Creating heart healthy communities

Working with local government
Creating heart healthy communities: working with local government includes recommendations for health planners and strategic planners to consider as they develop Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans and Municipal Strategic Statements.

This resource outlines two Heart Foundation priority areas for local government. It also describes how the Heart Foundation can support your council and lists resources, contact details and additional Heart Foundation programs that might be relevant to you.

The Heart Foundation’s priority areas for local government include:

- **Food and nutrition**: Ensure physical and affordable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate foods for all and recognise the potential of local food economies and the value of productive agricultural land.

- **Active living**: Create built environments that make it easier for people to be physically active, particularly by making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

Heart disease is Victoria’s leading cause of avoidable death¹ and a major cause of hospitalisation.² It will increase significantly over the next decade¹ unless action is taken now.

Local governments can take practical action to reduce the risk of heart disease. This can be done by improving access to healthy food and by increasing active living.
Food and nutrition

The design and layout of our cities and towns can help or hinder people’s physical and affordable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. Local governments can play a key role in enabling food-sensitive planning and urban design to be implemented, which includes identifying opportunities for better access to healthy food for all.

Overweight and obesity, hypertension, high blood cholesterol and insufficient intake of fruits and vegetables are food-related risk factors for heart disease. Over 60% of Victorian adults are overweight or obese and 94% do not eat enough fruits and vegetables.

Recommendations for council plans and policies

• Adopt healthy catering policies or guidelines to provide healthier food and drink choices within the municipality, including internal council catering or council-managed services.

• Ensure access to affordable, culturally appropriate, safe and nutritious food. See VicHealth’s Supporting healthy eating, local government action guide no 7 for more information.

• Create a council food policy to integrate healthy and sustainable food system* considerations into all council portfolios.

• Develop policies for supportive built environments to enable healthy and sustainable food systems. For instance, to enable better access to food, guide the activity-centre hierarchy to include neighbourhood centres that offer a variety of local destinations, such as healthy food retail and healthy foodservice outlets.

• Ensure access to food, through active travel measures, are incorporated into planning and transport policies.

• Protect agricultural land and explicitly state the value it provides to the local community, such as health, employment, tourism and a resilient and sustainable food system.

* Healthy and sustainable food is:
• required for a nutritious diet, and is adequate, safe, culturally appropriate and tasty
• produced, processed, transported, marketed and sold without adverse environmental impacts, and that contributes to healthy soils and waterways, clean air and biodiversity
• provided through means that are humane and just, with adequate attention to the needs of farmers and other workers, consumers and communities.

Often strategies which work to improve food-related risk factors also address active living and other risk factors to heart disease. For example, a more walkable community with local destinations promotes better access to food, increased physical activity and opportunities for social interaction.
How the Heart Foundation can assist

The Heart Foundation provides a workshop that introduces the principles of its resource, *Food-sensitive planning and urban design*. The workshop explains the resource and shows how it can be used to influence council practice. The workshop can be tailored to meet your council’s needs.

**Workshop: Introduction to Food-sensitive planning and urban design**

**Who:** The session is relevant for local government health professionals and planners; social, transport, community, open space, environment and sustainability, strategic and statutory.

**Duration:** 3 to 4 hours

**Cost:** $1,800 (excluding GST) for group workshop plus travel expenses.

**Bookings:** Email cvhvic@heartfoundation.org.au

The resources listed below have been developed by the Heart Foundation to provide an evidence base for local government to create healthy and sustainable food systems:

- *Food-sensitive planning and urban design: A conceptual framework for achieving a sustainable and healthy food system (FSPUD)*
- *Planning for food: Towards and prosperous, resilient and healthy food system through Victoria’s Metropolitan Planning Strategy*
- *Heart Foundation ‘Healthy Catering and Preparing Foods’*

**More information**

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Active Living

Physical inactivity is a significant risk factor for poor health in Victoria. Overweight and obesity is closely linked to low levels of physical activity and poor eating habits. The design of contemporary Victorian cities, towns and neighbourhoods minimises the uptake of physical activity in the form of incidental exercise due to the heavy use of motorised transport and a built environment that, in general, does not prioritise the needs of walkers, cyclists and public transport users.

Local governments can make it easier for people to be physically active by addressing the way that the built environment and public realm is designed. Planning for a healthy built environment puts the needs of people and communities at the heart of council decisions regarding spaces in which people live, work and play.

Recommendations for council plans and policies

- Ensure the Municipal Strategic Statement contains healthy built environment components such as a liveability clause, active transport measures, and the promotion of healthy food access through local level retail provision.

- Develop an Activity Centre Strategy that promotes and maintains local destinations, utilises the public realm, and seeks to diversify retail/service mix.

- Develop an integrated transport plan that includes provision for walking and cycling and prioritises the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in council transport decision making.

- Use Healthy by design principles to ensure streets are designed to accommodate active transport modes. Street design can include, but is not limited to the following features – slow speed, safe places to cross and infrastructure and connectivity’ for pedestrians and cyclists.

- Develop an open space strategy to accommodate all ages and abilities. The strategy should promote a diverse and connected network of open space incorporating unstructured open space and play areas that are suitable for children of all ages and abilities; and walking and cycling networks and pathways that are connected to the larger walking/cycling network.

