

The Evidence for Act-Belong-Commit



What is “Act-Belong-Commit”?

The Act-Belong-Commit campaign is a community-based health promotion campaign developed from scientific evidence and primary research undertaken by Curtin University into people’s perceptions of mental health and the behaviours they believed promoted and protected good mental health.^{7,9-11} The campaign encourages people to take action to improve their mental health and wellbeing by promoting behaviours people can and should do for their mental health under three domains: Act, Belong, and Commit. Evidence that these three domains contribute to positive mental health continues to grow. This document provides a summary of some of the evidence underpinning the campaign’s philosophy.

Why promote positive mental health?

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is an indivisible part of general health, is essential for individual functioning and wellbeing, and contributes to all aspects of human life.¹ Therefore, mental health concerns everyone!

Increases in population-wide levels of wellbeing are associated with reductions in the prevalence of mental disorder.⁴ Higher population wellbeing is also associated with improved productivity and quality of life and is increasingly being used as an indicator of the progress and sustainability of nations.⁵⁻⁶

Evidence for “Act”

Act refers to keeping active physically, socially, spiritually and mentally. There is substantial evidence from a variety of sources that individuals with higher levels of physical, mental, spiritual and social activity have higher levels of wellbeing and mental health.^{9,2,3,12-16} For example, the mental health benefits of physical activity are well-known for improving quality of life and mood,¹⁷ while reducing depression and anxiety.¹⁸⁻²¹ Social activity predicts cognitive performance^{14,22-23} and is associated with higher self-esteem.²⁴ Staying mentally active in both work and leisure reduces dementia risk²⁵⁻²⁶ and more generally protects against cognitive and functional decline later in life.²⁷⁻²⁸

Evidence for “Belong”

A sense of belonging is fundamental to good mental health.²⁴ Belong involves keeping connected to friends and family, involvement in groups, or joining in local community activities. Regular involvement in social activities results in strong personal support, one of the most important factors for maintaining good mental and physical health.²⁹⁻³¹ Overall, the more social interactions an individual has, the greater the contribution to their mental health and the greater their ability to cope with trauma and the stressors of life that affect our mental health.^{23,32-33} As humans have an innate need to belong, loneliness can make us anxious, increase depressive symptoms, and reduce optimism and self-esteem.³⁴⁻³⁵ Involvement in local community activities and organisations builds social cohesion and is likely to result in a strong personal support group.³⁶⁻³⁹ Furthermore, a sense of belonging or identification with a group helps buffer the negative wellbeing consequences of change.³² Previous campaigns, such as California’s Friends are Good Medicine⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ and VicHealth’s Together We Do Better⁴² have focused on this belong domain.

For more information

Download more information and resources from our website (actbelongcommit.org.au) or contact Mentally Healthy WA on (08) 9266 4648 or email info@actbelongcommit.org.au

The Evidence for Act-Belong-Commit

Evidence for "Commit"

Commit refers to engaging in activities that provide meaning and purpose in life, such as advocating for a cause, volunteering, learning a new skill, or setting challenging goals. Taking on and meeting challenges, even small ones, provide feelings of efficacy and a stronger sense of self.⁴³⁻⁴⁴ Goal setting is an important component of taking on personal challenges providing motivation, a sense of accomplishment and growth, self-fulfilment, and happiness.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸ Similarly, volunteering and activities undertaken to benefit the community at large have special returns for feeling good about oneself and others, and providing meaning and purpose in life.⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ Volunteers have higher levels of life satisfaction when compared to non-volunteers⁵⁰ and consistency and diversity of volunteer activity is linked to wellbeing and self-reported health.⁵¹

