



## WesternCape on Wellness Healthy Lifestyles Initiative Design and Outcome Evaluation of Phase 1 Pilot Implementation

### Executive Summary

**Rationale:** In South Africa, the growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) affects more than 2 in every 5 adults, with more than 1 in every two adult women and 1 in every three men either overweight or obese. Nearly 1 in 3 adolescents watch more than 3 hours of television daily, and nearly half of all adults are insufficiently active. In the Western Cape Province, the overall burden of NCDs (heart and vascular disease, lung disease, diabetes, and cancers) accounts for more than 35% of all deaths, and surveillance indicates that the prevalence of adverse lifestyle behaviours, including physical inactivity, smoking, overweight and obesity are all higher in the Western Cape than in the rest of South Africa.

**WoW! Phase 1 Pilot Programme:** The Western Cape on Wellness (WoW!) initiative is a health promotion programme designed by the Western Cape Provincial Government Department of Health to address modifiable risk factors associated with NCDs. The WoW! initiative incorporates a novel transversal partner approach, involving “health champions”, to help group members activate healthy lifestyles, in workplace, school and community settings.

WoW! Champions were largely ‘self-selected’ within 13 provincial departments, 10 schools, and 9 community support groups. Champions underwent training regarding healthy lifestyles, health risk assessment, brief behavioural change counseling, and group leadership. WoW! Champions recruited members from their specific settings, who were subsequently invited to undergo baseline health risk assessment. All measurements were offered again at 3 months and 6 months. The programme communicated with members and partners through a Wellness print magazine, monthly newsletter, and weekly health messaging via WhatsApp and SMS text messages. Champions were provided with refresher training every two months.

**Aim:** The primary aim of this report is to summarise the results of the first phase of implementation of the WoW! community-based, settings-specific health promotion initiative, including changes in health risk behaviours, as well as proximal health outcomes.

### Key findings

- Of the WoW! pilot cohort of nearly 800 members at baseline, **more than 80% were either overweight or obese, over 50% of members from schools and community groups were hypertensive, and less than 1 in 4 of all members were meeting recommendations for physical activity ( $\geq 150$  min/week).**
- Barriers to lifestyle change differed according to site. Members from **community groups cited “lack of knowledge and resources” as barriers**, whereas members from the other two, more well-resourced groups cited **“lack of time and inability to prioritise” lifestyle change as the key barriers.**
- The **overall retention was in line with similar community-based interventions, globally, with 40%** of all participants presenting for follow-up at 3 and/or 6 months. **Retention in the community groups was significantly higher** than in both other settings.
- **“Lack of knowledge” was no longer considered a barrier after programme implementation**, whereas “lack of time” was more frequently cited, **suggesting greater engagement.**

- Marked **improvements were seen in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure at 3 months**, and systolic blood pressure at 6 months; the **proportion of members presenting with hypertension at 3 months was halved**.
- There were **significant improvements in self-reported healthy eating, physical activity, quality of life, and general health status**, and **significant reductions in waist circumference at 6 months, and in time spent sitting**. Self-reported **smoking changed from 10% at baseline to 0% at 6 months**.
- Over 90 WoW! Champions were trained for the pilot phase, and results over 6 months were available from 38 WoW! Clubs. Training manuals have been developed and now revised, based on feedback from champions in Phase 1.

### **Key recommendations**

- Challenges to implementation can be addressed through **supportive management; self-selection of WoW! Champions; letters of commitment from members, recognition in the workplace**.
- Increase emphasis on and **support for self-management** towards positive lifestyle behaviour change.
- **Address time constraints** and to help to motivate members to increase the priority of lifestyle change; **avoid over-assessment** that may be the enemy of engagement.
- More **comprehensive training for WoW! Champions** and alternative models for **personalised messaging**, such as print and SMS, that may be more effective and time efficient.
- **Greater community engagement and capacity development** through the proposed WoW! **Community Action Teams (CATs)** and the development of a community **Wellness Assets Assessment tool (WAAT)**.
- Provide Web-based online registration, **personalised and timeous feedback on health risk assessment**.
- Ensure **ongoing process evaluation** of implementation and engagement.

### **Conclusions**

- The Health Champions model is evolving, but has been shown to be **effective in changing health risk behaviour and health risk status** in members in a number of settings, including schools, worksites and community-based facilities.
- **WoW! Champions**, as peer-leaders **have been shown to be effective in this pilot**, however, there is a need to address challenges and barriers to implementation and engagement, as well as sustainability, as the programme is scaled up.
- The **WoW! Healthy Lifestyles Initiative** reflects **best practice in comprehensive, community-based health promotion** programmes, with **promising initial results**. WoW! Phase 2 has largely set about addressing the recommendations based on the results of the pilot programme.



For more information about the WoW! Healthy Lifestyles Initiative  
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