

Building capacity where it is needed

Once thought to be affecting only affluent countries, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity and other life-style related diseases (collectively referred to as non-communicable diseases or NCD) are now the leading cause of death and disability also in developing countries. Physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of NCDs. Half of the adult population is not sufficiently active to maintain a good health.

Prevention is better than cure. It is imperative that programs are delivered globally that focus on prevention sooner rather than later. To combat physical inactivity and at a population level, we need to engage not only with the health sector, but also with governmental departments and policy makers in areas of urban planning, recreation, education and transport. To achieve this engagement and to be influential, we need a competent and sizeable workforce. However, there is a lack of appropriately trained professionals in the field of physical activity promotion and NCD prevention, in particular in low and middle income countries. Many locations are either geographically isolated or face economic or safety issues making face to face training difficult or not feasible. The University of Sydney and WHO collaborating centre for physical activity, nutrition and obesity took on the challenge to build this capacity globally.

To educate a large group of professionals including those located in developing countries, we developed an accessible and low-cost online course about physical activity promotion and NCD prevention. The course ran over six weeks in 2014 and had over a hundred participants from four continents. It consisted of video lectures, quizzes, and online discussions that were facilitated by the University's experts. The course included modules for physical activity and exercise; epidemiology of physical activity; increasing physical activity at the whole population level; using exercise for the management of disease; exercise programs in the community; program evaluation; and sedentary behaviour. What set this course apart from other massive online open courses, were the discussions facilitated by experts. These discussions took place online over a period of 2 weeks and were suitable for participants from all time-zones. The participants found the course very useful and said that they would recommend it to others. The participants especially valued the online lectures, the discussions with experts and other participants and the global aspect of the course;

'The discussions were excellent, especially since there were many people from different countries'.

A third of participants enrolled in the course completed it in accordance with relatively strict guidelines. This is a higher completion rate than many massive online open courses. This online course about physical activity promotion and NCD prevention was very successful and has the potential to reach a global audience and build capacity in physical activity promotion and NCD prevention where it is most needed.

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Publication

[Capacity building in physical activity and non-communicable disease prevention: a low-cost online training course can reach isolated practitioners.](#)

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