



HEALTHY SPACES & PLACES

A national guide to designing places for healthy living

An overview

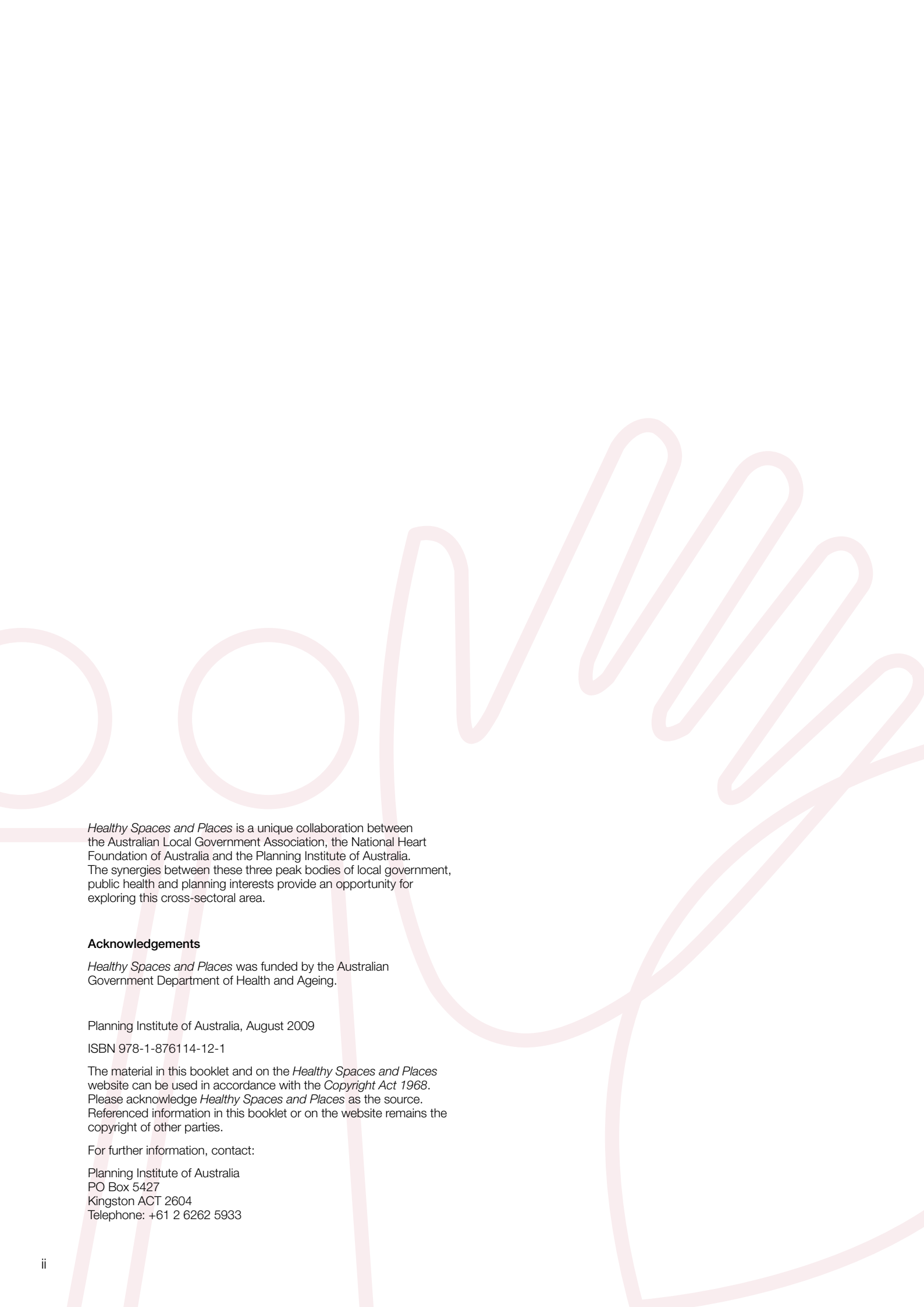


www.healthyplaces.org.au

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Healthy Spaces and Places is a unique collaboration between the Australian Local Government Association, the National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Planning Institute of Australia. The synergies between these three peak bodies of local government, public health and planning interests provide an opportunity for exploring this cross-sectoral area.

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What is *Healthy Spaces and Places*?



Healthy Spaces and Places is a national guide for planning, designing and creating sustainable communities that encourage healthy living.

