



The HeLP-her Rural Research Project

Thank you for supporting the Monash University Healthy Lifestyle Trial (HeLP-her Rural) over the past two to three years. This summary sheet was created to inform you about the project progress and results.

The HeLP-her Rural program

The HeLP-her Rural project commenced in 2012, was funded by the Australian NHMRC and aimed to prevent excess weight gain in young women living in rural Victorian communities. The purpose of the study was to deliver a simple self-management healthy lifestyle program to determine if it is useful, acceptable and effective in preventing weight gain in women. We compared weight gain in women who received the HeLP-her program with women who did not. Six hundred and forty nine (649) women volunteered to participate across 42 small rural towns throughout Victoria. We visited each town at least four times to recruit women, to deliver the group session and to collect starting weight, 1 year and 2 year weight. We estimate that we partnered with approximately 120 different schools and kindergartens, travelled 28,000km, recruited, weighed and measured 649 women (at the start of the program, at 12-months and 24-months) and delivered 80 group sessions since September 2012.

Results: Program participants' motivation for program participation

We investigated why women participated or did not participate in the program. Reasons for attending included a convenient program location and time. Weight management was a strong motivator for attendance, as well as being encouraged to attend by friends or family. Importantly we also explored why women did not attend as this has implications for program delivery. Reasons included concerns related to privacy in small communities, self-consciousness and having to mix in new social networks. Word of mouth was important, as women say they would attend if they knew about it or if friends encouraged them to attend.

Results: Program effectiveness

Through your support we were able to demonstrate the HeLP-her program was successful in preventing weight gain in women over a year. This is important and ground breaking evidence particularly as this was such a large project and one of the first in Australia. There was a lot of variation in weight loss and gain as we expected. Some women lost weight, some women gained weight, but by far the majority of women were able to minimise weight gain over the year compared to the control towns. We measured their weight, their food intake, physical activity and behaviours. There was a small but significant difference in weight gain between the groups over the year. On average the intervention women lost a little weight and the control women gained a little weight. The results have now been published. We found that women who were able to make healthy lifestyle choices during the program if they

- used the program as an opportunity to commit to changing their lifestyle
- used the information we delivered in the program to change their lifestyle
- understood the message to set small achievable lifestyle goals, a core feature of the program

Women liked the group session and text messages, understood making small changes to their lifestyle, and generally reduced snack food, takeaway food, bread and alcohol. There was a small difference noted in physical activity and suiting time.

Following completion of the program, the participants in the control towns received the program manual and they also received a summary of the results

Program satisfaction

Based on participant perspectives, we found that the group education sessions were a valued method to receiving lifestyle advice. However, women suggested that using a mixture of face-to-face and electronic methods (phone coaching and SMS text messaging) was useful and important to address individual preferences and learning styles. We will use these findings to inform the design of future healthy lifestyle programs.

Moving forward: Sharing program findings and results

We have shared our results with other researchers through conferences in Australia and internationally. In 2015, the team received a national award for the program. We have had a lot of interest in running the program in Victoria and other states and the HeLP-her program was delivered in the Geelong area with Healthy Together Victoria in 2014. If you would like more information or to run the program please contact us.

Here are some examples of our results,

1. Lombard C et al *Preventing weight gain in rural women* PLOS Medicine Jan 2016,
2. Kozica S, et al Optimizing Implementation of Obesity Prevention Programs: A Qualitative Investigation within a Large-Scale Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Rural Health* 2015, doi: 10.1111/jrh.12133
3. Kozica S, et al Engaging rural women in healthy lifestyle programs: insights from a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Trials* (2015) 16:413
4. Samantha L Kozica et al Acceptability of delivery modes for lifestyle advice in a large scale randomised controlled obesity prevention trial *Journal: BMC Public Health* 2015
5. Samantha Kozica et al...Initiating and continuing behaviour change within a weight gain prevention trial: a qualitative investigation *PlosONE*; 10(4): 2015.

We again would like to express our appreciation and thanks to all our partners and the women who participated in the HeLP-her Rural program.

Kindest regards,

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