

## Physical activity of rural residing children with disabilities: perceptions of parents/carers

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**Introduction:** Physical activity (PA) has been shown to be an essential component of children's health and development. Evidence suggests that children with disabilities are less active than their similarly aged peers and face multiple barriers to PA. Additional research shows that rural and remote children of all abilities face barriers to PA. As yet, there is no research investigating the level of participation in PA or the barriers faced by rurally residing children with a disability. Therefore the aim of this project was to describe parent's perceptions of PA undertaken by rurally residing children with disabilities and possible barriers to further participation in PA.

**Methods:** Participants were parents and carers of school aged children with a disability (5-18 years), who resided in a rural or remote area and were recruited through a local disability organisation or private allied health service. A paper based semi-structured survey was developed enquiring about participant demographics, child's characteristics, child's participation and barriers to PA and mailed out through these organisations. Quantitative data was analysed using frequencies and proportions whilst the qualitative data was thematically analysed using generic qualitative methodology.

**Results:** Thirty-four surveys were returned with participants from inner regional (n=13, 38%), outer regional (n=20, 59%) and remote (n=1, 3%) areas of New South Wales. The majority of the respondents were female parents/carers (n=30, 88%) with an average age of 44 years (SD  $\pm$  7.72, range, 28-67 years). The majority of the children were male (n=19, 59%) with a mean age of 11 years (SD  $\pm$  3.90, range, 5-18 years). Children included had a range of disabilities including; behavioural disorders (n=15), neurological conditions (n=11), genetic conditions (n=7), digestive disorder (n=1), endocrine disorder (n=1), hearing loss (n=1), respiratory conditions (n=1) and unknown (n=2). Seventy-four per cent of children were not meeting the daily recommendation of PA. Twenty-seven participants (79%) indicated that there were barriers to their child participating in PA. From the qualitative data three main themes emerged: segregation, access to facilities/resources and barriers specific to the child.

**Conclusion:** This study has provided evidence that rurally residing children with a disability are not undertaking the recommended amounts of daily PA and face added barriers to participation. Whilst there is clearly further research needed, this study is the first of its kind in Australia to specifically investigate parents' and carers' perceptions of PA undertaken by rurally residing children with disabilities and the barriers preventing participation.