



NORDIC WALKING and its role in the NATIONAL PREVENTATIVE HEALTH STRATEGY

Introduction

Nordic Walking is a new activity to Australia however for the past decade it has been making significant differences to the health and wellbeing of mass populations in Europe. The activity's popularity and therefore benefits are now spreading around the globe.

Nordic Academy Australia Pty Ltd (also operating as Nordic Academy International with branches in Singapore and New Zealand) was founded by two individuals who are passionate and dedicated to make a real difference to the participation levels of regular exercise by the mass population. Whilst living in Europe they discovered an activity that was proving to make such a difference across many countries. The aim of the Founders of Nordic Academy is to utilise this proven mode of exercise to attract as many Australians to experience and enjoy the benefits of regular and sustained exercise.

These Founders believe convincingly that Nordic Walking has a very significant role to play in the federal government's offensive in reducing the burden of chronic disease caused by inactivity and obesity in Australia.

About Nordic Walking

Nordic Walking, as it is most commonly known around the world, is a low impact but highly effective total body workout which is suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels. It can be done in all seasons and over all terrains (from sandy beaches to country trails to urban footpaths). To achieve the excellent health benefits offered by Nordic walking the use of specially designed poles (which are not the same as trekking or ski poles) and a learned technique is required.

Nordic Walking is an ideal form of exercise for people who wish to:

- improve their cardiovascular fitness without overly exerting themselves;
- lose weight by doing a physically active but low impact exercise;
- get into an exercise program having only a low level of fitness;
- change their habits to create an active, balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Overseas research studies have proven the following health benefits of Nordic Walking:

- activates 90% of the body's muscles
- gives a 20-25 % greater cardio fitness benefit than regular walking
- burns up to 46% more calories compared to regular walking without poles
- decreases the weight load and impact on the joints of the lower body
- strengthens as well as tones the upper back and shoulders
- gives a more intense workout but with lower perceived exertion
- increases the lateral mobility of the spine
- promotes an upright and balanced walking posture
- improves co-ordination
- releases pain and muscle tension in the neck and shoulders

Tasks of the Taskforce (as outlined in the Terms of Reference) and the relevance of Nordic Walking and Nordic Academy

The Taskforce will also:

1. support the further development of the evidence base on preventative health, to inform what works and what doesn't;
 - in 2009 Nordic Academy will be working in collaboration with the Victorian University of Technology on a study which will investigate the effects of different modes of physical activity on people with diabetes (Nordic Walking will be compared to regular walking and resistance exercise)
2. provide advice for policy makers on what strategies work best at a population level, and on the best buys for government investment in primary prevention;
 - Nordic Academy is already working with a number of community health centres to provide effective Nordic Walking programs. Nordic Walking is easy to learn, accessible, affordable and most importantly an enjoyable form of group or solo exercise for a wide range of people
3. provide advice on the most effective strategies for targeting prevention in high risk sub-populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people living in rural and remote locations;
 - community programs in rural and remote areas are easy to implement as the activity needs minimal equipment and low levels of resourcing
4. provide guidance and support for clinicians, particularly in primary care settings to play a more effective role in preventative health care;
 - promotion, of the concept and easy to attain benefits of NW as a suitable form of activity for many persons needing primary health action, to GPs, clinicians and primary health providers is required
5. provide advice to Government on options for better integration of preventative health practice into the Medicare Schedule and other existing government programs; and
 - subsidisation/ tax benefits for the purchasing of health and fitness equipment and services should be a given in the new Preventative Health Strategy – such incentives reduce the barriers to participation
6. support the development of inter-governmental and public-private partnerships on preventative health.
 - forums and conferences which invite and truly welcome new ideas and innovations from private enterprise and overseas experiences should be listened to and given opportunity

Comments re: the Taskforce's Discussion Paper

page viii

Governments, industry, advertising and the media need to work to reshape consumer demand in favour of healthy choices, and to **make those choices available and accessible**.

Comment: Nordic Academy to make partnerships with local governments to provide access to well run and mentored Nordic Walking groups.

page ix



However, our need for knowledge should not stop action – we must act now on the basis of what we know, following the best practice and advice available, and learning by doing.

