



Life! Program Evaluation Overview 2023–2024



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In this document, 'Aboriginal' refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Indigenous' or 'Koori/Koorie' is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

Available at lifeprogram.org.au

Executive summary and case studies

The *Life!* program is the leading evidence-based prevention program of its kind in Australia. The aim of the program is to reduce risk factors and incidence of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The program combines educational content about diet, exercise, and other health promoting behaviours with behaviour change techniques and peer support.

The program comprises of the following sub-programs:

- Group based programs:
 - Group Course
 - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
 - Road to Good Health (RTGH)
- Individual Telephone Health Coaching service (THC)

All sub-programs are delivered over 12 months and include seven sessions except for the RTGH program which is delivered over six months and includes six sessions.

Evaluation purpose and scope

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the *Life!* program over the short term (six months) and longer term (12 months) using a range of outcomes measures.



Jordan - *Life!* Facilitator and Jane - *Life!* Participant

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. The measures used to determine program effectiveness included lifestyle behavioural outcomes, physical outcomes, achievement of the program goals, self-perceived positive impact of the program and satisfaction with the program. Statistical tests were conducted to compare results at introductory session with six months (session 5/follow up call 4) as well as across 12 months for longer term impact. A p value of <.005 was accepted as statistically significant.

Evaluation findings

Program reach and retention

In the 2023-24 financial year (FY), 5,757 participants from the Group Course, CALD and THC sub-programs completed the introductory session. This included 4,495 Group Course, 699 CALD, and 563 THC participants. This is an important achievement as it is the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that the program has met this delivery target (+/-5% of 5,935).

The typical participant of the 2023-24 cohort was a 59-year-old woman, referred through the provider/facilitator channel, holding at least a bachelor's degree, married, and employed.

Participants from the 2023-24 cohort were from:

- non-English speaking backgrounds: 30% (above the target of 20%)
- hotspot locations: 12.5% (below the target of 35%)
- regional/rural locations: 26.6% (below the target of 40%)
- very high risk of type 2 diabetes category: 26.5% (below the target of 30%).

The Group Course increased the retention rate at session 5 to 55.33% (compared to 51.13% 2022-23), CALD retention decreased to 59% (compared to 73.99%) and THC increased to 67.92% (compared to 66.31%).

However, it should be noted that these retention rates are based on a point in time, and therefore cannot be considered as an accurate full picture because many participants in this cohort were still active at the time of these calculations and therefore were excluded from the table below.

Program effectiveness in the short term (six months)

The evaluation findings demonstrate that all the *Life!* sub-programs achieved positive improvements in the short-term for the lifestyle behavioural outcomes (diet and exercise), physical outcomes (weight and waist measurements), and achievement of healthy eating and physical activity program goals. Trends examined in the previous year's cohort over 12 months indicate that these achievements at six months are maintained and, in some cases, improved upon at 12 months.

In 2023–24 participants' program outcomes were:

- weight was reduced by an average of 2kg
- waist circumference was reduced by an average of 3cm
- physical activity increased by 10 minutes per day
- 67.9% improved their fat and fibre intake

Change in participant outcomes over six months (Tables 1–2)

Table 1: Overall program participant outcomes at six months for the 2023–24 cohort

Outcomes evaluation cohort = 1457	Diet	Physical activity	Sedentary behaviour	Weight (kg)	Waist (cm)
	N (%) participants				
Improved after intervention	989 (67.9)	833 (57.3)	690 (47.4)	848 (58.2)	767 (52.6)

Participants achieved the *Life!* program goals:

- healthy eating goal: mean fat/fibre score \geq 3.8 for women; mean fat/fibre score \geq 3.5 for men
- physical activity goal: moderate activity \geq 30 minutes/day
- weight loss goal: weight decreasing by at least 5%.

Table 2: Goal achievement at six months for the 2023–24 cohort

Outcomes evaluation cohort= 1457	Diet ³	Physical activity	Weight (kg)
	N (%) participants		
Goal met after intervention	371 (55.5) • Men 123 (32.5) • Women 248 (23.0)	870 (59.8)	250 (17.2)

Participants' perceived impact of and satisfaction with the program

Participants are highly satisfied with the program, with over 74% of participants rating the program as 'very good' or 'excellent'. Although 25% of participants did not respond to this survey, almost 100% of those who did answer this question rated the program positively. Participants also rate their self-efficacy in increasing their knowledge and skills in both physical activity and healthy eating as high. More than 70% of participants either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the program assisted them to improve their diet and increase their physical activity.

