



Evidence Summary

Public Libraries Have a Key Role to Play in Planetary Health Programs and Initiatives

A Review of:

Patrick, R., Bruges, N., Gunasiri, H., Wang, Y., & Henderson-Wilson, C. (2025). Healthy me, healthy planet: Evaluation of a pilot planetary health library program. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 36(1), Article e882. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.882>

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Abstract

Objective – To evaluate the impact of the Healthy Me, Healthy Planet (HMHP) pilot health promotion program, running from December 2021 to August 2022. The program was designed to promote the health benefits of action on climate change to build a climate ready community.

Design – Mixed methods design of online quantitative surveys and online qualitative focus groups via Zoom.

Setting – Public libraries in Victoria, Australia during the Covid lockdown.

Subjects – 136 adults aged 18+ who were members of the public who were program participants, as well as library staff and HMHP delivery partners.

Methods – Researchers conducted pre- and post-surveys in English and simplified Chinese using the quantitative Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and Environmental Attitudes Inventory (EAI). The pre-surveys were undertaken from December 2021-February 2022 and the post-surveys between the 26th of July and 7th August 2022. A focus group was conducted in July 2022 for program participants, and a

second focus group for library staff and HMHO delivery partners. Focus group transcripts were analysed in NViVO using inductive and deductive thematic analysis approaches. Survey and focus group data was triangulated using thematic content analysis.

Main Results – The impact evaluation found four main themes: personal health and social-wellbeing, individual capacity building, pro-environmental knowledge, and organisational/community capacity. The authors found that libraries promote meaningful social connections and can use programs like this to create shared community social connections, including intergenerational, on the topics of climate change, sustainability, and healthy environments to alleviate loneliness and isolation and take collective action to adopt pro-environmental behaviours. Public libraries are well placed to deliver these types of programs as trusted community knowledge hubs as they know their communities and can reach populations at every age. As well, libraries are stakeholders for partnership development, empowering communities to take ownership of their health and environmental well-being and engage in pro-environmental behaviour.

Conclusion – The HMHP program offers a tested framework for others to adopt to align to health and well-being strategies, particularly around climate change. It highlights the potential benefits of linking health and well-being and planetary health into a joint health promotion, and the value of the use of public libraries as a setting for these types of promotions and programs. It recommends that future programs should prioritise community engagement in the decision-making process, integrate intergenerational aspects more explicitly, and take a systems thinking approach to collaborate with stakeholders across sectors on programs addressing planetary health.

Commentary

Planetary health initiatives have only been adopted as a whole field approach to health promotion since the 2020 World Health Promotion and Education Conference, however Whitmee et al. (2015) first put forward this concept as part of a Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet commission. This is therefore still a new approach within the field of health promotion and the body of evidence on these initiatives and programs is still emerging. Whilst there is some literature on planetary health initiatives, these other articles do not involve libraries. Libraries have however been successfully involved in health promotion programs and initiatives for a number of years, with a systematic review by Vassilakaki and Moniarou-Papaconstaninou (2023) identifying libraries as trusted places that can play key roles in health promotion.

As Healthy Me, Healthy Planet is a health programme, the ReLIANT instrument for evaluation of an educational and training intervention has been used for the critical appraisal. The demographic data provided for program participants and survey respondents is not that detailed, and some data is provided for one set and not the other, meaning it is difficult to assess the representation. For example, whilst we are told the age range for engagement in the HMHP programme, we are only told the average age of survey respondents. We are told that 92% of the survey respondents were female, which is a significant gender skew and may need to be taken into consideration when applying the findings. The authors themselves state that the sample size is not generalizable to the wider population; however, we are not told the gender split of the program participants, so we do not know if this is representative or not. We are also told that the first focus group included four of the survey respondents, but we are not told how many library staff and HMHP delivery partners took part in the second focus group.

Another key area of weakness of the article is that there is a lack of analysis based on the educational interventions received by survey participants. 779 participants attended education sessions and workshops, and 179 people completed challenge actions. However, we do not know which of these the individual survey respondents engaged with to be able to assess whether specific workshops,

education sessions, or challenges were more effective than others in relation to pre- and post-survey data changes. There is also no control group to assess whether PWI and EAI data changed over this time period without engagement with this specific program, as participants could also have been engaging with climate change knowledge and learning in other ways.

Despite the methodological weaknesses identified above and given the current lack of literature on the role of libraries within planetary health initiatives, this study provides significant findings and recommendations that other libraries can adopt and use to develop planetary health promotions. It builds on existing literature around the role of libraries in health promotion to make clear recommendations on how public libraries in particular can also play a key role in planetary health initiatives.

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