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National Heart Foundation  
of Australia  
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Dear Infrastructure Australia team

## Heart Foundation response to Infrastructure Australia Audit 2019

The Heart Foundation welcomes the opportunity to respond to *The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019*, and to assist in identifying nationally significant reform and investment priorities to address the future needs of Australians and to build our nation.

We welcome the report's acknowledgement of the benefits of active transport and green infrastructure and the government's commitment to infrastructure reform in order to enhance the quality of life for all Australians. The way we build cities, communities and neighbourhoods underpins people's ability to be active where they live, work, play and learn. Activity-promoting built environments are therefore central to a prosperous, healthy, productive and sustainable Australia.

Innovative solutions are urgently required to improve the declining health of Australians. Aligning sectoral agendas with initiatives to promote population wellbeing and health equity offers considerable scope for achieving co-benefits in the different sectors. A healthier population produces a better workforce, a sustainable economy, and more resilient communities. Increased population wellbeing may also reduce government spending on health services, freeing up funds for expenditure elsewhere.

### About the Heart Foundation

For sixty years the Heart Foundation has been fighting for Australian Hearts.

We have a vision of an Australia free of heart disease and our mission is to prevent heart disease and improve the heart health and quality of life of all Australians through our work in prevention, support and research.

As part of our work we are committed to seeing more Australians more active, more often.

The Heart Foundation is the leading Australian organisation advocating for environments that promote and support physical activity. We work in partnership with a range of industry, government, non-government and academic organisations to create environments that support healthier living through better planning, built environments and transport solutions.

Promoting healthy built environments and active transport solutions are strategic priorities for the Heart Foundation and this is reflected in our internationally recognised flagship program [Healthy Active by Design](#), and through key resources such as the [Blueprint for an active Australia](#).

# Key Issues

## 1. ACTIVE TRANSPORT

The Heart Foundation is pleased to see Infrastructure Australia's Audit acknowledge the importance of active transport and the opportunity it provides to make Australian cities more productive, efficient and sustainable. The Heart Foundation believes it is crucial to invest in maintaining and upgrading active transport infrastructure to prepare for a healthier future.

In this submission we define active transport to include all non-motorised transport and involves physical activity such as walking, bike riding, jogging, scooting, skating or using public transport. By enabling and encouraging active transport we can help Australians get more physical activity into their day and improve their physical and mental health, quality of life and life expectancy.

The built environment affects the transport choices of both adults and children. Characteristics such as higher residential density, land use mix, urban sprawl, traffic volumes and speed, quality of footpaths and bike paths, street connectivity, access to destinations such as shops and parks, aesthetics and personal safety have been found to be important correlates of walking for transport and active transport in general.

A national approach is required to help make our neighbourhoods more pedestrian and bike friendly, and the Heart Foundation recommends Infrastructure Australia establish a funding scheme to assist local government to redevelop residential streets to accommodate greater pedestrian and cycling activity, and to increase uptake of public transport journeys.

The benefits of active transport are recognised in health, transport and urban planning fields.

Active transport delivers health benefits through increasing physical activity. Walking and bike riding as a component of daily travel have beneficial effects on all-cause mortality and reduce several burdens of disease, including cardiovascular disease.<sup>1</sup>

We know that physical inactivity contributes 10-20% of the disease burden. Physical inactivity is also a major risk factor for obesity.<sup>2</sup>

Disappointingly, only 56% of Australian adults engage in the recommended 150 minutes (or more) of physical activity each week.<sup>3</sup> Only 30% of children aged 2-17 years meet the recommended physical activity guidelines.

For our ageing population the statistics are even worse – 75% of Australians over 65 years of age are not sufficiently active to achieve any health benefits.<sup>4</sup>

It is critical for Infrastructure Australia to take these health statistics into serious consideration when setting infrastructure priorities for the next 15 years and beyond.

Active transport is proven to be a good investment. An international review of evaluations of environments which make walking accessible and enjoyable showed positive cost benefit ratios of up to 37.6<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the latest report from VicWalks found investing in walking infrastructure can provide a higher economic return than other transport projects such as rail and road.

VicWalks looked at the evidence from 20 different studies which suggested that the cost benefit ratio of walking interventions is 13:1 – \$13 of benefit for every \$1 of expenditure.<sup>6</sup> In comparison with other transport projects, investments in walking are excellent value for money.

Long-term policy and infrastructure measures are required to address chronic disease, mental health, loneliness and our obesogenic environments. At a neighbourhood level this requires building new communities and regenerating old ones to provide infrastructure and services for active transport and providing high quality green public open spaces and access to recreational facilities.

Confronted by the potential for rapid population growth, the challenge is now to rethink the way populations live, work, play and travel. Central to this consideration is the need to shift away from car dependent low-density suburban sprawl to more sustainable, compact and liveable cities.

Looking to our future, Australians will need cities with housing diversity. Choice of dwelling will meet the needs of our diverse and ageing community and helps create vibrant places.<sup>7</sup> High quality apartments, close to active transport infrastructure are vital to this diversity. For example, townhouses can provide many of the desired choices of suburban living, including gentle density, private green spaces and shared facilities. Townhouses near transport and community hubs can ensure older people wanting to downsize from their single-home residence can potentially age-in-place.

