



HEALTHY SPACES & PLACES

A national guide to designing places for healthy living

BRIEFING NOTES

What is Healthy Spaces and Places?

Healthy Spaces and Places is a national guide setting out the importance of for planning, designing and creating sustainable, people-friendly places. It has two parts, a summary printed booklet, and the website: www.healthyplaces.org.au. It provides practical tools, case studies, guidelines and research evidence.

Healthy Spaces and Places 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, with overweight and obesity affecting about half Australian adults and up to one in four children (Department of Health and Ageing, 2009).¹ Diabetes is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia, with about 275 Australians developing the condition everyday (Diabetes Australia, 2009).² Our sedentary, car dependent lifestyles are seen as significant contributing factors to the prevalence of preventable health issues; planning for places is seen as most often giving priority to cars (vehicular movement) rather than encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport.

But *Healthy Spaces and Places* is for everyone who can make a difference to the overall health and wellbeing of Australians. Design professionals, health professionals, the development sector, governments, and the community (individuals, community organisations, anyone with an

interest in active, healthy living) can, and need to make a difference in order to bring about positive community-level change.

As a national guide, *Healthy Spaces and Places* supports and complements planning and design initiatives of state, territory and local governments. It is a single source of easy-to-find information that:

- brings together expertise from different areas (eg. experts in health, planning, urban design, community safety and transport planning) into one place – so aiming to break down the more traditional 'silo' mentality or barriers that can prevent knowledge and expertise coming together to achieve the best results
- provides links to the health/planning research (the evidence base) that supports planning for active living (or for healthy planning, as this guide also refers)
- offers a national approach to policy and principles for planners to create environments for active living, and
- is practical, using Australian case studies. They show what is achievable and each has potentially wider application – so potentially for action in your community if it is not already achieving similar results.

The design principles for planners that are identified by *Healthy Spaces and Places* are the foundation stones for healthy planning and for healthier, more active communities.

Why health and planning?

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 falls in the elderly. An active life 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 individual health and wellbeing.

Research also shows that the built environment can have a significant impact on a person's level of physical activity. Good design and people-friendly spaces and places can promote active lifestyles including by encouraging walking, cycling, the use of public transport and active recreation. On the other hand places designed around personal motorised transport (cars, especially) can limit a person's opportunities and desire to be physically active.

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:

- when people get more involved in their communities, communities become stronger in their own right
- 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)
- 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 provides sources of evidence of how the built environment can contribute to major preventable health issues. Then it shows how to modify planning processes and design to create environments for active, healthy living that will bring about a positive correlation between health and the built environment.

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 lifelong can help reduce our own risks. One example of the evidence is that in 2008 alone, obesity (excluding overweight) was estimated to cost Australia \$58.2 billion (financial cost \$8.283 billion, lost wellbeing \$49.9 billion). This included costs attributable to diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, various cancers and osteoarthritis.³

Through the contributions health professionals have made to *Healthy Spaces and Places*, the website enables us to be better informed about the increasing body of evidence supporting the links between good health, good design and planning and how we can individually benefit from taking some small steps. These small steps, such as opting to walk or cycle, are more likely if planners and design professionals create the right places for us.

The *Healthy Spaces and Places* website www.healthyplaces.org.au is a good starting place for getting involved or getting informed about the benefits of active, healthy living. It provides information to the following audiences:

- **planning and design professionals**, including urban and regional planners, urban designers, architects, building designers and transport planners
- **the development industry**, including property and land developers, project managers, the real estate industry and the construction industry
- **health professionals**, including health educators, health advocates, public health officers and population health managers
- **government**, including local councillors, state/territory and federal politicians, and
- **community, including individuals (the public)**, community organisations, schools, advocacy organisations and peak bodies.

	Planning for health and wellbeing through:	Current examples:
Strategic and Structure Planning (state metropolitan or regional scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visionary statements • strategic principles • urban structure and form characteristics that can directly affect the connectivity and walkability of places • location and connections between places to live, work, learn, play and shop • affordable housing strategies, with a range of housing types • transport networks which minimise greenhouse gas emissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • state – Liveable Neighbourhoods: guiding new developments for a more sustainable urban future (WA) • regional – South East Queensland Regional Plan (Qld) • local – City of Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Vic), Municipal Strategic Statements (MSS), Victoria
Statutory planning controls (applied according to each local government area’s characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning authorities adopting ‘healthy planning’ as core business, acknowledging this in mission and vision statements, and reflecting it in planning strategies and controls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Environment Plans (NSW) • Development Plans, Better Development Plans (SA) • Planning Schemes (Vic), eg. Guidelines for residential subdivision in the Macedon Ranges Shire: designing in health and wellbeing.
Master planning (neighbourhood scale in new areas or large scale redevelopment within existing areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designing new neighbourhoods to ensure active living, and • effective links with existing areas, particularly where a new area is dependent on existing infrastructure (eg. public transport, schools etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lightsview, South Australia • VicUrban Sustainable Community Rating, Victoria • Social Sustainability Due Diligence, LandCom NSW
Impact assessments (various scales depending on the nature of a proposal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensive assessment of possible impacts of a proposed development to include consideration of people’s health and wellbeing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Impact Assessments (NSW) • Municipal Public Health Plans (Vic)
Development assessment (local, site specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development proposals assessed against ‘healthy planning’ criteria • relevant conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geelong Walkability Toolkit (Vic). • Hobsons Bay Health and Wellbeing Plan (Vic).

Making it happen

Everyday decisions for designing healthy places

Healthy planning calls for a commitment to 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.

It cannot be stated enough: everyday decisions make a difference. Small changes can count as much as big or strategic ones. Many different actions can lead to improved health and wellbeing.

The existing planning frameworks of Australia's eight jurisdictions can cater for planning that considers people's health and wellbeing as a priority. The case studies that *Healthy Spaces and Places* highlights show some current work that fulfills the goals of *Healthy Spaces and Places*. The following table demonstrates how the current planning systems at each level can be used to prioritise people's health and wellbeing

Other material has been included with this briefing document to assist you in advocating and implementing the principles of *Healthy Spaces and Places*:

- **Overview document** – this will give you an idea about the design principles needed when planning *Healthy Spaces and Places*.
- **Web site details** – Please visit the web site www.healthyplaces.org.au to have a look at all the resources available around health and planning including case studies from around Australia of other programs, communities and organisations that are making it happen.
- **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** – a short list of the key points that you may wish to take with you or give to someone to help get the message across.

- **Strategic sample planning words**
- **Tender Document** – an example of a paragraph that could be included in tenders to ensure principles of Healthy Spaces and Places are included.
- **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** – more information resources can be found on the *Healthy Spaces and Places* website.

All of the above material is also available from the web site for printing for your convenience.

Kind regards,

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

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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.

