

Case Study 3

Step and Connect: Walking Together for Women's Health

Step and Connect is a community-led active living initiative delivered by Access Health and Community through the Together for Health: Eastern Prevention Partnership. The project was established to help address barriers women face in participating in physical activity by creating safe, free, accessible and socially connected walking opportunities across Melbourne's Inner and Outer East. It recognised that factors such as social isolation, safety concerns, caring responsibilities, limited recreation opportunities and geographic barriers can significantly affect women's ability to be active.

Through Step and Connect, local women gained access to regular walking groups that supported physical activity, social connection and community leadership. Community voice was central throughout implementation. Women contributed through focus groups, route planning, communication networks and peer support, helping ensure the walking groups met local needs and preferences. Community walk champions were recruited and trained to lead groups independently, supporting sustainability and long-term community ownership.

A systems approach informed both planning and delivery. Beyond increasing physical activity, the project considered the broader factors that shape participation, including social connection, infrastructure, local environments, transport and gendered social norms. Partnerships with allied health, mental health and disability services strengthened referral pathways into the program and positioned walking groups as a practical social prescribing option for health and wellbeing.

During 2025-2026, seven Community Houses were engaged, supporting eight walking groups across Melbourne's Inner and Outer East. More than 150 people participated in Step and Connect, and 287 walks were hosted during the 18-month project timeframe. Seven of the eight walking groups successfully transitioned to a community-led model, demonstrating strong local capacity and sustainability. A Step and Connect Process Guide was also developed to support replication and future scaling of the program.

Step and Connect demonstrates how low-cost, community-led physical activity initiatives can contribute to improving health, wellbeing and social connection for participants, while building local leadership and strengthening more connected, resilient communities.

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What I like most about Step and Connect is meeting new people and having interesting conversations. I also like feeling more confident about walking in the evening by being with others.

Step and Connect participant



Image: Walking group participants preparing for their weekly walk.