

# A Healthy Weight Initiative in Primary Care: an interactive approach to sustainable weight management in general practice

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## Introduction

In 2014–15, 11.2 million Australian adults (63.4%) were overweight or obese. In the same period the Hunter New England & Central Coast Primary Health Network (HNECC PHN) had the third highest adult obesity rate of the 31 PHNs across Australia. Addressing the increasing prevalence of unhealthy weight has been adopted by the PHN as a priority strategy to impact the growing incidence of chronic disease in the region.

Achieving and sustaining weight loss is challenging, and general practitioners are well placed to inform patients of the health risks associated with unhealthy weight. Despite this, health professionals frequently report a lack of confidence in discussing the issue, and in particular, in initiating ‘difficult conversations’ with their patients. GPs and other health providers may benefit from the provision of information and resources that enhance their skills and confidence in facilitating a weight management program in the primary care setting.

## Materials and methods

The *Healthy Weight Initiative* was devised to increase the confidence and skills of general practice staff in facilitating a weight management program. The approach features a structured, 12 week ‘in-practice’ program with follow up at 6 and 12 months. The program is being trialled in 26 practices with approx. 1200 patients. The program uses an interactive tablet-based platform that will screen, assess and educate participants on healthy weight and behaviour modification. It has the capability to capture and report on diverse health and behavioural data, and offers access to numerous educational resources and online tools focused on sustainable weight management, health risk identification and behaviour modification. The program has been implemented as a Randomised Controlled Trial Study, and will assess participant weight change, program delivery costs, and several qualitative measures from providers and participants to determine its effectiveness and acceptance.

## Results

Participating general practices were randomly allocated into either an Intervention (high intensity), or Control (low intensity) group. Participants in the Intervention group attended 12 weekly sessions including a weight check, brief education on a related topic and monitoring of personal health and behavior goals. Control group participants attended an initial assessment / intake at Week 1, and monitoring at Week 12. Both groups received follow up assessment at 6 months and 12 months post-program.



Figure 1. HWI dashboard / home page, weekly healthy weight / lifestyle session topics.

The HWI platform encourages a high level of engagement between participant and practitioner. It is envisaged that this will result in increased program retention and participant satisfaction. Participants are encouraged to establish and monitor behavioural goals, and gain motivation from interactive tools such as the Avatar. As a cloud-based program, multiple healthcare practitioners (e.g. dietitians, exercise physiologists) are also able to facilitate service provision and support for participants.



Figure 2. Avatar provides a personalised visual representation of effects of weight change for participant.

The HWI platform includes instructional videos and educational content to support program facilitation in practice. This is to encourage a ‘Whole-of-Practice’ approach and maximise ‘top of scope’ use of professional skills within the practice. The program has embedded reporting capability, and includes templates to generate reports against multiple aspects of participants’ behaviours and activity.



Figure 3. HWI platform uses dynamic data storage systems to collect patient data and report at nominated points throughout the program.

The Healthy Weight Initiative targets patients with an increased BMI but no current diagnosis of chronic disease. Importantly it provides GPs, and other program facilitators, an opportunity to take a preventive health approach with an at risk cohort (see Figure 4). The program references the *Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia*, and endorses the 5As approach in the establishment and maintenance of a therapeutic, person-centred relationship.

