



## INFORMATION SHEET

# Why a whole-school approach?

The health of children and youth affects their ability and willingness to learn and participate in school life. Healthy children and young people are more likely to succeed at school. Developing a whole-school approach in areas such as health and physical activity will help ensure schools contribute to this outcome.

A whole-school approach extends the learning environment from what is taught inside the classroom to how students' well-being is supported outside the classroom. This type of approach is commonly recognised as characterising a **health promoting school**.

A health promoting school will address three different aspects of school life:

- ✧ the *formal curriculum*, such as the teaching strategies, content and resources in the PDHPE program, as well as what is taught in other learning areas
- ✧ the *school ethos*, which refers to the school's climate or atmosphere and includes policies, procedures, and the social and physical environment of the school
- ✧ the involvement of *parents and the community*. This may include involving community services and personnel, parents to help with school-based initiatives, or local government services in sport and recreation.

The importance of taking a whole-school approach is supported by research. (NHMRC Health Advancement Standing Committee, 1997.) The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) in 1996 reported that the most influential barriers found to contribute to inactivity in children and youth are:

- ✧ limited time allocated in the school curriculum for physical education and sport
- ✧ increasing social concern for safety in recreational facilities
- ✧ decreased funding for community recreational programs
- ✧ parents' work commitments
- ✧ the amount of time spent watching television or playing computer games.

While some of these factors may be out of the control of the school, it is important to recognise that many factors impact on the activity patterns of children and youth. Developing a whole-school approach may have some positive impact on a number of these factors.

To get children and youth active, we need to look beyond the formal curriculum to the areas of school ethos and the school-home-community interface to see how they can be more supportive of increasing physical activity. Work in just one area is not



sufficient to initiate and maintain behavioural change. Work across the three areas reduces conflicting messages and reinforces the concepts learnt by students through the formal curriculum.

### *Putting it into practice in the school*

Schools can:

- ✧ provide comprehensive PDHPE programs, including an appropriate emphasis on physical activity
- ✧ provide opportunities for students to participate in enjoyable activities which will promote lifelong habits
- ✧ implement programs to develop students' fundamental motor skills, which are the foundation for participation in sport and recreational activities in adult years
- ✧ allocate a sufficient amount of time for physical education and sport
- ✧ professionally develop teachers and other school community members

with a responsibility for PDHPE and sport

- ✧ review policies and practices related to physical activity in the school, for example, the policies on the use of equipment at lunchtime or the use of facilities before and after school
- ✧ conduct a safety audit on fixed equipment and in areas where children play
- ✧ provide opportunities for parents to act as helpers in such areas as fundamental motor skills, physical education and sport
- ✧ link with community expertise in sport and recreation, and investigate and promote the range of opportunities for students to be involved in physical activity in a community setting.

These are just some examples of strategies schools can embrace as part of a greater whole-school approach to physical activity. Putting these types of strategies into operation will impact significantly on the development of lifelong habits of physical activity of students.