Step and Connect Process Guide

A guide for establishing local community led walking groups.

Welcome

Access Health and Community (AccessHC) acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, as the Traditional owners of the land and waterways where we work.

Step and Connect walks today on the beautiful green trails around the Yarra Ranges, on land that has been cared for and tended to by the Wurundjeri people for countless generations. May we walk with awareness, gratitude, and respect, recognising that every step we take is a chance to listen to and learn from Country.

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The Step and Connect Process Guide was developed in 2025 by Megan McInerney (AccessHC Health Promotion).

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Contents

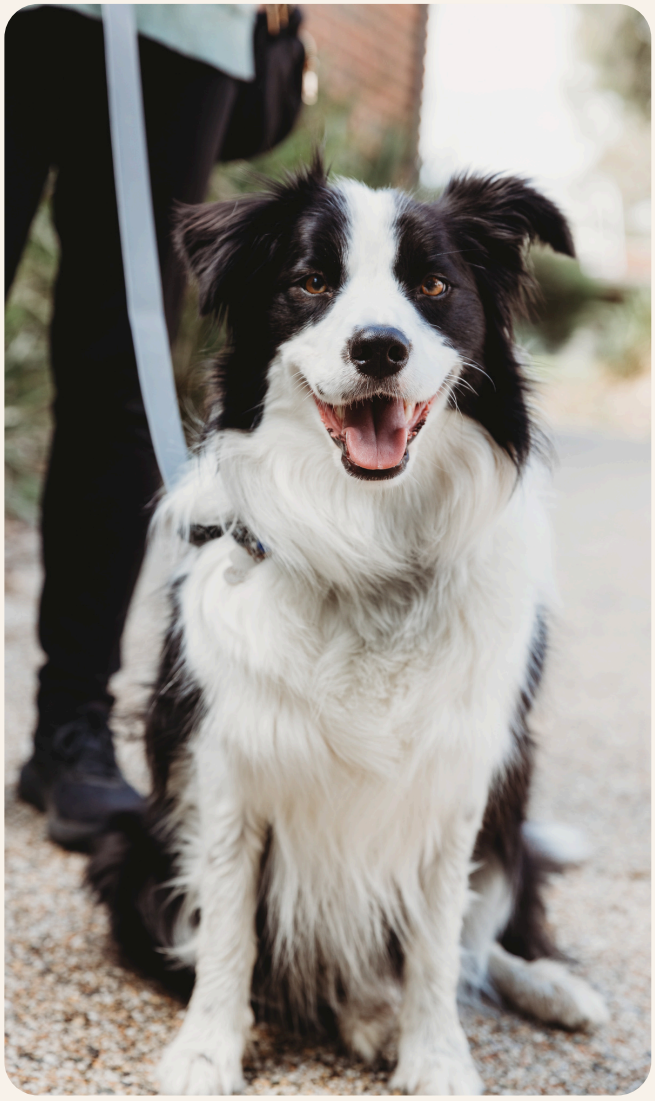
Using the Process Guide

The Step and Connect Process Guide is designed to help establish free, or low cost community-led walking groups.

Increasing active living to support the health and wellbeing of all Victorians is a focus area of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029.

This guide has been developed in consultation with community members, Health Promotion teams and Community House leaders in the Yarra Ranges.

It’s designed as a guide only to help prompt ideas and discussion, and contains suggested steps in helping to establish a walking group.



Walking between 6,000 and 8,000 steps daily can lower the risk of disease and chronic illness.

Why Walk

Walking is an excellent way to improve or maintain our overall health. Walking also:

- Is free.
- Doesn't require any special equipment or training.
- It is low impact.
- Can be done at any time of the day.
- Can be done at your own pace

Walking has a great range of benefits:

Physical benefits can include:

- Increased cardiovascular (heart) fitness.
- Increased balance.
- Better control over diabetes.

Mental and social benefits:

- Improved mental health and social connection.

Walking can help reduce our carbon footprint.

How much

How much exercise we need varies from person to person. It depends on a lot of different factors such as:

- Our age.
- Our general fitness level.
- Injuries and illness.
- If we live with a disability.
- Our sex.

In general, the more we move our bodies the better.

The key is to decrease the amount of time we are sedentary (sitting). It doesn't mean having to walk for hours, it means making sure we move our bodies regularly during the day.

Ways to Move More

- Park a little further away at the shops and do an extra lap or two around the supermarket aisles.
- Walk, or ride instead of driving to the local shops or on the school run.
- Take the stairs instead of the lift or escalator.
- Join a club. For example a walking group, running club, bird watching.
- Walk to catch public transport, or when using public transport, get off at an earlier stop and walk the remainder.
- Go on an outing. Explore a new park, playground or different neighbourhood.
- Walk at different times of the day. Notice how thing look different in the morning - compared to the afternoon or evening.