References

- 1.WHO. Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice. Summary report. Geneva: World Health Organization 2004.
- 2.Keys CLM. Promoting and protecting mental health as flourishing: a complementary strategy for improving national mental health. *American Psychologist*. 2007;62(2):95-108.
- 3.Kazdin AE, Blasé SL. Rebooting psychotherapy research and practice to reduce the burden of mental illness. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2011;6(1):21-37.
- 4.Huppert FA. A new approach to reducing disorder and improving well-being. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2009;4(1):108-11.
- 5.Eckersley R. Perspectives on progress: Economic growth, quality of life and ecological sustainability. In: Eckersley R, editor. *Measuring progress: Is life getting better?* Collingwood: CSIRO Australia; 1998. p. 3-34.
- 6.Oishi S, Schimmack U. Culture and well-being: a new inquiry into the psychological wealth of nations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2010;5(4):463-71.
- 7.Donovan RJ, Watson N, Henley N, Williams A, Silburn S, Zubrick S, et al. Mental Health Promotion Scoping Project: Report to Healthway. Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer Control, Curtin University 2003.
- 8.Park N, Peterson C. Achieving and sustaining a good life. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2009;4(4):422-8.
- 9.Donovan RJ, Henley N, Jalleh G, Silburn SR, Zubrick SR, Williams A. People's beliefs about factors contributing to mental health: implications for mental health promotion. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 2007;18(1):50-6.
- 10.Donovan RJ, James R, Jalleh G, Sidebottom C. Implementing mental health promotion: the Act-Belong-Commit Mentally Healthy WA campaign in Western Australia. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*. 2006;8(1):33-42.
- 11.Jalleh G, Donovan RJ, James R, Ambridge J. Process evaluation of the Act-Belong-Commit Mentally Healthy WA campaign: first 12 months data. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 2007;18(3):217-20.
- 12.Kwag KH, Martin P, Russell D, Franke W, Kohut M. The impact of perceived stress, social support, and home-based physical activity on mental health among older adults. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. 2011;72(2):137.
- 13.Hamer M, Stamatakis E, Steptoe A. Dose-response relationship between physical activity and mental health: the Scottish Health Survey. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 2009 December 1, 2009;43(14):1111-4.
- 14.Buchman AS, Boyle PA, Wilson RS, Fleischman DA, Leurgans S, Bennett DA. Association between late-life social activity and motor decline in older adults. *Archives of International Medicine*. 2009 June 22, 2009;169(12):1139-46.
- 15.Rohwedder S, Willis R. Mental retirement. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 2010;24(1):119.
- 16.Hsee CK, Yang AX, Wang L. Idleness Aversion and the Need for Justifiable Busyness. *Psychological Science*. 2010 July 1, 2010;21(7):926-30.
- 17.Penedo FJ, Dahn JR. Exercise and well-being: A review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*. 2005;18(2):189-93.
- 18.Herring MP, O'Connor PJ, Dishman RK. The Effect of Exercise Training on Anxiety Symptoms Among Patients: A Systematic Review. *Arch Intern Med*. 2010 February 22, 2010;170(4):321-31.
- 19.Conn VS. Depressive symptom outcomes of physical activity interventions: Meta-analysis findings. *Annals of Behavioural Medicine*. 2010;39:128-38.
- 20.Saxena S, Ommersen MV, Tang KC, Armstrong TP. Mental health benefits of physical activity. *Journal of Mental Health*. 2005;14(5):445-51.
- 21.Jonsdottir IH, Rödder L, Hadzibajramovic E, Börjesson M, Ahlborg Jr. G. A prospective study of leisure-time physical activity and mental health in Swedish health care workers and social insurance officers. *Preventive Medicine*. 2010;51:373-7.
- 22.Ybarra O, Burnstein E, Winkelman P, Keller MC, Manis M, Chan E, et al. Mental exercising through simple socializing: Social interaction promotes general cognitive functioning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 2008 February 1, 2008;34(2):248-59.
- 23.Crooks VC, Lubben J, Petitti DB, Little D, Chiu V. Social network, cognitive function, and dementia incidence among elderly women. *American Journal of Public Health*. [Article]. 2008;98(7):1221-7.
- 24.Gailliot MT, Baumeister RF. Self-esteem, belongingness, and worldview validation: Does belongingness exert a unique influence upon self-esteem? *Journal of Research in Personality*. 2007;41(2):327-45.