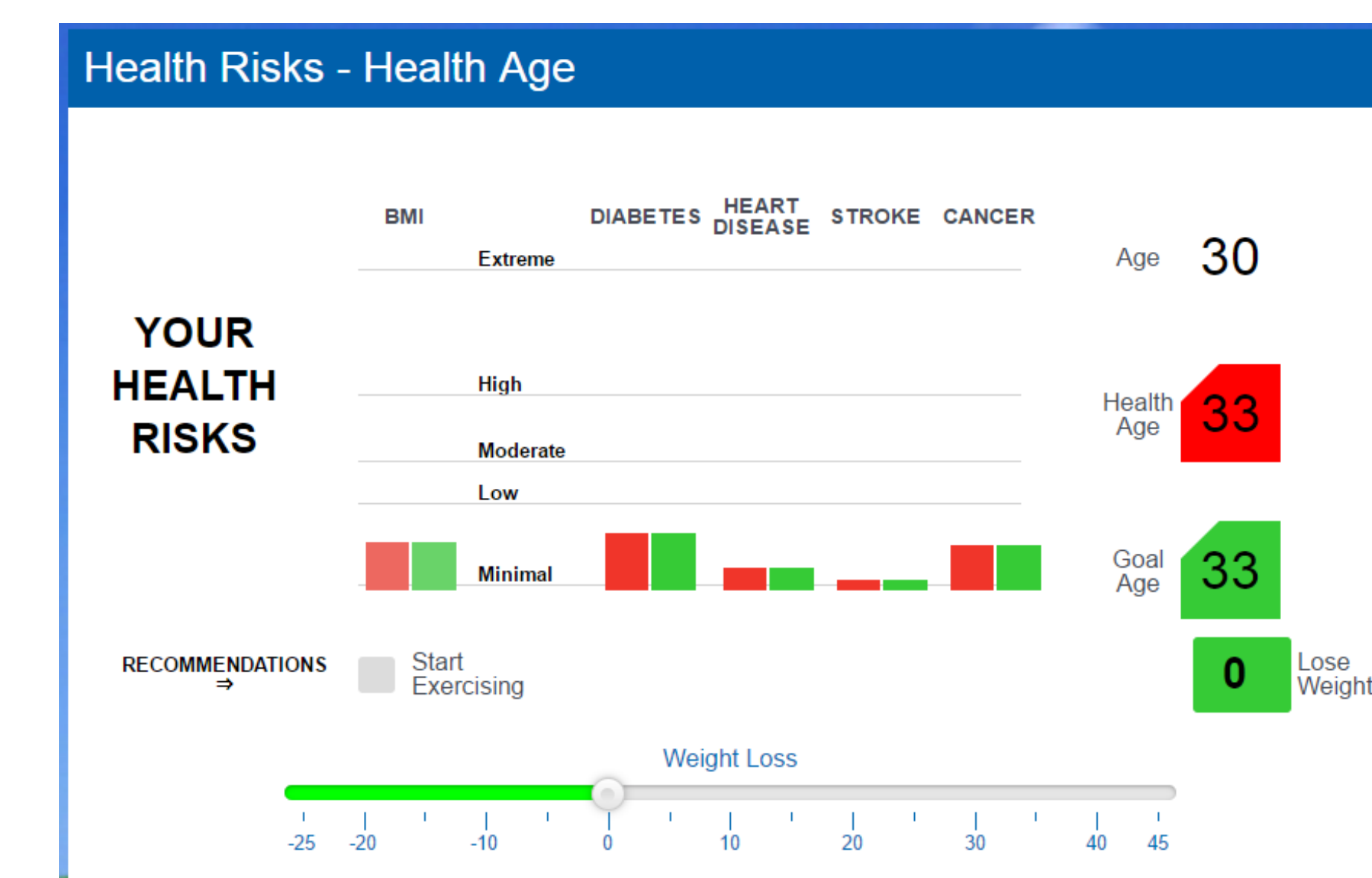


Figure 4. Participants can identify the impact of personal health characteristics on chronic disease risk.

## Conclusions

The Australian Medical Association notes that general practice is well suited to the initiation and coordination of weight management activity; and that its goal should be to develop the skills and motivation of patients to help manage their condition.

The Health Weight Initiative platform offers an innovative, engaging and educational weight management program that enhances the skills and confidence of health practitioners, and encourages participants to identify and address their barriers to reaching and sustaining a healthy weight.

## Literature cited

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Visual Fitness Planner

## Further information

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