Program effectiveness in the longer term (12 months)

At the time of this evaluation, most participants in the 2023–24 cohort had not yet reached the 12 month session/call, therefore participants from the 2022–23 cohort have been examined to determine program effectiveness in the longer term. Participants maintained and, in some cases, continued to improve on the results achieved at six months by the 12 month session/call.

Conclusions

Overall, participants in the *Life!* program made significant improvements in all program outcomes, including physical activity, fat and fibre intake, reduced sedentary time, and reductions in weight and waist measurements.

There are important initiatives to be implemented to address priority population reach, improve data quality, and maintain quality assurance. These will be worked towards over the next 12 months and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Implement targeted interventions to increase:
 - a. the number of participants from priority populations.
 - b. referral pathways in regional and hotspot locations.
2. Continue to improve the *Life!* program's data quality.
3. Continue to develop and maintain quality assurance processes.



Michael - *Life!* Participant and Angel - *Life!* Facilitator

For more information about the *Life!* program evaluation overview please contact Carli Leishman (Evaluation and Quality Lead) at cleishman@diabetesvic.org.au

Eliza – Life! graduate – Group course



Eliza, a resident of Shepparton, Victoria, experienced a significant turning point in her health journey when she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes during her first pregnancy. Concerned about the risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the future, Eliza attended the *Life!* program to improve her health and prevent the progression of her condition.

Lifestyle changes

Eliza adopted several lifestyle changes as a result of attending the program. She became more active, regularly engaging in outdoor activities with her son. This not only benefited her health but also modelled positive behaviours for her family. She stated, "Some of the changes I made were lifestyle ones, keeping myself active and moving and modelling that for my family and my son, regularly going outside with him and playing on the different equipment outside and just moving my body." These simple yet effective changes, such as moving her body more and enjoying meals as a family, contributed to her overall well-being.

Long-term benefits and success

The most significant outcome for Eliza was the reduction in her risk of developing type 2 diabetes. After being tested annually following her gestational diabetes diagnosis, she was pleased to find that she did not develop gestational diabetes during her second pregnancy. She expressed her relief, saying, "It was really nice to know that I have made some positive changes and that potentially I have stopped the risk of me developing type 2 diabetes in the future."

Program resources and support

Eliza appreciated the comprehensive support provided by *Life!*, including face to face sessions, reading materials, and practical tools that helped her understand sugar, salt, and saturated fat content in food. She emphasised the value of these resources, stating, "This program is well resourced with face to face content, reading materials and a great little card to help me understand sugar, salt and saturated fats in food products." The supportive environment of the program, coupled with its free access, made it an invaluable experience for her and her family. "I gained professional-based knowledge around a number of different topics to help make better lifestyle choices. And it is free and with a supportive environment," Eliza highlighted.

Racha – Life! Group Course Facilitator



Racha studied nutrition and dietetics and graduated from the American University of Beirut in Lebanon in 2010. She has been delivering the *Life!* program since October 2023.

Tell us a little bit about what interested you in studying nutrition?

From a young age, I have always been interested in health and wellness. My passion for studying nutrition stemmed from a desire to understand how food impacts the body and mind and how we can use nutrition to improve our lives and health.

What interested you to become a program facilitator and provider for the *Life!* program?

My interest in becoming a program facilitator and provider for the *Life!* program stems from my dedication to improving community health, particularly in preventing chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes. I have seen firsthand the impact that education and support can have on individuals' health outcomes.

When I learned that we could deliver this program to the culturally diverse Arabic community, I felt an even greater urge to help.

Why do you think it's important for our communities to offer in-language programs like the Arabic *Life!* program?

Offering in-language programs like the Arabic *Life!* program is crucial for several reasons. Language barriers can often prevent individuals from accessing essential health information and services. By providing programs in the participants' native language, we ensure that they fully understand the content, which enhances their ability to apply the knowledge to their daily lives. Culturally sensitive programs recognise and respect the unique customs, beliefs, and practices of the community. This cultural relevance helps build trust and encourages greater participation and engagement. Participants are more likely to feel valued and understood, which increases the likelihood of successful health outcomes.

What has been your favourite moment with a participant that has stood out for you?

One story that particularly stands out involves a couple who joined the program together.

Week after week, they returned to the sessions, sharing their progress and challenges. They both started losing weight and their blood sugar levels began to improve. The joy and pride they expressed were incredibly moving. Seeing them work together, encouraging and motivating each other, created a wonderful dynamic in the group.



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