-Farinelli, an author on the study and from the University's School of Molecular Bioscience and Charles Perkins Centre.

"It is [young adults](#), not the middle-aged or elderly, who record the biggest weight gains of any adult group and therefore run accelerating risks of associated early onset chronic diseases."

"A crucial part of addressing the obesity crisis is to therefore create effective lifestyle campaigns to prevent young adults becoming increasingly overweight."

The research, with leading author PhD student Stephanie Partridge, reviewed 21 peer-reviewed publications on weight-gain prevention trials from four continents, including Australia, targeting 18-to-35 year-olds.

Half of the trials showed weight control in the short term. But only four

studied maintenance for more than six months and none of these were Australian.

Most of the weight-gain prevention trials failed to report data that would allow governments or private [health services](#) to successfully implement programs in the wider community.

"Important details which would be crucial to making a decision on whether and how to run the program were not recorded. Missing information included costs, how young adults were recruited to programs, the profession and skills of those who delivered programs, and the socioeconomic, educational and ethnic background of the participants," said Professor Allman-Farinelli.

Researchers need to remember to collect the information that would enable health services to evaluate the pros and cons of implementing their program and not just report on the success of their program the study concludes.

"Whether the effects of the program are the same when more than one person delivers it, whether it works in rural and urban settings, if some components of the program are not critical to success and just what the participants think about it - all need to be evaluated and reported," said Professor Allman-Farinelli.

"We are failing our [young people](#) and contributing to the looming healthcare crisis which estimates put as high as 60 percent of the worldwide population being overweight by 2030 if we don't come up with effectively designed programs to use in Australia and elsewhere.

"We need to fund large-scale, long-term research that provides the answers we need."

More information: Partridge, S. R., Juan, S. J.-H., McGeechan, K.,

Bauman, A. and Allman-Farinelli, M. (2014), "Poor quality of external validity reporting limits generalizability of overweight and/or obesity lifestyle prevention interventions in young adults: a systematic review." *Obesity Reviews*. doi: 10.1111/obr.12233

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Urgent demand for better designed programs to halt Gen Y's growing waistlines (2014, December 8) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-12-urgent-demand-halt-gen-waistlines.html>

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