Adding more movement throughout the day helps us increase our overall activity levels.

Step 1.

Community House Consultation

First Step Reflection

Let's begin by exploring some of the 'Why. What. When. Who. How much is it?' involved in establishing a walking group. Consider some of these questions in your planning.

WHY

Is there community need and genuine interest for a walking group?

WHO

Who will be your target group?

Who will take the walk? Consider your staff availability and interest level.

Is there a community member you could tap on the shoulder?

WHEN

Give yourself plenty of time for planning and promotion.

Think about the weather. Consider launching your walk in the warmer months.

WHAT

What has helped other programs launch and be successful?

Have there been previous issues running this kind of group? How can you address them?

What are other Houses doing with their walking groups. Can you have a chat about ideas?

HOW MUCH

Are there any costs you need to budget for? e.g. first aid training, will you provide tea/coffee?

Will the walks be free or gold coin donation?

Step 2.

Community Consultation

Walking is the number one preferred physical activity for women across Australia

Using Surveys

Create an Expression of Interest survey including questions covering:

- Participant age.
- Group days/times/frequency options (that suit your capacity).
- Option to elect/assign a walk leader. Having a key person leading the walks helps build consistency and momentum.

Google forms is a free, easy to use survey platform. Other tools such as Snapforms and SurveyMonkey are available but require a fee.

Survey Steps

1. Decide on your questions.

2. Share the survey with community in digital and/or hard copy forms.
   - Digital surveys can be shared with your mailout list.
   - Hard copy surveys can be placed in the Community House or setting.

3. Create a poster with a QR code to display in the centre - encouraging community to share their thoughts.

Step 3.

Planning

Walk the Route

Use your survey findings, conversations, and consultation to select the most popular day and time to host the group.

Think about where you'll walk, and the needs of your group members. Consider group aims and accessibility, for example:

1. How far will you walk? What is the terrain like? Is it hilly or uneven? Can you find a flatter route that's convenient?

2. Will you walk a certain path and turn back? Is there a loop? As a guide, aim for a walk that takes between 45-50 minutes, or approximately 4km.

3. Are there toilets? Is there a water station or places to rest on the route? Take note of what's available in the area and what your walkers might need.

4. Consider pace/timing. If you're aiming for a social walk, a slower to medium-paced group may be more suitable.

5. What can you explore? Are you close to a forest or park, historical monuments, birdlife, art installations or murals?

Risk Management

No matter how well we plan, any physical or group activities can involve risks. Here's some suggestions to help minimise potential risks:

Insurance: Ensure your Public Liability insurance policy is current.

Incidents: Have a plan for your walk organiser in case of injury or incidents, e.g.:

- Step 1 – call 000 for serious emergencies.
- Step 2 – use your First Aid Kit for smaller needs such as for blisters or small scratches.

Medically Fit: Will you have the walkers sign a waiver confirming they are medically fit to participate?

Code of Conduct:
Help ensure your walk is inclusive and welcoming by having a code of conduct for the group. An example Code of Conduct can be found in Appendix 1.

Prevention is always better than cure. Consider:

- Avoiding particular areas that could be slippery in wet weather.
- Watching out for snakes - especially in summer, if walking on bush trails or grassed areas.
- Encouraging sunscreen use when the UV is above 3 and hydration on warmer days.

Other considerations:

Walk Cancellation

- Have a process outlining what to do if the walk is cancelled.

Photo consent

- Are your participants happy to have their photo taken during the walk. Be clear on how you will use photos.

Managing and storing data

- Have a process for storing personal data such as contact details.

Registration and Attendance

It is important to make registration easy and accessible. Consider an **option** that best suits your setting. Some ideas:

A registration form or portal you already use.

Set up a new online registration form.

Hard copy registration form.

Example hard copy form in Appendix 2

Quick Tips

Trybooking and Eventbrite are free booking platforms.

Hard copy forms are great if you have people registering on the day. They're also a great option for people who have trouble with digital forms.

Make sure to include the essentials for your group members. e.g.:

- Where to meet, what time to meet, what to wear, what to bring, if there is a cost involved.

Attendance

Recording attendance is important as it will help you understand and evaluate the success of your program.

It will also help you keep an eye on trends such as:

- Changes in participation numbers.
- How changes in weather affect attendance.

For basic attendance, you can document **participation number**.

For a more detailed evaluation you can record **participant first names** and **attendance numbers**.

Recording participant names may help you identify potential **community champions**/walk leaders.

Example sign in sheets can be found in Appendix 3

Walk Facilitation

A community-led model helps make the program sustainable. Recruiting a walk organiser/community champion is a great option if your team can't host the walks. When thinking about facilitating the walk, consider:

IN HOUSE
Can your team facilitate the walks initially, then encourage community members to share the role?

COMMUNITY CHAMP
Is there a community member interested in attending the walks that may be interested in the role?