Loss of mobility as we age, leads to a decrease in both quality and longevity of life. As older people transition out of car ownership, and fewer younger people take up driving, flexible mobility options will be needed. Increasing the frequency and decreasing the cost of public transport will become crucial. Investment in fast and frequent public transport should be a high priority for Infrastructure Australia, particularly serving and connecting our urban fringe and regional centres to our employment hubs.

Infrastructure Australia must consider social-equity goals when making long-term infrastructure planning decisions. Equity is about fairness and justice and giving people what they need to live a healthy and productive life, regardless of where they live. The Infrastructure Australia plan must ensure affordable and accessible public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure is available to those who can't afford a car or do not drive.

Australia's affluent suburbs are also the healthiest, and makeup the top 20 "most active" locations according to the [Heart Foundation's Heart Maps](#). It is now well known that your postcode is one of the determinants of your health status - and the Heart Foundation has concerns that the health and wellbeing of communities who are the *most* disadvantaged and have the poorest health outcomes are being overlooked. This includes people living in remote, rural and regional areas.

The Heart Foundation recommends setting goals for infrastructure investment in disadvantaged areas, such as those on the urban fringe and remote, rural and regional areas

## **2. SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Green infrastructure**

The Heart Foundation is pleased to see Infrastructure Australia acknowledge green infrastructure as an asset to support liveability, health and wellbeing, and to mitigate against climate change.

Over the next 20 years and beyond, Australia will experience a changing climate, becoming increasingly warm, dry, and liable to more frequent weather extremes. We can also expect urban heat island effects will intensify.

Cities around the world now regard trees and other green infrastructure as critical urban infrastructure. Trees are as important to how a city functions as the “hard infrastructure” such as roads, and particularly vital to the health and wellbeing of communities.

Green Infrastructure is defined by the [Australian Institute of Landscape Architects](#) as “the network of natural landscape assets, which underpin and provide for the economic, socio-cultural and environmental functionality of our cities and towns.” Green Infrastructure, when planned well and integrated into our cities, towns and suburbs can contribute to improving the comfort, quality and health of people and the environment.

Thoughtful design of both soft and hard infrastructure is equally critical to the success of planning and reshaping our cities and regional centres to address the challenges of population and economic growth.

Informed development of Australia’s natural infrastructure assets is key to tackling the major public health issues facing Australia’s cities, towns and regions.

The Heart Foundation’s [Healthy Active by Design](#) provides substantial evidence and case studies demonstrating that living within walking distance of parks and green public open space is linked to greater use of these areas and positive health outcomes. Additionally, if the route to a green public open space is perceived as aesthetically pleasing, and safe from crime and traffic, adults are also more likely to walk there. Within parks, people are more active when using features such as trails, playgrounds and sports facilities.

The Heart Foundation agrees with Infrastructure Australia’s observation about the increasing pressures on green, blue and recreational infrastructure as our population grows, our urban areas expand, and our neighbourhoods densify. Design and delivery of open space that promotes the health and wellbeing of people and the natural environment is a key challenge for health and urban planning.

Green space and public open space targets are identified within the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) and meeting these targets will be particularly important and challenging with increasing urbanisation and densification within cities.

These challenges will place significant pressure on the built fabric, services and people of cities.

Infrastructure Australia must coordinate action, that is underpinned by good governance, and evidence-based guidelines to ensure that new approaches for greening are developed and implemented for both our compact cities and our regional areas.

## **Recreation and sporting facilities**

The health, cultural and economic contribution sport makes to our country is significant.

The Heart Foundation supports the development of sport and recreation facilities and ensuring new neighbourhood developments allow for grassroots community sports facilities including training grounds, sporting clubs and shared spaces. In particular we strongly urge Infrastructure Australia to prioritise areas of socio-economic disadvantage, high cultural diversity and remoteness because they often have higher rates of physical inactivity, obesity and chronic disease.

The Government's [Sport 2030 - National Sports Plan](#) outlines the case for investment into community sport infrastructure with more than eight million Australians using community sporting infrastructure every year. The Plan states "The availability of accessible and sustainable sporting and physical activity infrastructure is critical when it comes to getting Australians moving more. Part of this is working to ensure that all funded facilities are designed in a way that they are accessible to all – not modified for use for people with a disability but designed to be used by people with a disability." We would recommend that Infrastructure Australia accesses the good work already being done by Sports Australia in mapping and planning sports infrastructure.

In redeveloping existing facilities or constructing new facilities, such as proposed community hubs, opportunities exist to increase incidental physical activity in the community and maximise the health benefits of recreation and sporting facilities.

The Heart Foundation's [Healthy Active by Design](#) provides evidence, case studies, policies and checklists around the health benefits of **Community Facilities**. When community facilities, such as schools and sport and recreation facilities, are located near to homes it enhances opportunities for physical activity, wellbeing, sports participation, community interaction and social cohesion. The co-location of sporting facilities and schools within a neighbourhood will encourage children to walk or cycle to school and to use local recreation facilities.

