

Social Prescribing Initiatives: Heart Foundation

Service: Heart Foundation Walking (free community led walking groups)

Main Component: Heart Foundation Walking is Australia's largest free walking program!

Since 1995, the program has engaged over 145,000 Australians to start and stay walking, there are over 1,300 walking groups nationwide. Walking doesn't require special skills, instruction, or equipment, it is low impact and has a low risk of injury, and it's free. The walking groups connect individuals - building a community of walkers to support participants to improve their physical and mental health, enhancing their overall quality of life.

Who is this for? Anyone but the core demographic is older Australians. A recent survey of Heart Foundation walkers found that 37% of respondents were aged between 60-69 years and a further 51% were aged over 70 years, demonstrating the programs suitability and popularity among older adults.

Outcomes:

- Heart Foundation Walking groups are a community-led initiative, aimed at improving public health and reducing the prevalence of heart disease among Australians by encouraging people to engage in physical activity with others, in turn also enhancing social connections. For most people, irrespective of age, walking is an easy way to start and maintain an active lifestyle.
- Walking and regular physical activity have been proven to improve health. Walking can help manage weight, blood pressure and cholesterol, reduce the risk of cancer, and maintain bone density, reduced risk of osteoporosis as well as improve balance and coordination, reducing the risk of falls and other injuries.
- The social aspect of HFW was the main reported reason among respondents of (to?) the 2019 Heart Foundation Walking Walker Survey for their on-going participation in the program.
- Majority of the 2019 HFW Survey respondents said they would refer the program to friends and family.
- Organised walking groups provide opportunities for people to connect, helping to reduce the risks associated with isolation.
- HFW - in part due the program's affordability (free) and widespread reach - is effective in attracting vulnerable members of the community, including older people, the socially isolated and households on a low income.

Organisations-involved: Heart Foundation - various Host Organisations that includes Local government, health service providers, private companies, community groups and other organisations across Australia.

Keywords: Walking, Heart Health, Healthy Active Ageing, Walk Wise

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