



# HEALTHY SPACES & PLACES

A national guide to designing places for healthy living

## BRIEFING NOTES – COMMUNITY

### What is Healthy Spaces and Places?

*Healthy Spaces and Places* is a national guide for planning, designing and creating sustainable, people friendly places. While the primary audience is planners, individuals and communities (and others) too have a major role in its potential for success over time, hence these briefing notes. *Healthy Spaces and Places* has two parts – a summary printed booklet, and the website:

[www.healthyplaces.org.au](http://www.healthyplaces.org.au)

It has been developed to help tackle some of Australia's major preventable health issues by planning and designing places where it is easier for more Australians to be active – walking, cycling and using public transport – every day. Those preventable health issues include, for example, overweight, obesity and diabetes. Australia is one of the most overweight of the developed nations: overweight and obesity affect about half Australian adults and up to one in four children (Department of Health and Ageing, 2009).<sup>1</sup> Diabetes is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia, with about 275 Australians developing the condition every day (Diabetes Australia, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Our sedentary, car dependent lifestyles are seen as significant contributing factors to the prevalence of preventable health issues; planning is seen as most often giving priority to cars (vehicular movement) rather than encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport.

*Healthy Spaces and Places* is fundamentally about planning for sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on the benefits to people's physical and mental health from active or healthy living. It is a guide to assist relevant professionals to better understand and to respond

to modern-day issues around planning and health. It highlights the importance of planning and designing communities for people movements as well as car movements and provides tools for doing this. It provides evidence of how the physical environments – where we live, work, play and socialise – can make a big difference to health and wellbeing.

Current research shows strong links between people's health (mental and physical) and regular physical activity. There is widespread agreement that there are multitudes of benefits for whole communities as well as individuals when planners consider people's health and wellbeing in conjunction with the built environment. For example, the evidence suggests:

- the built environment is directly associated with physical activity, particularly walking (by the 'built environment, we mean the structures and places in which we live, work and play, including land uses, transportation systems and design features, such as the shape of roads and pedestrian crossings, walking paths, cycling tracks, places for sitting, proximity to destinations for activities etc)
- in communities that facilitate walking, cycling, sitting, talking, people get more involved in their communities and the communities become stronger in their own right (as well as there being benefits to the individuals)
- walking is recognised as a promising means of increasing the population's levels of physical activity
- good quality neighbourhood aesthetics (including access to public open space) tend to be associated with increased walking for recreation, and
- people who are more active are more likely to make healthier food choices.

# Who is *Healthy Spaces and Places* for?

**You and me: success requires everyone to be involved. We can all make a difference**

*Healthy Spaces and Places* sets out why planners should have as a starting point to their work a commitment to healthy planning, which demonstrates the links between health outcomes and the built environment. As such, *Healthy Spaces and Places* provides sources of evidence about the ways in which the built environment can contribute to major preventable health issues. The resources provide further support and suggest strategies for modifying planning and design processes to create environments for active, healthy living.

However, planners are only part of the equation. People who work with planners, health professionals, councillors, developers and anyone with an interest in the health and wellbeing of the community, and their local environment can benefit from the application of *Healthy Spaces and Places* principles and ensure its successes are equitably delivered.

Why get involved? Because there is a role for all of us in either making or influencing what the planners and others do in their day-to-day work that will benefit individual and community health and wellbeing. Most immediately, through *Healthy Spaces and Places* we can be:

- better informed about what planners, designers and related professions consider when developing or redeveloping places, and
- better equipped to advocate for priority to be given to planning for people movements to in order to encourage less sedentary behaviour and less use of motorised transport, particularly cars, and especially for local trips.

Perhaps the most compelling reasons for taking a deeper interest in what *Healthy Spaces and Places* has to offer come from evidence about the cost of preventable disease/illness, combined with the knowledge that being more active across the lifespan can help reduce our own risks. In 2008 alone, obesity was estimated to cost Australia \$58.2 billion. This included costs attributable to preventable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, various cancers and osteoarthritis.<sup>3</sup>

## Making it happen

### What can you do?

Healthy planning requires healthy planning principles to be applied at all levels of the planning system, at every stage of the planning process and in every planning project regardless of scale – across metropolitan areas, regions and local neighbourhoods; in regional, rural and remote communities.

Included here is a range of materials and information to help you advocate for your community to become a healthy space and place. Information we have included for you:

- **Overview document** – this will give you an idea about the design principles needed when planning healthy spaces and places.

- **Website details** – Please visit the website [www.healthyplaces.org.au](http://www.healthyplaces.org.au) to look at all the resources available around health and planning. It includes case studies from around Australia of communities and organisations that are making healthier planning happen. The research evidence, or links to it, is also on the site.
- **Letter template** – we have included a letter template that you can use to advocate on behalf of your community. This is also available as a word document download from the website for you to edit to suit your local circumstances.
- **Key points** – key points that you may wish to take with you or give to someone to help get the message across.
- **Powerpoint presentation and images** – these could be helpful with any presentations you may wish to make to community meetings or your local council when advocating for what your community needs.
- **Two articles on Connectivity and Parks & Open Spaces** – examples of design principles that can be applied to your local area. More information resources can be found on the *Healthy Spaces and Places* website.

We hope this assists in making your community, however large or small, a sustainable, liveable, healthy place to live.

Best wishes,

Australian Local Government Association, the National Heart Foundation and the Planning Institute of Australia.

Email: [healthyplaces@planning.org.au](mailto:healthyplaces@planning.org.au)

Web: [www.healthyplaces.org.au](http://www.healthyplaces.org.au)

## References

1. Department of Health and Ageing, Submission No. 154, p 1 to the *House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, inquiry into obesity in Australia*, contained in the Standing Committee's report *Weighing it up, obesity in Australia*, May 2009.
2. Diabetes Australia, <<http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Understanding-Diabetes/Diabetes-in-Australia/>> accessed 17 April 2009.
3. Access Economics 2008, *The growing costs of obesity in 2008: three years on*. Diabetes Australia, 2008.

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