

# Creating Healthy Neighbourhoods

Consumer preferences for healthy development



# Introduction

“Neighbourhood design plays an important role in supporting healthy communities by encouraging physical activity and community interaction.”

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. The simple act of walking for 30 minutes a day or more can reduce our risk of cardiovascular disease by as much as half. While planned physical activity, such as attending the gym or pool, is important, there are also opportunities to incorporate unstructured (or incidental) physical activity into our daily lives. Walking to the shops instead of driving, taking the dog to the park or riding a bike to work are good examples.

Neighbourhood design plays an important role in providing opportunities for incidental and recreational physical activity. Providing safe places for people to walk and cycle, destinations within walking distance and easy access to public transport all contribute to developing a neighbourhood that supports physical activity and community interaction.

The Heart Foundation calls this a “healthy neighbourhood” and we have a long history of collaborating with built environment professionals to encourage this type of development.

We have worked with town planners, property developers and local consent authorities to implement guidelines such as *Healthy by Design*® and, through our national partnership with the Planning Institute of Australia and the Australian Local Government Association, jointly developed *Healthy Spaces and Places*, a national guide to designing places for healthy living.

The Heart Foundation is also interested in what members of the community think about healthy neighbourhoods. In October 2009 we commissioned a Newspoll survey, conducted by telephone, of approximately 1,400 people, aged 18 years and over in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth to find out whether healthy neighbourhood features may influence their decision about where to live. The results of the survey indicate that many people do value being able to walk to the shops, enjoy areas of open space and access public transport.

Together we play a role in building healthier communities and reducing the impact of cardiovascular disease on Australian families. This brochure highlights the results of our survey and provides some basic guidance on how new developments can appeal to the market demand for healthy neighbourhoods.

**Image:** Landcom's Park Central development, Campbelltown (image courtesy of Landcom).





## Quality open space

The community values being within close proximity to attractive and useable park land with Heart Foundation research indicating that over 45% of people regard being within walking distance to a local park extremely or very important when deciding where to live.

Easily accessible, well maintained parks and public open spaces are essential in healthy neighbourhoods. They provide places for people to walk or cycle to and in, as well as other recreation and social interaction opportunities.

- Where there are opportunities, provide large local parks (1 hectare minimum) within 400 metres safe walking distance from all homes. Small local parks are also important as focal points for walking and they provide opportunities for children to play. Ideally, all homes in a development should be located within 150 to 300 metres safe walking distance of a small park.<sup>1</sup>
- Open spaces and public areas need to be pleasant places. The landscaping, including large leafy trees for shade, and provision of seating and lighting, are important components of open spaces in healthy neighbourhoods.
- When allocating open space and negotiating its maintenance, consider that the area could be used for informal contact with community as well as recreation.

**Image source:** Healthy Spaces and Places – SGS Economics and Planning

## Walking and cycling

More than 50% of people indicated that every street in the area having a paved or concreted footpath would be extremely or very important to them when deciding where to live.

Integrating a well-connected network of footpaths, trails, shared paths and on and off road cycle lanes allows people to travel and exercise safely and easily.

- Provide street design that promotes vehicle speed of no more than 30km/h in residential streets, strip shopping and around major trip generators (e.g. schools and community facilities).<sup>2</sup>
- Provide separated, or at least marked and signed on road bicycle lanes on streets with traffic speeds of and over 50 km/h.<sup>2</sup>
- Make streets safe and comfortable places to walk by planting trees for useful shade and welcoming frontages.
- Provide footpaths on both sides of all streets.

**Image:** Courtesy of The Health Promotion Service, Clinical Support Cluster-Western



## Developing connected, safe and legible street networks

Having more people on streets contributes to active and lively communities where people meet and interact, a neighbourhood characteristic which is becoming increasingly valuable.<sup>3</sup>

Street networks based on grids and with attractive frontages are safer and they encourage people to be out and about.

- Design street layouts based on grids to provide both direct and legible paths to neighbourhood destinations such as shops, schools and public transport stops.
- Use alternatives to roundabouts and cul de sacs. If cul de sacs are used, provide signed and safe pedestrian and cycling linkages through the cul de sac to adjacent streets.
- Integrate new street networks with existing surrounding streets and walking and cycling networks.
- Design attractive, interesting and welcoming street frontages to enable natural surveillance of people walking, cycling and gathering at points of interest.

