



Queensland  
Government

# Executive Summary

Wide Bay/Burnett **Stay on Your Feet**  
Trial Project



stay active, stay independent



ambassadors

# Stay on Your Feet

## Wide Bay/Burnett trial project 2001 – 2006

This summarises key findings and experiences from the implementation of a five-year community-based falls prevention research project in regional Queensland. The trial project was developed by Queensland Health's Wide Bay Population Health Unit, in partnership with Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Injury Prevention and Control (Australia).

### Project snapshot

#### Aim:

To develop, trial and evaluate cost-effective and sustainable interventions aimed at reducing falls and subsequent injury among people aged 60 years or older living in the general community.

#### Duration:

Five years (2001 to 2006).

#### Location:

The Stay on Your Feet Wide Bay/Burnett trial project was conducted in Queensland's Wide Bay/Burnett region, which is a large geographical area covering approximately 49 000 square kilometres encompassing both central and coastal regions. The project spanned 21 local government authority areas and involved a diverse range of communities including regional centres, small rural communities and coastal villages. The Wide Bay/Burnett region was selected as it has Queensland's highest proportion of people aged 60 years and over.

A sister project site in New South Wales' Northern Rivers region ran concurrently, with cooperation and collaboration between the two regions throughout the five-year duration of the project.

## Primary target group and setting:

The trial primarily targeted people aged 60 years or older living independently in the Wide Bay/Burnett community (approximately 49,000 people). Other target groups included Government, community agencies, service providers and community members with a responsibility of providing goods and services to the primary target group.

## Rationale:

Preventing falls among older people aged over 65 years is a priority given Queensland's increasing older population and the incidence and impact of falls. As there has been relatively little work undertaken to quantify the effectiveness of population-level interventions, the intent of this project was to trial a variation of a previously effective community-based intervention that occurred in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales during the 1990s.

## Approach:

The Stay on Your Feet Wide Bay/Burnett trial project used a positive approach focused on healthy and active ageing. A community partnership and engagement process was used to ensure the community would want, and could have, ownership and direction of the project, with a long-term view to sustaining the activities within the community's resources. In order to foster the sustainability of this collaborative response, the Stay on Your Feet Wide Bay/Burnett trial project operated without directly providing funding for local activities. Multiple evidence-based strategies were used predominantly focused on a range of awareness and information activities and resources; as well as encouraging, developing and promoting opportunities for increased physical activity. These two key project emphases were locally prioritized along with a number of other risk factors, including safe footwear, vision, medications, home and public safety and healthy eating. Consequent action was guided by a series of locally-developed Community Action Plans.



### Key stakeholders:

Local key stakeholders involved in the trial project included:

- › Local Government
- › Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport & Recreation
- › Queensland Health staff, including Community Health and Home and Community Care staff
- › Private health practitioners, including pharmacists and allied health professionals
- › Divisions of General Practice
- › Heart Foundation of Australia (Just Walk It)
- › Physical activity leaders, trainers and facilities
- › Community-based organisations (eg. Home Assist/Secure, Bluecare, Sixty and Better, Senior Citizens Clubs, the Returned & Services League, Country Womens Association, Progress Associations and Service Groups such as Rotary and Lions)
- › Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, health workers and elders
- › Interested older people.

### Staffing:

A full-time Project Officer was appointed in the Wide Bay/Burnett community as a facilitator, with designated administrative support.

## Guiding principles

The Stay on Your Feet Wide Bay/Burnett trial project was implemented according to the following set of guiding principles:

Principle	Explanation
Encourage local involvement and ownership.	The most important thing for initiatives to work and to last.
Be inclusive, accessible, simple and practical.	Any community or person that wants to be involved can be involved. Community Action Plans should be easy to follow.
Start from what is already in place. Aim to enhance and extend the reach. Respond to local priorities.	Recognise existing local activities. Develop local skills and resources as needed. Start from what is seen as locally important.
Be guided by research. Don't 're-invent' the wheel.	Encourage the sharing of ideas, programs and activities within the local community and from other areas.

## Project activities

'Staying on your feet' involves being aware of the risks of falling. As falls are not an inevitable part of ageing, a range of activities focusing on awareness and information were conducted as part of the trial project.

- Existing and project-initiated resources including fact sheets, brochures, 'One Step Ahead' booklet, display boards and calendars were coordinated, distributed and promoted.

- › A 30-second advertisement was aired on three regional television networks during June to November 2005 and January to April 2006. NSW Health's Northern Rivers Area Health Service and QUT, who jointly developed the advertisement, kindly allowed its use by the project.
- › 35 trained community members represented the project in their local communities as voluntary Ambassadors, including local Murri Ambassadors. This role involved assisting local older people to maintain their independence and activity; being interested in learning and sharing information on how to reduce falls among older people; and helping to motivate and support people to make the necessary changes in an informal, friendly and non-threatening manner.
- › Local training for workers providing in-home services and local community organisations and volunteers was given.
- › A bi-monthly community newsletter was produced to reach stakeholders and local older people and raise and maintain the profile of the project.

A range of activities were also undertaken to encourage increased physical activity by older people.

- › Opportunities for physical activity were promoted through the development and distribution of local directories, brochures, Come and try days and sports tours in a number of locations across 33 communities and all 21 Local Government Authority areas.
- › New physical activity opportunities were developed and supported through local leader training and introducing activities such as Nordic Pole Walking, Life Ball, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Gentle Exercise. In total, 77 leaders were trained representing 20 communities and 16 Local Government Authority areas. As an additional supportive strategy, a library loan system operated for access to physical activity equipment and resources in a number of communities.