This overview provides a summary of the information available on the *Healthy Spaces and Places* website www.healthyplaces.org.au, which is the primary resource.

Through practical tools, case studies and guidelines, *Healthy Spaces and Places* aims to:

- encourage the development of built environments that provide opportunities for physical activity and other health-related activities

- continue to improve health outcomes for all Australians through better-designed built environments
- raise awareness of the relationship between physical activity and the built environment, and
- contribute to a national policy setting.

Healthy Spaces and Places is for everyone who can make a difference to the overall health and wellbeing of Australians. Planning and design professionals, health professionals, the property development industry, governments and the community (individuals, community organisations and anyone with an interest in active, healthy living) can make a difference in order to bring about positive community-level change.



***Spaces and places** describes the composite of the physical environment where Australians live, work and socialise, and includes neighbourhoods, movement networks, schools, workplaces and parks.*

Healthy Spaces and Places is fundamentally about planning for more sustainable communities, with a particular emphasis on the benefits to people's physical and mental health from active or healthy living. It is a guide to help better understand and respond to modern-day issues around planning and health. It highlights the importance of planning and designing communities for people movements, not just car movements, and provides tools for doing this.

***Active living** is defined as a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines.*

At present in Australia, the built environment does not often encourage active lifestyles, but rather reinforces sedentary behaviour and car dependence. Evidence of how the physical environment can make a difference to health and wellbeing has helped shape *Healthy Spaces and Places*.

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 (e.g. experts in health, planning, urban design, community safety and transport planning) to help break down the 'silo' mentality and barriers that can prevent knowledge and expertise combining to achieve the best results
- provides links to the health and planning research (the evidence base) that supports planning for active living
- offers a national approach to policy and principles for planners to create environments for active living, and
- is practical, using Australian case studies that show what is achievable.

The design principles identified by *Healthy Spaces and Places* provide the foundation for planning for active living and for healthier, more active communities. Professional experts in a variety of disciplines have reviewed the design principles and practical advice.

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Why health and planning?



Health, physical activity and the built environment

Perhaps the most compelling reason for taking a deeper interest in what *Healthy Spaces and Places* has to offer comes from evidence about the human, health and financial costs of preventable disease/illness.

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.¹ Cardiovascular disease is Australia's leading cause of death, with almost 23,000 deaths in 2007.² Diabetes is the fastest growing chronic disease in Australia, with about 275 Australians developing the condition every day.³

In 2008, obesity (excluding overweight) was estimated to cost Australia \$58.2 billion (financial cost \$8.28 billion, lost wellbeing \$49.9 billion). This included costs attributable to diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, various cancers and osteoarthritis.⁴ Being more physically active every day and choosing a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of developing chronic disease.

Research 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 by encouraging walking, cycling, public transport and active recreation. On the other hand, places designed around private motorised transport can limit a person's opportunities and desire to be physically active.



Current research shows strong links between people's overall health (mental and physical) and regular physical activity. An active lifestyle can reduce the risk of preventable disease, including coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity and some cancers, and may also lower blood pressure and prevent falls in the elderly. It can also help in managing some mental health issues and improve community life, social wellbeing and community safety. According to health experts, it takes as little as 30 minutes of physical activity a day on most, preferably all days of the week, to make a difference to health and wellbeing.

Our sedentary, car-dependent lifestyles are significant contributing factors to the prevalence of preventable health issues. Development practices have contributed to these problems by often giving priority to cars (vehicular movement), rather than encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport.

There are many benefits for communities and individuals when planners make planning for active living integral to their work. For example, in Perth, adults who had access to large, attractive public open space were 50 per cent more likely to undertake high levels of walking.⁵ There is growing evidence that attractive, well-designed public open space is restorative, reducing mental fatigue and stress.⁶

***Built environment** means the structures and places in which we live, work and play, including land uses, transportation systems and design features.*

These findings are also reflected in a recent study of European urban adults. Residents of areas with the highest levels of greenery were more than three times as likely to be physically active and 40 per cent less likely to be overweight or obese than those living in less aesthetically-pleasing areas.⁷ People who are more active are also more likely to make healthier food choices. Other evidence suggests that when people get more involved in their communities, communities and social networks are strengthened.





