PARKS AND LEISURE AUSTRALIA
& PARTNERS
ADVOCACY MESSAGES
We are the People behind the Places that encourage healthy and active communities. The planners, the architects and custodians of Australia’s parks, bushlands, gardens, sports facilities, leisure centres and trails.

We are concerned about the poor health of our nation:

- Eight in ten Australian children do not meet national guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity per day.¹
- More than a third (36%) of Australians aged 15 and over do very little or no exercise at all.²
- 70.8% of Australian men were overweight or obese in 2014-15, compared with 56.3% of women.³
- Physical inactivity costs the Australian economy $805 million annually - $640m in direct costs (healthcare expenditure) and $165m in indirect costs.⁴
- Physical inactivity causes an estimated 16,000 premature deaths a year.⁵
- Productivity loss due to physical inactivity is estimated at 1.8 working days per worker per year.⁶
- Adults who participate in sport are 20–40% less likely to die prematurely from all causes compared with non-participants.⁷
- Physical inactivity contributes to 19% of diabetes cases, 16% of bowel cancer cases, 16% of uterine cancer cases, 14% of dementia cases, 11% of breast cancer cases, 11% of coronary heart disease cases and 10% of strokes.⁸

These statistics are damning and even more severe in rural and regional Australia and across disadvantaged groups.

This is a national crisis and we urgently call the Australian government to partner with state and local governments across Australia to reverse this trend!
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Participating in regular physical activity can reduce cardiovascular disease–related deaths by up to 36%.

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WHO calls on policy makers and practitioners to invest in urban green spaces to provide healthy and sustainable living environments for people in all cities in the face of increasing pressure from expanding populations, limited resources and the growing impacts of climate change including pollution and loss of biodiversity.

THE EVIDENCE

The World Health Organisation (WHO) constitution (1947) best defines the rights of Australians and the government’s role:

“Having the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition and that governments have the responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures”.

The University of Sydney study found in 2013 that physical inactivity costs Australia $805 million each year. This cost is made up of direct health care expenses linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease and indirect costs of productivity losses when people die prematurely because of physical inactivity.

The Australian Government allocated $486 million in the 2017-21 Budget towards ‘prioritising mental health, preventative health and sport’. However, only $15M or 3% of this was allocated to preventative measures that encourage people to walk and ride (Healthy Heart Initiative).

We welcome the Australian Government’s additional $144.7 million funding to the Australian Sports Commission (Ausport) to get Australians more active. Funding sport participation programs is an important first step, but it is only part of the solution to making Australians healthier.

We need to rethink our approach to addressing obesity and physical inactivity. Parks and Leisure Australia argues there is a need for a bigger investment in the future health of Australians.
World Health Organisation Call for Action on Urban Green Space

In 2017, the World Health Organisation (WHO) released a “brief for action” on urban green spaces. The brief is based on extensive evidence supporting the need for urban green space and includes blue spaces, water bodies and corridors.10

WHO calls on policy makers and practitioners to invest in urban green spaces to provide healthy and sustainable living environments for people in all cities in the face of increasing pressure from expanding populations, limited resources and the growing impacts of climate change including pollution and loss of biodiversity.

WHO explains that urban green spaces are a feature of healthy settlements and that the evidence proves “green spaces benefit cities and urban quality of life”.11

Our public realm including parks, civic spaces, active transport corridors, sport and recreation facilities, streets, water bodies and open space corridors, enables people to live a healthy and active lifestyle. These spaces and places help people escape from the built environment and reconnect with nature. They provide social spaces for us to connect with each other and strengthen our sense of community. They help us learn. They protect natural environments, important habitats and cultural heritage. They offer opportunities for tourism, sustainable economies and investment in social capital. Our green spaces are the lungs of our growing cities and the solution to overheating as the climate continues to change.
AUSTRALIA NEEDS A PLAN AND WE NEED TO ACT

To create a Healthy and Happy Australia, we need to plan and to invest in this critical infrastructure for health. Our green spaces, open spaces and active transport networks are the essential ingredient in making our cities liveable and providing a path to a healthier Australia.

