



# HEALTHY SPACES & PLACES

A national guide to designing places for healthy living

## STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENT – SAMPLE WORDS

### Health, physical activity and the built environment

Current research shows strong links between people's health (mental and physical) and regular physical activity. An active lifestyle can reduce the risk of some preventable diseases, including coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity and some cancers; and may also lower blood pressure and prevent assist in the prevention of falls in the elderly. Australia is one of the most overweight of the developed nations, with overweight and obesity affecting about one in two 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 everyday (Diabetes Australia, 2009).<sup>2</sup> Instead of encouraging more people to walk, cycle and use public transport, our sedentary, car dependent lifestyles are a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of many of our preventable health issues.

An active and socially engaged lifestyle can help in managing some mental health issues. It can help improve community life, social wellbeing and community safety. According to the health experts, for adults it takes as little as 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week, preferably every day, to make a difference to health and wellbeing. Active living simply means including walking and cycling and moving more as part of everyday activities.

Research also shows that the built environment can have a significant impact on a person's level of physical activity and community engagement.

Good urban design that leads to more people-friendly spaces and places can promote active lifestyles by encouraging walking, cycling, public transport and a variety of active recreation pursuits. On the other hand, places designed around car-based transport as well as poorly designed and maintained public spaces can limit a person's opportunity and desire to be physically active. The Bureau of Transport Economics states that 10 per cent of all car trips in local neighbourhoods are less than one kilometre in length (the equivalent of a ten minute walk) and 30 per cent of car trips in local neighbourhoods are less than three kilometres in length.<sup>3</sup>

Thus there are many social, environmental and economic benefits when planners, developers and decision-makers make healthy planning integral to their work. For example, the evidence suggests:

- in places that are well planned and designed, people get more involved in their communities and communities become stronger in their own right
- people who are more active are more likely to make healthier food choices

- low density suburbs with detached houses and very few (if any) community facilities, distance from public transport reduce residents' transport choices, with consequential affects for health and wellbeing, and community strength, whereas towns and cities, neighbourhoods, public spaces and places, shopping areas, town and neighbourhood centres designed for all stages of life will result in greater use and physical activity, and provide for increased social interaction and inclusion, and
- people walk more if they perceive streets are safe and aesthetically pleasing.

Planning for healthy places means taking into account localised factors and conditions. Healthy places have a variety of activities and facilities within easy and safe walking distances (such as houses, parks, schools, shops and other services). For cycling, there need to be easily accessible cycle routes between destinations.

The key design principles considered necessary to plan for positive health and wellbeing benefits are:

- **active transport** – travel modes that involve physical activity such as walking and cycling and include the use of public transport that is accessed via walking or cycling and may allow for integration of multi-modal transport in the course of a day
- **aesthetics** – the attractiveness of a place or area affects the overall experience and use of a place such as for sitting, walking, cycling, viewing and talking; an attractive neighbourhood invites people to use and enjoy its public spaces and places and to feel safe
- **connectivity** – the directness of links and the number of connections in a path, street or road network and, for *Healthy Spaces and Places*, the ease with which people can walk and cycle around a neighbourhood and between places. Streets move people by vehicle, foot, bicycle and other modes, including wheelchair, rollerblade, skateboard etc, often perform a civic engagement function and can contribute to economic vitality
- **environments for all people** – places that are safe and easily accessible for everyone regardless of age, ability, culture or income, with a suitable range of facilities and services that are available to all
- **mixed density** – residential development that contains a mix of housing types such as single dwellings and multi-units and development of varying size and height. This enables people to grow older in their local neighbourhoods
- **mixed land use** – meaning complementary uses such as houses, shops, schools, offices, libraries, open space and cafes etc are co-located to promote active transport to, and between different activities. People are more likely to walk, cycle or take public transport when they can conveniently undertake multiple activities at one destination
- **parks and open space** – land reserved for preservation of natural environments, amenity, recreation (sport, active and passive recreation) and / or natural asset management (biodiversity, water management etc)
- **safety and surveillance** – perceptions of safety influence the nature and extent that people use spaces and places; design that aims to reduce crime can enhance the physical, mental and social wellbeing of a community
- **social inclusion** – referring to a society where all people and communities are given the opportunity to participate fully in political, cultural, civic and economic life, and
- **supporting infrastructure** – facilities that encourage regular and safe physical activity such as walking (footpaths, lighting, water fountains and signs), cycling (bike paths, bike lockers, signs and showers), public transport (safe shelter, lighting and signs), social interaction (seating, shade, shelter and toilets), and recreation (seating, play equipment and facilities).

## 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. Bureau of Transport Economics, 2002, *Greenhouse policy options for transport*, Bureau of Transport Economics, Report No. 105.



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