## Results

As a result of the trial project, there was:

- › an increase in the proportion of older people who agreed that falls are preventable
- › minor improvements in some of the risk factors for falls, including more people reporting wearing footwear, increasing calcium intake and making changes to home environments
- › a significant increase in the number of people reporting to talk to a health professional about falls
- › more local activities targeting falls risk factors, particularly physical activity
- › achievement of most major Community Action Plan strategies in local areas and regionally
- › more local people trained as physical activity leaders, resulting in more physical activities starting and continuing
- › wide exposure to Stay on Your Feet information in local communities

- › more local government/councils demonstrating commitment to furthering Stay on Your Feet aims in local communities by new initiatives and inclusion in local council plans
- › more joint initiatives established in local areas by key partners
- › greater community responsibility to fund programs and activities addressing ongoing needs, resulting in successful funding submissions to support local initiatives
- › no significant improvement in the incidence of self-reported falls or fall-related injury based on self report, hospital admissions or mortality data.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided, so others can benefit from knowing what works and what doesn't.

### Approach

- › Use a positive, healthy ageing approach that emphasises being active to remain independent.
- › Where possible, falls prevention should be linked with, and integrated into current health programs for older people, looking broadly at promoting healthy active ageing, preventing and managing chronic diseases and reducing avoidable hospital admissions.

### Planning, implementation and evaluation

- › Allow adequate time for planning, as community engagement can be slow and complex.
- › Ensure that evidence informs your project, and you keep up to date.
- › Establish a realistic project plan from the outset that clearly outlines the project, identifies a governance structure on how the project will operate and roles and responsibilities, identifies project resource needs and considers potential project risks and opportunities.



- › Establish a means of monitoring project functioning, particularly considering parameters of time, quality and cost. The traffic lights coding system used in this project (developed by Tropical Population Health Network) provides a clear and visual way of assessing and indicating progress on project strategies.
- › Consider evaluation from the outset by ensuring that it is included in the project budget from the very initial stages of planning.
- › Consider sustainability from the outset. Sustainability can refer to the maintenance of effective strategies rather than the project itself.
- › Undertake a comprehensive community stocktake of relevant activities, programs and resources as part of getting started and knowing what already exists. This should also be undertaken periodically and/or on completion of the project to monitor change.
- › Actively encourage the participation of older people in the project planning, implementation and evaluation.
- › In consultation with stakeholders, develop and regularly review practical, local-level community action plans that highlight local priorities and specify what needs to be done, how it will be done, in what timeframe and by whom.
- › Develop and put in place a multi-faceted strategy to ensure the timely and appropriate generation, collection, dissemination and archiving of project-related information. Data entry should be electronic.
- › Keep in mind that benefits may require several years to accrue and be prepared to make appropriate commitments (financial and otherwise) to the planned interventions.

### Collaborative partnerships

- › Develop and maintain effective working relationships with and between local key stakeholders. Personal contact is important, particularly at the start.

- › Ensure effective ongoing and regular communication with key stakeholders and the target group. Newsletters may be a useful tool.
- › Encourage local government involvement, as they have an important role to play in promoting safety in public spaces and creating and maintaining supportive environments for physical activity.
- › It is important that culturally appropriate methods and resources are used when planning and promoting healthy, active ageing and falls prevention with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, leaders and workers.
- › Take a cross-continuum perspective that acknowledges that older people can, and do, move between the community and either the acute or residential aged-care settings. Aim for an integrated and coordinated response across settings by working with clinical service providers and non-clinical community-based agencies.

## Awareness and information

- › Awareness and information for both key stakeholders and the target group are an important starting point. Use existing resources, but seek permission from resource owners where applicable and consult with some proposed users before their widespread distribution.
- › Mass media can provide a way of reaching a wide audience and subsidised or even free access can be negotiated in the public's interest. Consideration of transit advertising (eg. on buses) may also be worthwhile.
- › Older volunteers provide a valuable and effective means of reaching their peers. If this system or similar is used, there is a need for it to be managed and supported in accordance with Volunteering Australia guidelines. Alternatively, it could be linked into an existing volunteer program such as the Council On The Ageing (COTA) falls prevention peer-education program.



## Physical activity

- › Physical activity is an important component to include in a multi-strategic falls prevention project/program. When promoting physical activity, be aware of the need to address potential barriers such as transportation.
- › Come and try days are a useful way of promoting available opportunities for physical activity and developing and supporting new physical activity opportunities.
- › Training of fitness leaders and health professionals to develop their skills and increase their capacity is essential in providing new physical activity opportunities for older people.
- › A range of activities should be made available to suit the range of fitness levels in the older community. To reduce the risk of a fall-related injury due to physical activity, ensure appropriate entry-level activities as well as opportunities to gradually increase activity frequency and/or intensity.

## Remember to celebrate!

- › Recognise and celebrate project achievements and successes.



## What next?

- › A second-phase falls prevention project is to take place in Queensland's Fraser Coast and Wide Bay Health Service District areas combined with chronic disease/physical activity/nutrition and healthy ageing interests.
- › Falls prevention across the continuum of care by Queensland Health will now be known as Queensland Stay On Your Feet® in hospitals, residential aged care facilities and the community.
- › A similar planning process to that used by the project will be implemented statewide with the development of action plans encompassing the continuum of care for each Queensland Health Service District.
- › The project is informing the development of a Queensland Stay On Your Feet® Community Good Practice Toolkit, which is attracting national interest.

## Acknowledgement

- › Many thanks to the Stay on Your Feet team at Wide Bay Population Health Unit (Central Area Health Services), the 34 Stay on Your Feet Volunteer Ambassadors, the many community and government organisations and of course the older people in the communities of Wide Bay/Burnett for their energy and commitment.

## For more information

[www.health.qld.gov.au/stayonyourfeet](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/stayonyourfeet)

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