



Walk to School 2015

Your council can be part of the action

Your council can be part of VicHealth's Walk to School 2015 campaign and make a difference to the health and wellbeing of local primary school-aged children and their families. In recent years, local councils across metropolitan and regional Victoria have contributed to significant year-on-year growth in Walk to School participation, helping primary school-aged children achieve the physical activity they need each day.

Evaluation of Walk to School 2014 shows that councils play a key role in delivering local Walk to School activities, helping to deliver significant, positive results within their communities. Find out more about Walk to School 2014 results, key success factors for councils, and stakeholder insights below.

To get involved in Walk to School 2015, apply for VicHealth's Walk to School funding for local councils. Find out more online at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/walktoschool

How Walk to School can support your local government priorities

Promoting physical activity campaigns such as Walk to School can support and strengthen a range of health benefits and priorities within council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans including:

- promoting active lifestyles and reducing sedentary behaviour
- engaging with schools, individuals and families
- providing opportunities for social connectedness
- providing equitable mobility options
- reducing traffic congestion
- reducing harmful air pollution and carbon emissions.

By promoting Walk to School in your local area, your council can also send a powerful message to the community that walking to and from school is acceptable, safe and normal.

ABOUT WALK TO SCHOOL

VicHealth's Walk to School is a high profile annual community event that encourages primary school students across Victoria to walk to and from school as often as possible during October. Now in its tenth year, Walk to School offers councils fantastic opportunities to deliver local initiatives and community engagement activities that support active travel among primary school-aged children and their families. The Walk to School campaign encourages regular physical activity in primary students by supporting them and their families to establish routines incorporating walking, and by supporting primary schools, local councils and communities to integrate walking behaviours into their local settings.

Communications and promotions

With strong campaign reach and a high level of interest from local media, Walk to School provides councils with a range of opportunities to promote local active travel initiatives, showcase the achievements of local schools, and reinforce campaign messages within the community.

The Walk to School 2014 campaign was supported by a program of public relations and media activity including ambassador engagement and partnership activities, paid media (focusing on digital advertising) and social media activity through Walk to School channels.

In 2014, local and mainstream media coverage resulted in more than 250 media mentions reaching an estimated audience of 6,605,389.

2014 evaluation findings and key insights

Participation is growing

In 2014, Walk to School achieved the following:

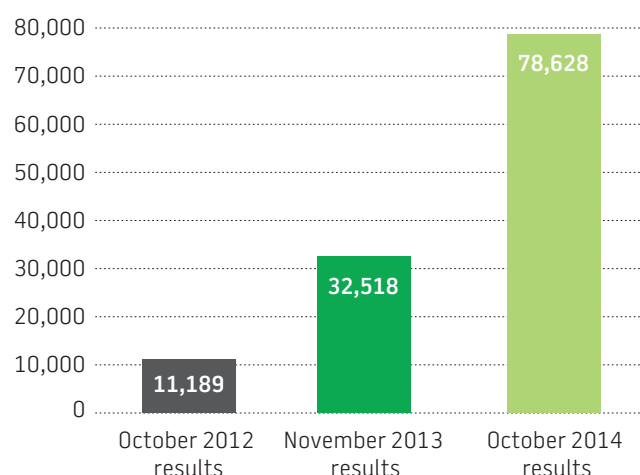
- 52 local governments received grants and delivered local Walk to School activities and initiatives
- 499 primary schools participated in Walk to School and submitted participation data
- 78,000 primary students participated either through their school or online
- participating students recorded more than 1.2 million walks in October.

Participation in Walk to School has significantly increased in recent years, as the graphs on the right show.

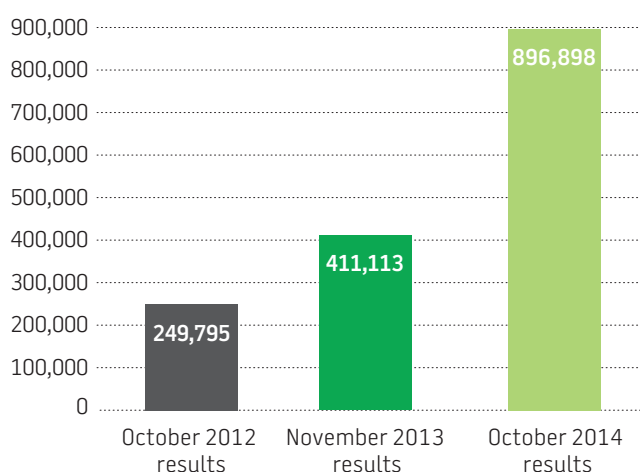
Councils and schools play a key role in increasing participation

- **Council involvement is important:** 86% of participating schools and 91% of participating students were from funded LGAs, indicating that local coordination of Walk to School activities supports school and student participation. School participation is much higher in funded LGAs.
- **School involvement is key:** 99.6% of participating students took part through a participating school, reflecting the key role primary schools play in promoting Walk to School and engaging their students.
- **The depth of school engagement is increasing:** the average number of participating students at each school is growing over time, from 74 students per school in 2012 to 158 students per school in 2014. This suggests that councils are doing a great job at increasing the quality of local primary school engagement each year.