In Australia:

- *10% of all car trips are less than one kilometre (the equivalent to a 10-minute walk) and*
- *30% of all car trips are less than three kilometres.⁸*



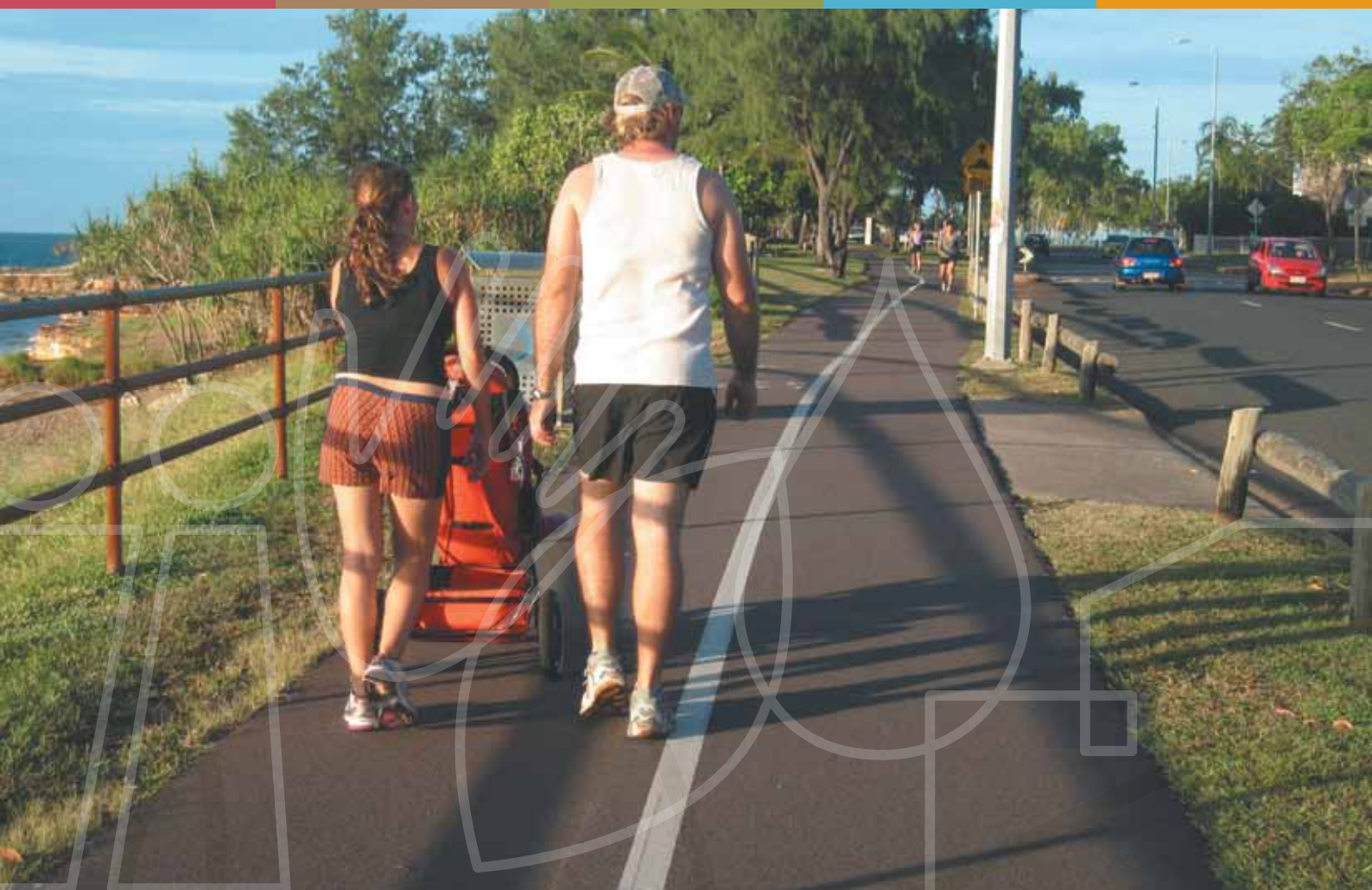
Neighbourhoods that have good access to destinations including shops, schools, public transport and other facilities and have connected street networks, mixed land use and higher densities are associated with increased walking and cycling for transport.

Research that links health and wellbeing with the built environment comes from diverse disciplines, including public health, health promotion, urban studies and planning and transport planning. For more detail on the evidence base, see the fact sheets on the *Healthy Spaces and Places* website.