Comment: As yet there isn't any Australian based scientific studies as to the benefits of Nordic Walking however we can learn from overseas experiences (see attached doc: Summary of Scientific Research) as well as from case studies already undertaken locally (eg. Central Western Gippsland PCP and Indigo North Health in Victoria).

page xi

The recent US study *Prevention for a Healthier America* shows that for every US\$1 invested in proven community-based disease prevention programs (increasing physical activity, improving nutrition and reducing smoking levels), the return on investment over and above the cost of the program would be US\$5.60 within five years.[14]

Comment: Nordic Walking is already proving to increase the participation in effective exercise by persons not usually inclined to do so. The return on investment is proportionally high as one set of 20 pairs of Nordic Walking poles and the instruction and guidance of 1 instructor can service 100 persons per week (10 x 1 hour sessions twice daily).

page xiv

An essential component to enable effective action is to ensure leadership and coordination through the establishment of a National Prevention Agency. At the national level, such an agency is needed to support the coordination of partnerships and interventions, ... By bringing together expertise across the relevant areas, a national agency would provide leadership for the implementation of the National Preventative Health Strategy

Comment: Nordic Academy would be keen to contribute/ be part of the division of the Agency which promotes participation in physical activity for the prevention of obesity (and the consequently related chronic diseases).

Among its tasks, a national agency would:

* Ensure the delivery of a minimum set of evidence-based, illness prevention/ health promotion programs that are accessible to all Australians.

Comment: Nordic Walking is an activity that can be performed anywhere one can normally walk and at anytime – it is therefore ideal for communities where access to sporting or recreational facilities are limited or just impossible.

Develop the evidence base on prevention through the design, implementation and evaluation of large-scale programs to improve the health and wellbeing of the population, or population sub-groups, by testing innovative strategies, programs and policies for illness prevention/ health promotion.

Comment: Nordic Walking is a new and innovative activity in Australia yet it has been proving itself as a valuable and beneficial form of exercise in a great many and varied countries: from Switzerland to Korea, from Great Britain to Singapore, from Romania to New Zealand, from Canada to Israel. It transcends cultures and geographical landscapes.

page 7



Prevention policies and programs require strong support systems and structures. These include linked components such as:... * a skilled and motivated workforce

Physical activity programs need to be fun and be led by inspiring and enthusiastic people – more training in the personality attributes will help bring participation and program sustainability a long way forward.

page 14

* offer health advice and preventative services in primary healthcare settings

Comment: Nordic Academy strives towards the goal of having qualified Instructors (be they nurses, onsite physios or contracted Personal Trainers) who offer regular Nordic Walking groups set up in local GP and/ or Community Health centres.

General Comment

(from the perspective of an experienced exercise instructor and trainer, health resort promotion co-ordinator, and author of 'healthy weight loss for women book')

Physical activity programs need to be fun and be led by inspiring and enthusiastic people – more training in the personality attributes will help bring participation and program sustainability a long way forward.

In the Taskforce's Discussion Paper there is an emphasis on improving nutrition which of course is important however the strategies to improve levels of participation in physical activity seem less acute even though the chart (Figure 1.1 on page 2) illustrates that the risk of Physical Inactivity on the Burden of Chronic Disease is far greater than that of Low Levels of Fruit & Vegetables (poor nutrition). I see the promotion of physical activity as an area which needs more attention and focus in the evolution of the National Health Preventative Strategy.

About Nordic Academy

- Is an advocate and promoter of a form of low impact, effective, social and enjoyable exercise for people of all ages, abilities and fitness levels
- Is an industry supplier of holistic fitness products and services associated with Nordic Walking
- Has set up a national network of qualified Nordic Walking instructors promoting physical activity in their local communities
- Is a willing, communicative and already demonstrable player in a team effort to increase the physical activity levels of the general public
- Prioritises and invests time and extra resources into training and support services beyond the mere skills and knowledge of NW as an activity (ie. professional and personal development of our instructors to be inspiring leaders and to encourage a shift in the thinking and behaviour of their participants towards healthier lifestyles).
- Is already in dialogues with state level of Diabetes Australia, Arthritis Victoria and the National Heart Foundation about how and what Nordic Walking programs can assist sufferers of their respective chronic diseases.

Appendices

Article written for Exercise Physiologists in their AAESS magazine – Sept 2007
Summary of Scientific Research (2005) compiled by a Sports Doctor in Finland
Brief and random stats and figures of the European experience of Nordic Walking