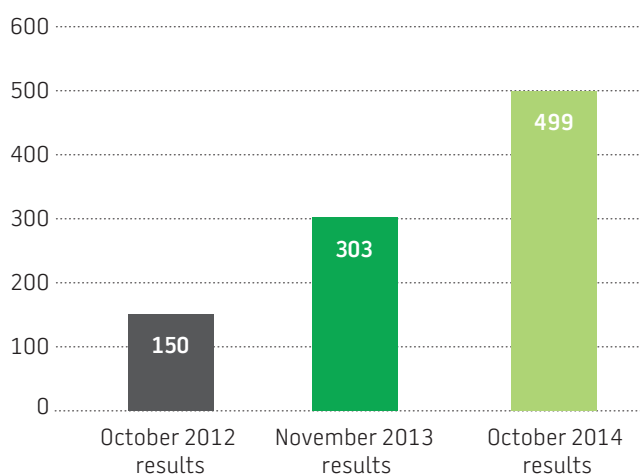
Number of participating students



Estimated distance walked by participating students (km)



Number of participating primary schools



Walk to School changes behaviour

VicHealth worked with a Research Practice Fellow at Griffith University to evaluate Walk to School 2014. The behaviour change evaluation suggests that the campaign helps to increase positive attitudes towards walking to school, and helps to increase active travel among primary school students who participate in the program, during the campaign and beyond.

Key results:

- The average number of times children walked to and from school increased significantly over time. There was a statistically significant difference between the intervention group (students who participated in Walk to School 2014) and control group (students who did not participate), indicating that an increase in walking to and from school for participating students can confidently be attributed to participation in Walk to School 2014.
- Rates of walking to and from school varied across different demographic groups, with higher walking rates reported among carers with less than two cars in the family, carers with postgraduate qualifications, and carers from higher SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) score backgrounds.
- Distance to school affects students' walking behaviour: the closer a child lives to their school, the more frequently the child will walk to school.
- The school walkability rating (broadly, how easy/safe it is to walk to a particular school) affects students' walking behaviour: the higher a school's walkability is, the more frequently the child will walk to school.
- Overall carer attitudes towards children walking to school are positive. Results suggest that the Walk to School 2014 program changed subjective norms (the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform a behaviour) for the better among parents of children who participated in Walk to School 2014, but no changes were observed for parents of non-participating students.
- Walking is the second most common form of usual transport to school: more than 70% of students use the family vehicle as one of their usual forms of transport to and from school, with more than 40% of students usually walking, and more than 10% usually cycling. School bus, carpooling/other vehicle, and public transport followed as other usual modes of transport (note that multiple selections were possible, so results don't add up to 100%).

Key success factors of funded councils

An independent evaluation of the Walk to School 2014 grants program found that the promotion of walking to school by local councils and schools sends a powerful message to the community from respected organisations that this behaviour is acceptable, safe and normal as well as beneficial.

Among councils that participated in Walk to School 2013 and 2014, both overall numbers of student walkers and walking participation rates increased substantially, suggesting that councils have successfully built upon previous experiences and connections with schools in their area to strengthen local Walk to School results.

Councils identified the following key success factors for local promotional activities:

- the availability of good, free promotional resources from VicHealth (and Victoria Walks), and the funding provided by VicHealth's Walk to School grant program
- experience conducting similar communications campaigns, including through established relationships with a range of community networks, facilities, groups, organisations, agencies and businesses
- council support for the Walk to School program, including management and administrative support from within council.

Councils identified the following key success factors for school engagement activities:

- the use of multiple, flexible methods of contacting schools, including targeting communication with school leaders, 'champions', and existing school contacts
- face-to-face contact, which was reported to be particularly effective, but is time-consuming, particularly for rural and outer-Melbourne metropolitan LGAs (some councils were able to link in with existing school network meetings to reduce travel time to numerous schools)
- communication messages that reassured schools that participation would not require a large time commitment, and was supported by high quality, free, readily accessible and available resources from VicHealth, together with ready access to support from council staff and resources
- the provision of information about the availability of incentives (prizes, awards, resources) to assist with the successful implementation of school activities
- leveraging existing links to school (e.g. through community organisations and programs) in the school engagement process
- schools having an existing interest/commitment to active travel to school or other health and wellbeing or sustainability issues. For some schools, the desire to address parking and traffic problems at the school was a motivation/support for participating in the Walk to School program.

What participating councils, schools and parents think about Walk to School

Feedback about Walk to School 2014 from councils, schools, and parents was overwhelmingly positive:

- **Councils were satisfied with the campaign:** 94% of council representatives indicated they were satisfied with their experience with Walk to School 2014. School engagement and limited time were challenges for some councils.
- **Schools were satisfied with the campaign:** 84% of school representatives indicated they were satisfied with their experience with Walk to School 2014.
- **Parents and carers were satisfied with the campaign:** 84% of carers indicated they were satisfied with their experience with Walk to School 2014. Parents and carers believe Walk to School is important: the overwhelming majority of comments provided by carers were positive and concentrated on the fact that walking was a great activity that they enjoyed regularly, and the importance of the program and its positive outcomes.
- **Distance, weather and safety concerns were challenges for some parents:** carers identified a range of barriers and enablers to participating in Walk to School with key considerations (beginning with the most frequent answers) being distance to school, weather, safety including stranger danger and traffic, ability of children to walk with friends, restrictions associated with work commitments, school involvement and walking infrastructure.

Support for councils in 2015

VicHealth is committed to building on feedback from our stakeholders, and working in partnership with councils to deliver a successful Walk to School 2015.

In 2015, VicHealth will provide councils with enhanced tools and resources to support grant applications, local Walk to School activities and ongoing active travel initiatives.

For key documents, useful resources and links, and more information, visit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/walktoschool or contact walktoschool@vichealth.vic.gov.au



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