- 25.Langa KM, Larson EB, Karlawish JH, Cutler DM, Kabeto MU, Kim SY, et al. Trends in the prevalence and mortality of cognitive impairment in the United States: Is there evidence of a compression of cognitive morbidity? *Alzheimer's and Dementia*. 2008;4(2):134-44.
- 26.Verghese J, Lipton RB, Katz M, Hall CB, Derby CA, Kuslansky G, et al. Leisure activities and the risk of Dementia in the elderly. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 2003;348:2508-016.
- 27.Valenzuela MJ. Brain reserve and the prevention of dementia. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*. 2008;21:296-302.
- 28.Drag LL, Bieliauskas LA. Contemporary review 2009: Cognitive aging. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology*. 2010;23(2):75-93.
- 29.Amieva H, Stoykova R, Matharan F, Helmer C, Antonucci T, Dartigues J. What Aspects of Social Network Are Protective for Dementia? Not the Quantity But the Quality of Social Interactions Is Protective Up to 15 Years Later. *Psychosomatic Medicine*. 2010;72(9):905.
- 30.Hystad P, Carpiano RM. Sense of community-belonging and health-behaviour change in Canada. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2010 October 14, 2010.
- 31.Fisher J, Yarwood G. Connecting not competing with others: raising awareness of wellbeing. *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*. 2008;128(3):110.
- 32.Iyer A, Jetten J, Tsvirikos D, Postmes T, Haslam SA. The more (and the more compatible) the merrier: Multiple group memberships and identity compatibility as predictors of adjustment after life transitions. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. 2009;48(4):707-33.
- 33.Cohen S, Janicki-Deverts D. Can we improve our physical health by altering our social networks? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2009;4(4):375-8.
- 34.Hawkey LC, Cacioppo JT. Loneliness matters: a theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. *Annals of Behavioural Medicine*. 2010;40:218-27.
- 35.Greenberg J. Understanding the vital human quest for self-esteem. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2008;3(1):48-55.
- 36.Muhammad A, Gagnon A. Why Should Men and Women Marry and Have Children? *Journal of Health Psychology*. 2010 April 1, 2010;15(3):315-25.
- 37.Berkman LF. Social networks and health: The bonds that heal. In: Tarlov AR, R F St Peter RF, editors. *The Society and Population Health Reader*. New York: The New Press; 2000.
- 38.Kawachi I, Berkman LF. Social ties and mental health. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*. 2001;78(3):458-67.
- 39.Wann DL, Waddill PJ, Polk J, Weaver S. The team identification social psychological health model: Sport fans gaining connections to others via sport team identification. *Group dynamics*. 2011;15(1):75.
- 40.Taylor RL, Lam DJ, Roppel CE, Barter JT. Friends can be good medicine: an excursion into mental health promotion. *Community Mental Health Journal*. 1984;20(4):294-303.
- 41.Hunter L, Lloyd-Kolkin D. Friends can be good medicine: educating the community about social support and health. *American Educational Research Association Annual Conference*; 11-14 April; Montreal, Canada 1983.
- 42.Carstarphen MG. Australia's "Together We Do Better" campaign: diversifying mental health benefits for local communities. In: VanSlyke Turk J, Scanlan LH, editors. *The Evolution of Public Relations: Case Studies from Countries in Transition*. 3rd ed. Gainesville: The Institute for Public Relations, University of Florida; 2008. p. 79-92.
- 43.Csikszentmihalyi M. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Perennial; 1990.
- 44.Morrow-Howell NP, Hong SP, Tang FP. Who Benefits From Volunteering? Variations in Perceived Benefits. *The Gerontologist*. 2009;49(1):91.
- 45.Locke EA. Setting goals for life and happiness. In: Snyder CR, Lopez SJ, editors. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2002. p. 299-312.
- 46.Lyubomirsky S, Sheldon KM, Schkade D. Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*. 2005;9(2):111-31.
- 47.Noels KA, Pelletier LG, Clément R, Vallerand RJ. Why are you learning a second language? Motivational orientations and self-determination theory. *Language Learning*. 2000;50(1):57-85.
- 48.Taylor A. Older amateur keyboard players learning for self-fulfilment. *Psychology of Music*. 2011;39(3):345-63.
- 49.Waddell EL. Predicting positive well-being in older men and women. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. 2010;70(3):181.
- 50.Meier S, Stutzer A. Is volunteering rewarding in itself? *Economica*. 2008;75(297):39-59.
- 51.Piliavin J, Siegl E. Health benefits of volunteering in the Wisconsin longitudinal study. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2007;48(4):450.