

Population Health
Health Promotion Service

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in support of Tai Chi as an excellent way to help reduce falls in older people. This is based on a study that I conducted from 2000-2006, *The Central Sydney Tai Chi Trial*,^[1] which was funded by the NSW Department of Health. While all of the outcome measures were reported in the paper cited, the paper does not go into much details about the implementation of the Tai Chi program. I hope to highlight some of this information in the next few paragraphs.

The Central Sydney study planned the randomised controlled trial around Tai Chi programs as they would be delivered in the community in order to maximize the generalisability of results to community settings. An important factor in implementing this study was to use instructors typically found in the community, regardless of Tai Chi style. However, instructors also had to: have experience in working with older people and, provide reasonably priced classes to maximize the number of older people able to afford the Tai Chi classes.

While there were many highly qualified Tai Chi instructors in the community, the cost of classes was deemed too expensive, particularly as the study was targeting older people in some of the poorer regions in Sydney. As a consequence there was a lack of already trained instructors who could take on classes for the study (altogether 866 people were enrolled in a Tai Chi program, over 76 x 16-week programs). We encouraged fitness leaders, health professionals, tai chi teachers, and advanced students already working with older people to consider learning Tai Chi. At the time, the only reasonable option regarding time required for training to become Tai Chi leaders was offered by Dr Paul Lam through the Tai Chi for Arthritis weekend workshop. Many other Tai Chi masters held the view that to teach Tai Chi one had to have years of training, which was impractical given the needs of the study and implications for promoting Tai Chi to older people *en masse*. Overall, twenty-two instructors taught 76 x 16-week programs. Seventeen instructors taught a form of Sun-style (mostly Tai Chi for Arthritis), three taught Yang style and two a mixed style of Tai Chi.

The impact this study has had is perhaps more evident in New Zealand than in Australia where the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) has promoted Tai Chi for Arthritis as a way of reducing falls in older people.^[2]

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March, 2010

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[1] Voukelatos A, Cumming RG, Lord SR, Rissel C. A randomized, controlled trial of tai chi for the prevention of falls: the Central Sydney tai chi trial. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2007 Aug;55(8):1185-91.

[2] <http://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injuries/at-home/older-people/information-for-older-people/modified-tai-chi-classes/index.htm>