By bringing together the research and tools for planning for active lifestyles, *Healthy Spaces and Places*:

- demonstrates the strong links between health and planning, equipping planning and design professionals with evidence of how their work can contribute to health and wellbeing
- provides planners and planning and design professionals with an easy-to-access guide to the essential elements of planning for active living
- provides health professionals and design professionals with a rationale for collaboration, and for sharing information about the factors that can influence healthy lifestyles, such as the built environment
- informs the broader community about the essential ingredients of planning for healthy and active lifestyles, and
- makes available to the broader community information about the benefits of being active lifelong.

Who is this guide for?



Everyone is involved, everyone can make a difference

Healthy Spaces and Places is for everyone. Anyone with an interest in the health of the community, community wellbeing and their local environment can benefit from *Healthy Spaces and Places*. This is because it demonstrates the benefits of planning for active living and provides evidence on how the built environment can promote healthy lifestyles. It provides practical advice on how planning and design can create environments for active, healthy living.

Why get involved?

There is a role for all of us in influencing changes in our behaviour and environment that will benefit individual and community health and wellbeing. Most immediately, through *Healthy Spaces and Places* we can become:

- better informed about the considerations planners, designers and related professions make when developing or redeveloping places, and
- better equipped to advocate for priority to be given to planning for people movements in order to encourage less sedentary behaviour and less use of the motor car, especially for local trips.

The *Healthy Spaces and Places* website www.healthyplaces.org.au is a good starting place for getting involved or learning about healthy planning. It provides information for everyone, and particularly for:

- planning and design professionals, including urban and regional planners, urban designers, landscape architects, building designers and transport planners
- the property development industry, including 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 decision-makers, including local councillors, state/territory and federal politicians, and senior public sector executives, and
- community members, including individuals, community organisations, schools, advocacy organisations and peak bodies.

Given their key role in designing and managing the built environment, planners are an important audience for *Healthy Spaces and Places*. Through planning and designing places that make it easier for more Australians to be more active, including walking and cycling, and using public transport every day, planners can help tackle some of the major health issues for Australia, including preventable health disease.

Planners are professionals who specialise in designing the communities in which we live, work and play. Balancing built and natural environments, community needs, cultural significance and economic sustainability, planners aim to improve our quality of life and create vibrant communities.

The contribution of health professionals to the *Healthy Spaces and Places* website enables us to be better informed about the increasing body of evidence supporting the links between good health, design and planning and how we can all benefit from taking small steps towards leading active lifestyles.



What makes a healthy place?



Designing healthy places: good practice considerations

The health and planning research evidence highlights the need to consider how planning policies, development decisions and planning processes or actions can benefit people's health and wellbeing. *Healthy Spaces and Places* is a practical guide on good practice for planning for active living. It provides:

- design principles for positive health and wellbeing (see next page)
- development types where these principles can be applied, and
- case studies showing how others are achieving best possible outcomes. Key processes for creating healthier places are also identified.



Design principles

Healthy Spaces and Places identifies the following key design principles to plan for healthy communities.

- **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
- **aesthetics:** the attractiveness of a place or area affects the overall experience and use of a place (e.g. walking, cycling, viewing and talking). An attractive neighbourhood invites people to use and enjoy its public spaces 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
- **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 promotes a more diverse community and caters to various stages of life
- **mixed land use:** complementary uses, such as houses, shops, schools, offices, libraries, open space and cafes, 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 passive recreation, sport and recreation, preservation of natural environments, green space and/or urban stormwater management
- **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:** refers 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).

Detailed information on each of the above principles is provided on the website at www.healthyplaces.org.au/design.php

Walkable distances means a distance that most people could walk in 5-10 minutes. This is commonly about 400 metres.

Development types

Healthy Spaces and Places also shows how the healthy design principles can be applied to a range of development types—infill development, neighbourhood parks, neighbourhood planning and design, regional recreational facilities, retirement accommodation, schools, shopping precincts, urban squares, rural and regional communities and workplaces—in different locations. For more information, see the website at www.healthyplaces.org.au/devtype.php.

Case studies

When applied correctly, the design principles can create spaces and places that are attractive and interesting, and safe for walking, cycling, relaxing or playing. The evidence shows that these are the kinds of places that help improve lifelong health and wellbeing because people are motivated to be active and have opportunities to be active. *Healthy Spaces and Places* gives examples of different approaches that work in specific places through case studies on the website. See www.healthyplaces.org.au/casestudies.php for further information.

Making it happen



Everyday decisions for designing healthy places

Planning for active living calls for a commitment to applying healthy planning principles to all levels of the planning system, at every stage of the planning process and in every planning project. These principles can be applied no matter what the scale, from metropolitan or regional-wide to local neighbourhoods in regional, rural and remote communities. Everyday decisions and changes, no matter how small, can make a difference and lead to improved health and wellbeing.

