Singapore’s Approach to Physical Activity for a Healthier Generation: Status, Guidelines and Programs

Biography

Ms. Alice Ong is Deputy Director of the Incidental Physical Activity Department, Physical Activity & Weight Management Division at Health Promotion Board (HPB), Singapore. She is responsible for planning, developing and executing programmes that help Singapore residents incorporate physical activities into their daily routines to prevent obesity and improve health outcomes. Alice has also been leading the National Steps Challenge™, a nation-wide pedometer-based physical activity initiative, since the Challenge was initiated in November 2015. In its fourth season now, the National Steps Challenge™ has reached out to 1 in 3 Singaporeans and has demonstrated sustainable and measurable changes in physical activity levels among its participants.

Alice has more than 10 years of experience in public health and health promotion. Her previous portfolio includes workplace health outreach and tobacco control. In 2010, she was in charge of the National Smoking Control Programme (NSCP) which utilises a multi-pronged strategy to combat tobacco use. Prior to leading the National Steps Challenge™, she was involved in the strategic alignment of Occupational Safety and Health and Well-being and Health Promotion at work, across the public sector, company and service industry.

Abstract

Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of premature deaths and ill health, and contribute to 80% of the disease burden in Singapore. The large burden of non-communicable diseases together with an ageing population result in an exponential increase in health expenditure.

Obesity is a modifiable risk factor of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. As the national body committed to promoting healthy living in Singapore, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) has a focus on prevention of obesity by helping Singapore residents incorporate physical activities into their daily routines. To do so, HPB must shift its approach from one that relies heavily on education to an approach which influences the environment to facilitate healthy living.

In 2015, HPB embarked on a multi-level public health intervention to reduce sedentary lifestyle behaviours. Termed the National Steps Challenge™, the population-level programme was launched to mobilise the residents towards a more active lifestyle using fitness wearables and leveraging technology to gamify physical activity. Through the National Steps Challenge™, HPB also engaged with workplaces, institutes of higher learning and community organisations to encourage physical activity and create health-promoting environments where people live, work and play.

Currently in its fourth year, the National Steps Challenge™ has reached out to 1 in 3 adult Singaporeans and demonstrated sustainable and measurable changes in physical activity levels among its participants. This presentation will focus on Singapore’s approach to physical activity using the National Steps Challenge™ as a case study by sharing the thinking behind the design of the programme incorporating physical activity guidelines, and findings and insights from the Challenge.