Image: Courtesy of Landcom

## Access to public transport

Of the factors surveyed, being within easy walking distance of public transport was most often ranked as the highest priority when making a choice of where to live, with almost 70% of people rating it as extremely or very important.

Good public transport provides the freedom of mobility without the inconvenience of parking and the rising costs of driving a car. Access to reliable public transport has increasing appeal to the community.

Using public transport also enables people to fit a little more activity into their daily life by walking or cycling to and from stations or stops. Healthy neighbourhoods take advantage of and seek to enhance existing public transport networks.

- Consider site accessibility by public transport when considering the value of a site.
- Ensure the location of public transport stops is well signed and included in the signage strategy used for walking and cycling routes.
- In healthy neighbourhoods, the homes of most people are located within a comfortable walking distance of a regular bus or train service.<sup>4</sup> Where possible, advocate for public transport access as a fundamental component of healthy neighbourhoods.

Image: Courtesy of Jennifer Kent



## Compact neighbourhoods ensure the viability of destinations

Heart Foundation research indicates that 64% of people say that being within easy walking distance to a range of local services would be extremely or very important to them when deciding where to live.

Local access to shops, facilities and public transport are important in healthy neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood clusters provide focal points for walking and reduce the need to drive for short journeys. To be viable, these destinations require more people to live locally which generally requires increased residential density. We recognise that the density of development is usually prescribed by planning authorities however healthy neighbourhoods are generally more compact neighbourhoods which provide a range of housing options.

- Consider the consumer preference for walkable access to existing neighbourhood clusters, including schools, parks and public transport when considering the value of a site.
- Where possible, develop to support neighbourhood clusters within close walking distance to most homes (usually 400 to 800 metres).<sup>5</sup>
- Where there is the opportunity to develop mixed use neighbourhoods, co-locate business uses with, or within 200 metres of, community centres, schools, parks or public transport stops.<sup>1</sup> This helps to facilitate viable businesses and convenient, walkable access.

Image source: Heart Foundation



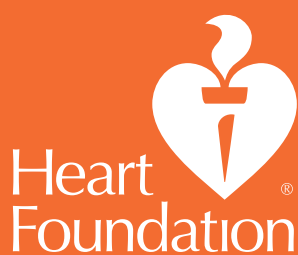
## Creating a community heart

Community spirit is about people having a sense of ownership and belonging in their local area. Recent studies have demonstrated that people are willing to pay more to live in communities that feel connected.<sup>6</sup>

Active communities increase community spirit and connectivity in a local area because people are out and about, meeting their neighbours and contributing to the local economy.

- Involve the existing community surrounding new development in planning activities through meaningful consultation. This will help residents of your new community to embrace existing community life.
- Avoid 'fortress' or gated residential developments where residents are not encouraged to connect with the public realm.
- Create opportunities for informal community interaction such as well maintained open spaces, walking trails, community gardens and other destinations.

Image source: Heart Foundation



For heart health information  
1300 36 27 87  
[www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

## Links to further information and healthy neighbourhoods in action

A range of resources are available for further information about designing neighbourhoods that promote active and healthy living as well as examples of healthy neighbourhoods in action. These include:

### Heart Foundation resources

- Healthy Spaces and Places – a national guide to designing places for healthy living. A web-based resource. [www.healthypaces.org.au](http://www.healthypaces.org.au)
- Healthy by Design: a guide to planning and designing environments for active living. [www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/Healthy-by-Design.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/Healthy-by-Design.pdf)
- Active, Healthy Communities – a resource package for local government to create supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating. A web-based resource. [www.activehealthycommunities.com.au](http://www.activehealthycommunities.com.au)
- Neighbourhood Walkability Checklist – how walkable is your community? [www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HFW-Walkability-Checklist.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HFW-Walkability-Checklist.pdf)
- Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design. [www.ecoinnovationlab.com/research/food-sensitive-planning-and-urban-design](http://www.ecoinnovationlab.com/research/food-sensitive-planning-and-urban-design)

### Other resources

- Development and Active Living: Designing Projects for Active Living. Developer's Checklist with Case Studies. Premier's Council for Active Living, NSW. [www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/local\\_government](http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/local_government)
- Development and Active Living: Designing Projects for Active Living. A Development Assessment Resource and Navigational Tool. Premier's Council for Active Living, NSW. [www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/local\\_government](http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/local_government)

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