HEART FOUNDATION WALK
Consider aligning with the Heart Foundation Walking program for support and resources on engaging a community walk organiser.

WALK ROLE
Help your walk organiser understand their role and responsibilities.

House environment:
A warm and friendly welcome is essential.

- Is there a waiting area?
- Will someone greet your walkers on arrival?

Social:
A social element can help build social connection.

- Will you just walk or have a cuppa afterwards?
- Do you have facilities/crockery/seating?

Accessibility:

- Is there ample parking for those traveling by car?
- Is there a ramp and/or steps to the entrance?

Feedback:
Lots of great ideas come from feedback and will help you improve the experience for your walkers.

- Provide an annual survey or feedback box.

Step 4.

Promotion

Walk Promotion

Launch Tips

- Align with dates and group times with your Term Program.
- Aim for the warmer months when the weather is better.

Digital Promotion

- Create a blurb and social tiles for your Term guide.
- Share through any social media channels you use: Facebook and Instagram.
- Use your inhouse channels, e.g. newsletter, email, mailing list.
- Advertise in the local newspaper.

Hard Copy

- Create and share flyers around your office/House.
- Share flyers to local places: Cafes, Libraries, Community Health, local GP, local supermarket.

Using your networks

- Share the walking group information with the people who completed your community consultation.
- Invite participants from other local health programs, e.g. weight management programs, diabetes education, falls prevention, support groups, social prescribing, mental health support and other community groups.
- Touch base with other Township groups and other local Facebook pages
- Make use of Council events pages, newsletters and Council teams (Active Ageing, Active Recreation, Family and Early years team).
- Contact local school newsletters.

What to include on your flyer or promotional information

- Time, cost, where to meet, what to wear, what to bring, distance or pace of the walk.
- Try and remove financial barriers by having your walk either free or low cost.
- Use images that are relatable and reflect your community and/or target audience.

Other Ideas

LOCAL EVENTS
Is there a local event or festival you could tie in with e.g. Healthy Active Ageing week, Over 50s Festival, Women's Health Week, Heart Week, International Women's Day.

PIGGYBACK PROGRAMMING
Can you link to other programs already established at your house e.g. walk after the earlier stretch class, walk before the house coffee and chat catchup.

EVENTS AND CHALLENGES
Can you schedule a special event or challenge, e.g. bring a friend, go in the draw to win a coffee.

- **TIP**: Word of mouth is the most popular way to reach people in your community

BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE
Consider what you might do in the colder months or when wet weather strikes. If the walk cannot go ahead, encourage your walkers to come and have a cuppa instead.

Step 5.

Walk

Congratulations

And you're away.

Share your success online through photos and walker stories or quotes.

Make sure you gather regular feedback from your participants to help improve the program.

Check where your walkers are hearing about the group to help direct ongoing promotion.

Check in with other houses or health promotion teams for support/feedback.

HELPFUL SITES

Step and Connect Landing Page

VicHealth

Heart Foundation Walking

Victoria Walks

Parks Victoria

Use the four Step and Connect posters in your Community House to encourage walking.

Walking. Good for mind, body and spirit

step and connect

step and connect

Walk to connect with each other

step and connect

Walk to connect with your community

Walk to explore your neighourhood

step and connect

Appendix

Code of Conduct

- The walks are for all. It is important that all walkers feel welcomed and included.
- The walks are for people to be involved socially and enjoy conversation.
- The walks are a pressure free experience.
- Focus is always on function/health and not appearance.
- Focus is on connection not competition.

Registration form

First Name ..... Last name .....
Phone .....
Email ..... Postcode .....
Emergency contact name .....
Emergency contact details (phone) .....

Do you provide consent to your photo/or video being taken? Images may be used to promote Step and Connect on social media platforms or in the (insert organisation) Annual Report.

Yes No

The Step and Connect walks are hosted in alignment with Heart Foundation Walking. By participating in the walks you acknowledge that you are medically fit to complete the walk comfortably. If you have any doubts, we advise that you speak to your doctor/practitioner prior to commencing with the group.

Signed ..... Date .....

Walks may be cancelled due to inclement weather. Walks will be cancelled:

- If the CFA warning is extreme or catastrophic
- If there is a risk of storm/trees down in the area
- If there is a power outage at the Community House
- If the rain is heavy and persistent.
- (insert any additional reasons)

Walkers will be notified by text and/or email of a cancellation at least 1hr prior to the start time.
Registration forms will be held with securely in accordance with (insert organisation) information policies. Contact details may be shared with the Community House administration and walk organisers as part of a risk management plan. Please feel welcome to contact us at (insert email address) if you have any questions.

Sign in sheet

DATE	NAME	DATE	NAME

Contact Information

For further details or inquiries

Access Health and Community
(03) 9738 8801
health.promotion@accesshc.org.au