There are six processes identified in *Healthy Spaces and Places* for creating healthier places, which are outlined below. They can be tailored to fit individual projects, policies and developments. They can be incorporated into big and small budgets, strategic planning, development control and community engagement programs.

Research

Research informs decisions. Research is essential for better understanding issues and associations between health and the built environment. Research provides for strengthened project or policy rationale as the gaps between research and practice are bridged. Over time, tools can be developed to track links between the built environment and health.

Integration

Integrated approaches lead to coordinated, effective responses. Integration means working across sectors, roles and responsibilities, regulations, policies and program delivery. For example, engaging communities in the development process provides the opportunity for planners to incorporate local knowledge into design, whilst also giving community members a sense of project ownership. This can increase the overall effectiveness of a project.

Planning for active living needs to be considered by and across all professions involved in the design and approval processes. Seemingly small considerations (e.g. widening footpaths or lowering traffic speeds) can count as much as the major decisions when it comes to planning that can improve people's health and wellbeing.

Implementation

Success requires shared ownership of the processes and the end goals, and clear understanding of who does what during implementation. Implementation needs to include using existing community networks for engaging communities in activities that promote health and wellbeing; identifying, implementing and measuring timely, tangible, high-quality results; and monitoring and reviewing the application of any regulation, policy or program.

The existing frameworks of Australia's eight jurisdictions can cater for planning that considers people's health and wellbeing as a priority. From strategic state or citywide planning, down to an individual development assessment, the capacity to consider people's health and wellbeing ensuring integrated implementation between each stage of the planning process can be achieved.



Education and training

Behavioural change requires making healthy choices the easy choices. This requires education and training for different audiences about the links and interrelations between environments and health. Professional development for those involved in planning and design should include work rotations between industries influencing the built environment (including private development industries and roads authorities) from which will come better understanding of the complexities of environments for health. There is also a need to include planning for active living in planning and health courses and to encourage continuing professional development on health and urban environment issues.

Healthy Planning Course – University of New South Wales

The Healthy Planning Course at the University of New South Wales is offered as an elective course for undergraduate students in the built environment and medical/health disciplines. The course aims to develop students understanding and knowledge about key health problems facing urban populations and to understand the relationship between urban planning, city form and current health problems in contemporary cities.

For more details, see www.healthyplaces.org.au/casestudies

Partnerships

Partnerships based on shared strategic vision and coordinated investment are essential for delivering sustainable outcomes in urban and built environments. Through partnerships, it is possible to define short- and long-term goals, collaborate with like-minded organisations and individuals and establish clear management processes and structures with agreed outcomes, benchmarks and measures of progress defined roles and responsibilities, including for review, consultation and revision.

Partnership and collaboration have enabled *Healthy Spaces and Places* to bring together this research-supported national guide, with evidence to show that planners have a major opportunity to contribute to improved community health and wellbeing in Australia by adopting planning for active living approaches. Cross-professional partnerships are essential if people are to be encouraged to be more physically active.

Lightsview Development, Adelaide

Lightsview in Adelaide is an example of a new (greenfields) development that is incorporating health considerations into the design and planning phases from the outset. The developers are working collaboratively with the South Australian Active Living Coalition (a partnership between the Heart Foundation, the Planning Institute of Australia, the Cancer Council and key South Australian government departments) to ensure design principles from the Heart Foundation's Healthy by Design® initiative are incorporated into the development. For more details, see www.healthyplaces.org.au/casestudies.



Key considerations:

- Planning for active living needs to be considered at all levels of the planning system—planning policies and strategies, development proposals, site design and projects. For instance, at the policy level, people's health and wellbeing is a key consideration, and
- In planning for active living, everyone who is affected by a plan or proposal should be consulted and involved. This includes the community, developers, experts, professionals and specific population groups (e.g. people with disabilities, the elderly, children and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).

The *Healthy Spaces and Places* design principles provide a useful checklist for evaluating development proposals. For example, key questions could be asked for different design principles, such as: for **active transport**, are there provisions for walking and cycling routes? For **parks and open space**, are parks within easy walking distance of most residences?

Appropriate checklists can help ensure that planning for active living considerations is included at the site level. For further information see www.healthyplaces.org.au/measuring_success.php

Measuring success

Successful implementation requires clearly articulated goals and measures for evaluation.