PLA is calling for the delivery of urban health infrastructure to be prioritised in planning for Australia’s cities and towns. We believe that green and active infrastructure should be planned, funded and delivered ahead of the major road transport projects that seem to take up the headlines each election cycle.

We recognise too, that a lack of connection to nature has a major impact on mental and physical health. Nature deficit syndrome is starting to make our children ill and we know access to nature helps with resolving mental health issues. Providing places that promote a positive and regular connection to nature is an investment in the health and mental wellbeing of Australia’s future generations.

Actions

It is time for a real commitment to addressing the impending health crisis arising from a lack of investment in the infrastructure that makes a difference.

We are proposing a solution that will pay dividends for generations to come.
1. **Urban Health Infrastructure Plans to be required for all cities in Australia**

All metropolitan and regional cities should be required to develop Urban Health Infrastructure Plans. These will build on the natural attributes of our coasts, rivers, parks and bushland, extend our open space networks and reimagine our cities as healthy and active living places.

The plans will identify current and future opportunities to expand public open space and to green our streets, laneways, roads and other infrastructure corridors, making city’s cooler and enabling people to walk, ride and be active outdoors.

The aim of these plans is to ensure that cities grow around green spaces, active places and an accessible public realm that creates social interaction and connection with nature. They will seek to:

- Ensure that cities are designed to improve people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Use public space and green space as the central framework around which urban development is planned.
- Provide both planning principles and long term investment programs.
- Ensure active transport is the easiest choice in all areas of a city.
- Detail how investment in greening cities will improve health of residents, reduce urban heating and increase biodiversity.

2. **Establish a $1 billion investment fund to deliver Urban Health Infrastructure**

To build a single hospital can cost more than $500 Million (Northern Beaches French’s Forest cost $600Mill) and for state of the art major hospitals over $2 billion (Royal Adelaide). In 2016-17 Australia spent more than $180.7 billion on health ($124B of that by state and federal governments). It makes sense to invest now to reduce what is a continually growing cost. While all levels of government accept the benefits of investment in urban health infrastructure such as parks and sports fields, there is no coordinated plan to fund this critical infrastructure. Most of the cost is left to local government and most of the benefit to future health budgets is realised by state and federal government.

Establishing a fund to support the implementation of Urban Health Infrastructure Plans is an investment in the future and the dividends will be realised by future health budgets and improved national productivity. **For around $40 a person we could transform our cities.**

The purpose of the fund is to resource the Urban Health Infrastructure Plans and remove the capital investment barriers to creating healthy liveable cities and towns.

The fund will only be available to those cities and towns who have prepared Urban Health Infrastructure Plans and initial policy priorities for funding could include:

- Delivering priority active transport and trail projects connecting where people live to public open spaces.
- Transforming existing parks and open spaces into active living hubs and living corridors through investment in facilities or redevelopment that enables more people to be active.
- Investment in green infrastructure, planting more trees in our open spaces to create urban forests and greening our streets to cool our city.

The fund should also support investment in building quality nature-based multi-use trails in regional and rural Australia.

State and local governments have begun planning a number of nature-based trail projects across regional Australia to boost regional economies and deliver the social and health benefits of connecting people to nature. Partnership funding from the Investment Fund will enable state and local governments to realise more trail projects and to increase mountain bike and bushwalking trails in our National Parks and State Forests.

Along with support for more touring cycle routes and multi-user rail trails, this investment will encourage more people to be active and have a significant impact on rural and regional health. The added advantage is that trails tourism continues to grow and will strengthen regional and rural economies.
PLA WANT’S A HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIA

This future requires investment in urban health infrastructure. This investment is now critical if we are to reverse the rising costs of physical and mental illness related to physical inactivity and lack of access to green spaces and social connection.

We have to make planning and funding urban health infrastructure a central priority for all levels of government in Australia. That priority also means that planning for our cities puts this infrastructure first and that we recognise it is not a cost, but an investment in our future.

Only then can we deliver truly liveable cities and towns.

Australians will improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing

Australia’s economy will benefit through decreased health costs and increased productivity

Australia’s environment will benefit and our cities cope with climate change more effectively

Australian children will be healthier, smarter and happier.

REFERENCES


5. Ibid


7. Ibid