The Heart Foundation recommends implementing the actions from the Heart Foundation's [Blueprint for an Active Australia](#) to enable evidence-based policy decisions around social infrastructure provision and to maximise the health benefits it offers.

Infrastructure Australia must implement local funding schemes for councils who are the custodians of suburban open space and recreational and sports facilities. Councils are well placed to respond to the needs of their local community and the impact of facilities on liveability.

## Recommendations

**The Heart Foundation recommends Infrastructure Australia to prioritise and invest in active transport and social infrastructure,**

The Heart Foundation recommends that Infrastructure Australia:

1. Ensure mandatory implementation of best-practice walking and cycling infrastructure as part of all major government-funded urban transport projects;
2. Set clear and realistic targets for active transport outcomes;
3. Implement Healthy Active by Design principles government and industry development, aimed at supporting population growth and creating more compact liveable communities;
4. Ensure investment in disadvantaged areas, such as those on the urban fringe and remote, rural and regional areas;
5. Develop and implement a funding scheme to assist local governments to create neighbourhood streets that encourage walking and cycling;
6. Coordinate actions to ensure that new approaches for greening are developed and implemented for both our compact cities and our regional areas;
7. Provide funding to local government to maintain and enhance social infrastructure that promotes physical activity;
8. Infrastructure Australia consider key documents from the Heart Foundation and our partners that can guide policy actions in relation to the above.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the planning and priority setting for future infrastructure reform in Australia. If you would like any further information, evidence or clarification on this submission please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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## Key documents supporting this submission

### 1. Heart Foundation's Healthy Active by Design

[www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au)

Healthy Active by Design (HAbD) is the leading national design guidance for healthy built environments. It details eight design elements and associated guidance that can be incorporated into cities, towns and suburbs to make them healthier and more supportive of active transport. HAbD provides the best-available evidence, practical advice, checklists and case studies to help with the development of healthy neighbourhoods and communities that promote walking, bike riding and an active public life.

### 2. Heart Foundation's Blueprint for an Active Australia (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2019)

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/BFAA](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/BFAA)

'The Blueprint' is the result of a collaboration between the Heart Foundation and over 50 of Australia's leading experts on physical activity, health, the built environment, transport and planning. The Blueprint presents an irrefutable and urgent case for change and presents evidence-based actions for government and the community that can form the basis of a systems-approach to address the major public health problem of physical inactivity.

### 3. Giles-Corti, B. et al Increasing Density in Australia: maximising the health benefits and minimising harm (2012)

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Increasing-density-in-Australia-Evidence-Review-2012-trevor.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Increasing-density-in-Australia-Evidence-Review-2012-trevor.pdf)

This evidence review commissioned by the Heart Foundation details how higher density in the right location, with appropriate height, land use mix, good design and accompanying amenity contributes to walkable neighbourhoods and encouraging walking. We categorise the land use features required to encourage more walking and high levels of public transport demand into the five D's: density, design, diversity, distance to transit and destination accessibility. The five Ds make the biggest impact when they work together.

### 4. Australian Local Government Association, Heart Foundation et al, *An Australian Vision for Active Transport* (2013)

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Active-Vision-for-Active-Transport-Report.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Active-Vision-for-Active-Transport-Report.pdf)

A call on the Government to make a commitment to active transport in Australia.

### 5. Moving People 2030 Taskforce, *Moving Australia 2030* (2012)

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Moving-Australia-2030.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Moving-Australia-2030.pdf)

This report sets out pathways for the establishment of a transport, land use management, planning and funding framework, including how we move people today and, in the future, to maintain the living standards we currently enjoy in Australia.

### 6. Heart Foundation's Does Density Matter?

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Heart\\_Foundation\\_Does\\_density\\_matter\\_FINAL2014.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Heart_Foundation_Does_density_matter_FINAL2014.pdf)

The role of density in creating walkable neighbourhoods.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Kelly, P et al. 2014. Systematic review and meta-analysis of reduction in all-cause mortality from walking and cycling and shape of dose response relationship. *Int J Behav Nut & PA*
- <sup>2</sup> AIHW. Impact of physical inactivity as a risk factor for chronic conditions.
- <sup>3</sup> AIHW. Australia's Health 2018. Insufficient physical activity.
- <sup>4</sup> AIHW. Australia's Health 2018. Insufficient physical activity
- <sup>5</sup> University of the West of England and Cavill Associates for Living Streets. 2011. Making the Case for Walking: 2011. A Review of the Evidence.
- <sup>6</sup> Badawi, Y, Maclean, F, and Mason, B, (2018). The economic case for investment in walking, Victoria Walks, Melbourne <http://www.victoriawalks.org.au/Assets/Files/The-Economic-Case-for-Investment-in-Walking-FINAL.pdf> Accessed 30 September 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> Heart Foundation. Healthy Active by Design. Accessed on 29/9/19 at <https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/>