Impact of an Aboriginal community governed project: adiposity and food intake of rural children

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In 2007–08 and 2011–12 the Many Rivers Diabetes Prevention Project (MRDPP) conducted a repeat cross-sectional designed study of the impact of a culturally acceptable health promotion program on the BMI, waist circumference, food intake, physical activity participation and diabetes knowledge of rural NSW Aboriginal children aged 10 to 14 years. Total participant numbers were 1620 in 2007–08 (16% Aboriginal children) and 1230 in 2011–12 (24% Aboriginal children). Other aims of this study were to establish if a multi-component, culturally acceptable health promotion program directed towards improved physical activity and food habits could be developed for Aboriginal children, and then identify the barriers to implementation and sustainability of such a program.

The MRDPP is an Aboriginal community governed program of research and health promotion delivered by a team of Aboriginal project officers to all children in the two participating towns on the north coast of NSW.

All variables were examined by Indigenous status, geographical location, and school year (primary school compared with high school). Associations between factors were also examined. At the time of submitting this abstract data, analysis is nearing completion and preliminary data shows the following between 2007–08 and 2011–12:

- A culturally appropriate health promotion program can be established, meets few barriers and is sustainable when initiated and governed by the participating Aboriginal communities.
- No statistically significant change in the mean BMI, mean waist circumference and prevalence of obesity for Aboriginal children. This is a very encouraging result, although these factors continue to exist at higher levels than for non-Indigenous counterparts.
- An apparent increase in the mean waist circumference of non-Indigenous children.
- Decreased intakes of sugary drinks among the general population, and among high schools students in particular, however this is not apparent in Aboriginal children.
- Decreased vegetable intakes regardless of Indigenous status.

These and the final results, including associations between factors, will be described, and the implications of these findings for future health promotion programs will be discussed.