

Empowerment to reduce childhood obesity explored for first time in Australia

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Empowering families with skills, resources and knowledge to improve their lifestyle is the focus of a University of Queensland study into reducing childhood obesity.

Ph.D. Candidate Renae Earle from UQ's School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences said this was the first time the approach had been explored for [childhood](#) weight management in Australia.

"This approach aims to empower people, organizations and communities by providing skills and knowledge that can be applied in any context to help improve life in any domain," Ms Earle said.

"Obesity is a complex and persistent problem and it's important all potential intervention techniques are investigated.

"The World Health Organization set an ambitious goal to have no increase in [childhood obesity](#) by 2025, but recent estimates suggest that no country has better than a 50 percent chance of meeting this target.

"It remains a global public [health](#) issue."

The empowerment method allows people to set and work towards their own goals, fostering self-determination, while also being supported by professionals along the way who ensure they have the skills and resources they need to achieve their goals.

Ms Earle said this sort of program had worked for some sexual and [mental health issues](#), as well as helped people stop smoking.

"We found that 70 percent of empowering studies improved health behavior outcomes in their participants," she said.

"Our research asks health practitioners, researchers and parents to consider this as an alternative intervention technique to increase traction in Australia."

Overall, there are only 29 empowerment studies worldwide that focus on

childhood weight management, none of them conducted in Australia.

Ms Earle said research indicated that empowerment interventions were a comparable alternative to traditional behavior change methods for childhood weight management and were particularly well suited to priority populations.

She now plans to co-design and implement Australia's first empowerment-focussed childhood healthy lifestyle program for weight management, which will be conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

The study is published in *Childhood Obesity*.

More information: Renae Earle et al, Empowerment Approaches in Childhood Weight Management: A Systematic Review, *Childhood Obesity* (2021). [DOI: 10.1089/chi.2021.0049](https://doi.org/10.1089/chi.2021.0049)

Provided by University of Queensland

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