To help ensure success, define aims and objectives clearly, be clear about the big picture framework, be inclusive of all stakeholders, be rational and rigorous and have an effective implementation and evaluation plan. Mechanisms for partnership and collaboration need to be established at the outset and need to involve a wide range of skills, including professional, technical, cultural and financial.



Health and sustainability



Planning for health contributes to developing more sustainable communities

Planning, health and sustainability are closely linked. There is widespread acceptance of the principle of sustainable development, due in part to the significant environmental challenges that confront society today, including climate change, fossil fuel dependency, food security, rising greenhouse gas emissions, excessive water use and pollution of the air, water and soil.

Sustainable development fulfils social, cultural, environmental and economic priorities, at the same time safeguarding the interests of current and future generations.

Healthy urban planning contributes to sustainable outcomes for all by:

- encouraging active transport (walking and cycling) rather than car dependency, thus reducing greenhouse emissions, and
- encouraging social inclusiveness and safe communities where residents feel part of their local community and are engaged and active.

Healthy and sustainable communities are well designed and safe and include:

- local facilities (e.g. schools, corner stores, child-care facilities, medical practices, recreation facilities, community services)
- movement networks designed for active transport (i.e. walking and cycling)
- parks and public spaces for people to meet and interact
- places for people to experience art and culture
- cycle facilities, and
- public transport.

The approaches to planning that *Healthy Spaces and Places* sets out will help achieve positive results against the quadruple bottom line sustainability measure (economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability).

Sustainable Community Rating Tool

A sustainable rating tool has been developed by VicUrban to assist in planning and delivering sustainability in new residential communities. It is based on five interrelated objectives: community wellbeing (including health), environmental leadership, urban design excellence, housing affordability and commercial success. For more information, go to:

www.sustainablecommunityrating.com



Healthy Spaces and Places online



The website www.healthyplaces.org.au is the principal resource for the *Healthy Spaces and Places* project. It is a single source of easy-to-find, practical information from experts in health, planning, urban design, community safety and transport planning.

The website includes:

- design principles that are the foundation stones of healthier more active communities
- different development types where these principles can be applied
- information about how to make planning for healthier communities happen

- Australian case studies that show what is achievable and which have potentially wider application, and
- links to the health and planning research and resources that support planning for active living.

The website's primary focus is on how to create built environments that support physical activity, so it does not provide in-depth information on other aspects in this area such as nutrition, food security and noise and air pollution.

If you do not have web access, a CD is available for order free of charge (see order form inside front cover).

Glossary

Active living is defined as a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines.

Active transport is walking, cycling or using public transport. Active transport is an alternative to car travel and can provide benefits, such as increasing daily physical activity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ancillary benefits can also include an increase in the sense of community and improved mental health.

Built environment means the structures and places in which we live, work and play, including land uses, transportation systems and design features.

Connectivity is the degree to which networks, such as streets, railways, walking and cycling routes, services and infrastructure, interconnect. A highly-connected place will have many public spaces or routes linked to it.

Density is the measure of the number of dwellings in a given land area. It can also be a measure of population in a given land area.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Healthy communities are communities where people come together to make their community better for everyone through collaboration, community ownership, inclusive approaches and long-term, positive commitment. A healthy community will:

- provide affordable, appropriate, accessible housing
- adjust the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility
- ensure access to key health and supportive services
- ensure accessible, affordable, reliable and safe transport
- provide work, volunteer and education opportunities, and
- encourage participation in civic, cultural, social and recreational activities.

Land-use mix (mixed land uses) is the diversity or variety of land uses (e.g. residential, retail, commercial, industrial and agricultural, parks and open space). A diverse land-use mix is associated with shorter travel distances between places of interest and activities.

Mixed density refers to residential development that contains a range of housing types, such as single dwellings, medium-density dwellings and higher-density dwelling units, including apartment buildings, and usually includes a variety of building forms.

Social cohesion (also referred to as sense of belonging) refers to the degree to which people in a community feel connected and committed to and part of a community.

Social inclusion refers to a society where all people are given the opportunity to participate fully in political, cultural, civic and economic life because they feel valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity.

Transport system (also referred to as movement network) is the physical infrastructure of roads, footpaths, bike paths and railway lines that provide the physical connection between places. Travel time, comfort and safety are factors that determine the quality of transport systems. It is also used as a term to describe the level of service provided (e.g. accessibility to public transport, routes, frequencies and connectivity).

Walkability is the measure of the overall walking conditions in an area. A place is walkable when it has characteristics that invite people to walk.

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