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Evaluation of the Provincial Walking Initiative Walk BC

Submitted to:

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Revised: September 30, 2010

Executive Summary

The Provincial Walking Initiative (hereafter called Walk BC) was one of four initiatives of the British Columbia Healthy Living Alliance's (BCHLA) Physical Activity Strategy. The initiative aimed to increase participation in physical activity among inactive British Columbians aged 35 to 54 through the provision of supports, resources, and training. The initiative initially consisted of two separate components — a Physician Engagement Program and Provincial Coordination and Supports, which included Walk BC walk leader training workshops. Through these activities, Walk BC engaged health care professionals with a walking prescription program, and trained leaders in several communities across BC in the benefits of walking and the components of a walking program. Communities identified a need for funding to support the implementation of walking programs for the target population. A grant program was added to Walk BC and implemented in the second year of the initiative with the funds remaining in the initiative. The first round of the grant program facilitated the implementation of 31 walking groups across BC.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) evaluated three of the five activities of Walk BC: the Physician Engagement Program, Walk BC walk leader training workshops, and the Walk BC grant program. Challenges were encountered during the first year of the evaluation when there was little indication from training workshop participants that walking programs were starting, and contacting patients from the Physician Engagement Program was not possible. The absence of these activities made it difficult to implement a relevant outcomes study. The addition of the grant program in the second half of the initiative provided the only opportunity to observe and determine the benefits of the program on individuals in the target population. Some of the key observations and lessons from the evaluation of Walk BC are described below.

Physician Engagement Program

- Approximately 300 physicians and other health care professionals participated in the Physician Engagement Program and received the program resources.
- The evaluators were unable to contact patients who connected with the Physician Engagement Program. Attempts were made to negotiate this access, but it was indicated that it would involve too much time on behalf of the physician and concerns were raised about patients' privacy. As a result, it is unknown who the program reached, and what impact it has had on increasing the physical activity of patients, especially individuals in the target population.
- Physicians and health care providers varied widely in their implementation of the program and use of the resources provided in the Physician Engagement Program. They did, however, indicate their satisfaction with both.

Walk BC Walk Leader Training Workshops

- Approximately 350 individuals with an interest in planning and delivering walking initiatives in their communities attended one of the 15 Walk BC training workshops delivered between 2008 and 2009.
- Walk BC training participants expressed satisfaction with the content and delivery of workshops. However, many noted the information presented was not new and suggested spending more time reviewing a step-by-step process for implementing a walking program. Walk BC training participants also indicated more networking opportunities would be helpful.

Walk BC Grant Program

- The first round of the Walk BC grant program facilitated the implementation of 31 walking programs in many communities throughout the province. Three rounds of grants were administered: one in the fall of 2009, one in the winter of 2010 and one in the spring of 2010. Only successful grant recipients from the first round participated in the evaluation conducted by SRDC.
- The Walk BC grant program provided an opportunity for SRDC to connect with individuals in the target population and assess the impact of the program.
- Communities were interested in providing walking programs however outside funding is often required to initiate and sustain community walking programs.
- Walking groups attracted adults in the target age group of 35 to 54 years, although many were already moderately active when they joined. Walking group participants enjoyed their experience and many reported an increase in their physical activity level. However, it is not known whether this increased participation in activity was sustained.

Other

- The components of Walk BC were implemented separately and sequentially, which prevented the programs from being integrated as originally envisioned. By integrating the three components it is possible that the target population could have been better supported and the initiative would have had greater reach and impact.
- A sustainability plan had not been developed at the time the evaluation concluded.
- The limited engagement among the target population in walking activities suggest that more research may be needed to determine whether walking programs or other activities are the most appropriate interventions for engaging inactive individuals in the targeted age group.