

Life! program Evaluation Overview

2024–2025



Published by Diabetes Victoria, **April 2026** © State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health

Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Prevention and Population Health, Department of Health, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000 or via e-mail at prevention@health.vic.gov.au

To receive this document in an accessible format phone 13 74 75, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email the *Life!* program at life@diabetesvic.org.au

Except where otherwise indicated, the images in this publication show models and illustrative settings only, and do not necessarily depict actual services, facilities or recipients of services.

This publication may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 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 an evidence-based chronic disease prevention program aimed at reducing risk factors for type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke among Victorians at high risk.

The program combines educational content about healthy eating, physical activity, 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)
- Individual Telephone Health Coaching (THC) services.

All sub-programs are delivered over 12 months and include seven sessions/calls.

Evaluation purpose and scope

The purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the *Life!* program at six months and 12 months after participants commence the program, using a range of outcome measures. This evaluation does not compare outcomes between subgroups as the socio-demographic factors differ greatly.

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data.

Program effectiveness was assessed by measuring changes in health behaviours (healthy eating, physical activity and sedentary time), physical outcomes (weight and waist circumference), progress toward the program's behavioural and weight related goals, self efficacy, perceived positive impact of the

program, and overall satisfaction.

Statistical analyses were conducted to compare results at the introduction session with six months (session 5/follow up call 4) as well as 12 months for longer term impact. A p-value of <0.05 was accepted as statistically significant.

The *Life!* program goal benchmarks used for this evaluation were:

- **Healthy eating goal:** Mean fat/fibre score ≥ 3.8 for women; Mean fat/fibre score ≥ 3.5 for men
- **Physical activity goal:** Moderate activity ≥ 30 minutes per day
- **Weight loss goal:** Weight decreasing by at least 5%.



Eliza – *Life!* Participant

Evaluation findings

Program reach and retention

The 2024-25 cohort included 6,255 participants completing the introduction session between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025.

These included 4,755 completing Group course, 841 CALD and 659 THC. This is the second consecutive year after the COVID-19 pandemic that the program has surpassed the delivery target. The average (mean) age of participants was 59 years old, and majority of the participants were female (75.8%).

Participants from the 2024–25 cohort were:

- From hotspot LGAs: 25.2% (below target of 35%)
- From non-English speaking countries: 32.3% (above target of 20%)
- From regional or rural locations: 24.4% (below target of 40%)
- At very high risk of developing type 2 diabetes: 22.9% (below target of 30%)
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander: 1.4% (below target of 3%).

Retention rates at session 4/follow up call 3 were strongest in the group sub-program (73.2%) followed by the CALD sub-program (61.7%) and the THC sub-program (46.2%). This trend continued at session 5, where retention was at 35.8%, 32.6% and 28.2% respectively.

It is important to note that the retention rates were calculated point-in-time, where it only includes participants who commenced in 2024–25 and reached session 5 by 30 June 2025. Active participants who had not reached session 5 by 30 June 2025 were excluded from the retention rate calculation.



Kevin – Life! Participant

Program effectiveness over six months

In 2024–25, the evaluation cohort used to assess program outcomes consists of 2,043 participants with 1,582 from group sub-program, 275 from the CALD sub-program, 186 from THC.

The evaluation findings demonstrate that all the *Life!* sub-programs achieved positive improvements in the healthy behavioural outcomes (healthy eating, physical activity and sedentary time), physical outcomes (weight and waist measurements), and achievement of healthy eating and physical activity program goals.

Change in participant outcomes over six months

Table 1 below demonstrates the number of participants who achieved an improvement in healthy behavioural and physical outcomes at six months.

Table 1: Number and percentage of participants achieving outcomes at six months

Outcome	Number of participants improved after intervention (% of participants)
Fat and fibre score (n=2043)	1462 (71.6%)
Physical activity (n=2041)	1191 (58.4%)
Sedentary behaviour (n=2043)	931 (45.6%)
Weight (n=2023)	1215 (60.1%)
Waist circumference (n=2016)	1144 (56.7%)

n= with complete data

The *Life!* program goals include:

- 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 per day
- Weight loss goal: Weight decreasing by at least 5%.

The data presented below in Table 2 reflects the achievement of the *Life!* program goals at six months for the 2024–25 cohort.

Table 2: Number and percentage of participants achieving program goals

Outcome (n= 2016)	Number of participants who met their goal after intervention (% of participants)
Healthy eating goal	625 (31%)
Physical activity goal	491 (24%)
Weight goal	365 (18%)

n= with complete data

Participants' perceived impact of and satisfaction with the program

Participants who completed the survey reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, with 98% rating the program as 'very good' or 'excellent' and the same proportion indicating they would recommend the *Life!* program to others.

More than 95% reported that their knowledge of chronic disease risk factors, skills and behaviours in relation to healthy eating and physical activity have improved as a result of completing the program.



Hoa – *Life!* Participant

Program effectiveness over 12 months

At the time of this evaluation, most participants in the 2024-25 cohort had not yet reached the 12-month session/call, therefore participants from the 2023-24 cohort have been examined to determine the program effectiveness in the longer term. Participants in the 2023-24 cohort were able to maintain the results they achieved at session 5/follow-up call 4.

