

Researchers aim to boost physical activity in preschoolers

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Credit: University of Western Australia

The University of Western Australia is teaming up with partners in the early education and care sector to find ways to improve young's children's physical activity, health and development.

It follows a [pilot study](#) that found 82 per cent of children attending childcare were not meeting national [physical activity](#) guidelines.

Dr Hayley Christian from UWA's School of Population Health said the new research would look at how professionally developed activity programs in childcare centres and upgrades to outdoor play spaces at the centres impacted children's physical activity.

"Physical activity in young children has broad health benefits such as instilling active behaviour, improved bone development, reduced risk of obesity, and enhanced cognitive and psychosocial development," Dr Christian said.

Data already collected by the team from more than 40 childcare centres in Perth and more than 800 families has already shown that on average children are only achieving two of the three hours a day of recommended physical activity.

"Our pilot study in 2014 provided the first objective measure of WA preschoolers' physical activity while attending childcare centres and the contribution it makes towards them achieving the Australian [physical activity guidelines](#)," Dr Christian said.

"With the early years such a critical period for promoting physical activity, childcare centres are the ideal setting for targeting strategies aimed at increasing the levels of activity in children."

Dr Christian said the new project, funded by a State Government Healthway Exploratory Research Grant, would look at whether professional programs developed by her team could help childcare educators to promote greater physical activity and outdoor play among kids.

"We'll also examine the key elements needed in outdoor play spaces to best promote activity," she said.

Dr Christian said the research team would work with partners in the early education and care sector to develop a set of practice guidelines for the design of healthy [outdoor play](#) spaces.

"The findings from this project are likely to positively influence policy

and practice relating to the physical activity and health of children attending childcare," she said.

"The project has the potential to increase the number of WA preschoolers achieving the Australian guidelines of at least three hours of physical activity per day."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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