Table 3: Percentage of 2023-24 cohort participants achieving program goals at six months versus 12 months

	Percentage of participants achieving goal (%)	
	6 months	12 months
Healthy Eating	24.60%	31.80%
Physical activity	62.10%	64.70%
Weight	16.90%	23.10%

As shown in Table 3 above, a greater proportion of participants had met the *Life!* program goals at the 12-month session compared to at the session 5/follow-up call 4.

The sustained improvements in physical activity and diet quality at 12 months suggest that the program supports long-term behaviour change for many participants.

Conclusions

The evaluation findings demonstrated that 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.

A key finding was that a greater proportion of participants were able to meet the program goals by the 12-month session than at the six-month follow up (session 5/follow-up 4).

This outlined the complexity of behaviour change and shows that achieving lasting change often takes time.

Recommendations

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

- Implement targeted interventions to increase:
 - the number of participants from priority populations
 - referral pathways in regional and hotspot locations
- Investigate factors contributing to reduced goal achievement at six months
- Continue to improve the *Life!* program's data quality
- Continue to maintain and develop quality assurance processes.

**For more information about the *Life!* program evaluation overview please contact:
life@diabetesvic.org.au**

Case studies – *Life!* Participant Stories

Phillip – *Life!* graduate



Turning 50 was a wakeup call for Phillip. Over the years, Phillip had noticed gradual changes in his health, but like many busy people, he had not taken action. Then he received unexpected news: he had prediabetes.

“It was the wake up call I needed,” Phillip says. **“I thought, now is the time to actually do something about my health.”**

Looking for structured support, Phillip discovered the *Life!* program. What appealed to him most was its practical, realistic approach – focused on small lifestyle changes that could fit into everyday life.

Finding practical support

From the start, Phillip found the program easy to integrate around work and home commitments. “The tips from the *Life!* program were really practical and easy to bring into my daily routine,” he explains. “They weren’t huge overhauls, but they made a big difference.”

Small changes that add up

The program helped Phillip focus on small, achievable changes, such as moving more throughout the day and being more mindful about his food choices.

These small adjustments quickly added up, helping him build healthier habits without feeling overwhelmed.

Building habits that last

One of the biggest changes has been increasing physical activity at work. Phillip now uses a sit-stand workstation, parks further from the office, and holds walking meetings whenever possible. “Those small tweaks really helped me move more and improved my energy levels,” he says.

His relationship with food has also shifted. “I’m very conscious of what I eat now, and I actually enjoy my food more than ever,” Phillip reflects.

What surprised Phillip most was how powerful these small changes could be. Despite working in the health sector, he admits he hadn’t prioritised his own wellbeing. “It was a bit ironic,” he says. “The program reminded me that even small changes can lead to meaningful improvements.”

Real results and renewed confidence

Since completing the *Life!* program, Phillip has seen real results. He feels fitter, more active, and more confident about managing his health. “I’m proud of the steps I’ve taken,” he says. “It’s never too late to start the journey to better health.”

A message to others

“Don’t wait—it’s never too late to make a change,” he says. “If you are thinking about doing the program, just do it.”

Case study – *Life!* Group Course, CALD and THC Workforce Stories

Hugh DeGaris – *Life!* Facilitator – Accredited Exercise Physiologist



For Hugh, health behaviour change is about more than exercise programs, it is about helping people discover what they are capable of.

As a *Life!* facilitator working across both community and custodial settings, Hugh supports participants at increased risk of chronic disease to take achievable, positive steps toward better health.

For Hugh, a career in exercise physiology was a natural fit. An active sports enthusiast with a passion for helping others, he completed a Bachelor of Exercise Science and Human Movement at Victoria University, followed by a Master of Clinical Exercise Physiology at Deakin University.

During his bachelor's degree, Hugh realised he was more drawn to rehabilitation than performance. "I wanted to take people from a place of limitation, pain, or chronic disease to somewhere healthier," he says.

Stepping into the *Life!* program

Hugh first became involved with the *Life!* program as a guest facilitator supporting delivery for session 3. In 2021, he became a lead *Life!* facilitator at Kieser Geelong.

"Early in my clinical career, I realised that even the gold-standard intervention doesn't make much difference if it's not done consistently," he explains. "I wanted to develop my toolkit to help people actually follow through."

Today, Hugh delivers the program to community members in Geelong and, since 2024, inmates at Marngoneet and Karreenga prisons in Lara. Participants come from diverse backgrounds, but all are at increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, or stroke.

A simple, empowering style

Hugh's approach centres on meeting people where they are. He breaks down complex health concepts into simple, practical steps that build confidence and capability over time.

"I love helping people realise that improving your health doesn't have to be complicated or unenjoyable," he says. "When people focus on what works for them, it's incredibly empowering."

Moments that matter

One early experience still stands out. Between Sessions 4 and 5, a recently retired participant returned to work, explaining that feeling healthier had motivated the change. "They said it improved their mental and physical health," Hugh recalls. "That was powerful to witness."

Lessons and advice

Hugh has learned that small steps can lead to big outcomes. "If you help people think positively and take small actions, they'll often surprise you." To other clinicians, Hugh offers encouragement: "*The Life!* program challenges you to grow as a clinician and builds skills that benefit all your clients."

Four years into facilitating, Hugh remains driven by the same passion: helping people move toward healthier, more fulfilling lives – one small step at a time.



GPO Box 9824 Melbourne VIC 3001
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

lifeprogram.org.au
life@diabetesvic.org.au

T 03 8648 1880
F 03 9667 1757

Follow us



The *Life!* program is supported by the Victorian Government