- Influence plans to encourage mixed land use and increase density levels to medium density thereby providing a diversity of housing stock and improving walkability to local destinations.
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How the Heart Foundation can assist

The Heart Foundation collaborates with the local government sector to advocate for active living. In 2013 the Heart Foundation will continue its involvement in the Safe Speed Interest Group. This group includes local governments, universities, community health organisations and NGO’s which advocate for lower speeds on residential streets, strip shopping and around major trip generators to improve safety and increase participation in active transport modes. Please contact us if your council is interested in joining the Safe Speed Interest Group.

The Heart Foundation provides workshops that focus on the principles of Healthy by Design. Workshops provide councils with the knowledge and skills to implement the principles of a healthy built environment through an integrated approach across council.

Workshop: Introduction to Healthy by design for health professionals
This workshop provides an introduction to healthy built environments for active living: what does it mean, why is it important, and how can health professionals contribute to better built environment outcomes?

Who: Local government health professionals
Duration: 1.5 hour presentation and discussion
Cost: $300 (excluding GST) for group session, plus travel expenses
Bookings: Email cvhvic@heartfoundation.org.au

Workshop: Introduction to Healthy by design for planners
This workshop is an introduction to the Healthy by Design guidelines. It could be a stand alone introductory presentation or include a workshop and site visit. We will tailor the session to suit your council’s needs.

Who: Local government planners: social, health, recreation, transport, environment and sustainability, open space, strategic and statutory
Duration: 1.5 hour to 4 hours
Cost: $800 (excluding GST) for 4 hour group workshop, plus travel expenses
Bookings: Email cvhvic@heartfoundation.org.au

The Heart Foundation and others have produced a number of resources to assist local government to plan and develop healthy built environments:

- Healthy by Design: a planners’ guide to environments for active living
- Healthy by Design: local government implementation tool
- Summary of Heart Foundation Active Living policies and documents: Active Living: A toolbox for creating liveable places and spaces that support active living
- Heart Foundation Position Statement: Built environment and walking
- Consumer survey results: Creating healthy neighbourhoods: consumer preferences for healthy development
- Good for business, the benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly
- Healthy spaces and places website
- Healthy urban environment, site assessment audit
- Active Living impact checklist: A tool for developments in the Australian Capital Territory
- VicHealth’s Increasing participation in physical activity: local government action guide no 3
- Streets for People: Compendium for South Australian Practice
- Literature review – Safe Speed: promoting safe walking and cycling by reducing traffic speed
The following programs promote good heart health and can be implemented with the support of the Heart Foundation.

**Heart Foundation Walking**

*Heart Foundation Walking* is Victoria’s largest network of free community-based walking groups. There are currently 250 groups and over 3,600 walkers throughout Victoria. Once people join *Heart Foundation Walking* they stay involved in the program; after three years the program enjoys a 76% participant retention rate.

The Heart Foundation works in partnership with local Area Coordinators, who may be based in local government, community health or sport and recreation to recruit and train volunteer walk organisers to lead local walking groups. Area Coordinators receive support from the Heart Foundation through resource allocation, evaluation, volunteer insurance and risk management, it is expected that Area Coordinators spend approximately four to five hours a week when establishing the program and only one to two hours during maintenance.

*Heart Foundation Walking* provides a tried and tested model for delivering and sustaining a network of free community based walking groups, providing your council with full support along the way. Visit our website for more information: [www.heartfoundation.org.au/walking](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/walking)
Green Walks in the Park

The Green Walks in the Park Program aims to get more people walking, more often, in more local parks, state parks and bushland reserves. Green Walks in the Park works with current Heart Foundation Walking Area Coordinators to set up free, park based walking groups led by volunteer Walk Organisers.

As a part of the program, the Heart Foundation works with current Area Coordinators to plan and run special event walks in their local regional park, in order to engage the broader community and connect them with an existing or newly formed park-based walking group. Resources for the walks are developed by Victoria Walks and include online maps and promotional flyers. Green Walks in the Park is funded by Parks Victoria with support from Victoria Walks. Visit our website for more information: www.heartfoundation.org.au/active-living/Pages/green-walks.aspx

Heart Foundation Heartmoves

Heartmoves is a low to moderate intensity exercise program, developed to be safe and effective for everybody, including people with risk factors for chronic disease, living with a long terms health condition and/or disability, as well as older adults at risk of falls.

Victoria currently has over 25 programs including programs in Armadale, Bentleigh, Caulfield, Castlemaine, Cheltenham, Cobden, Hawthorn, Lower Templestowe, Moonee Ponds, Neerim South, Pakenham, Seaford, Shepparton, Terang, Timboon, Warrnambool and Whittlesea. All classes are promoted via our web site. Heartmoves leader training for fitness professionals takes place a few times a year. Visit our web site formore information: www.heartfoundation.org.au/heartmoves
Smoke-free resource

The Heart Foundation (Victoria) and Quit Victoria support local councils to introduce local policies and by-laws to ban smoking in selected outdoor areas. We have developed a ‘how to’ guide for councils that summarises the evidence for action and outlines steps councils can take to implement change.

Recent announcements by the Victorian government have advanced tobacco control. In December 2012 the government banned smoking on Victoria’s patrolled beaches. In February 2013 it announced bans will extend to children’s playgrounds, public swimming pools and sea baths, children’s sporting grounds and other recreational areas such as skate parks.

However, councils can still choose to implement local smoke-free policies in some or all of the following areas:

- Events run or sponsored by council
- Alfresco dining areas
- Entrances to council owned buildings
- Pedestrian malls/plazas
- Bushland/parks/reserves
- Bus/tram/taxi ranks.

A copy of the Heart Foundation and Quit Victoria’s ‘how to’ guide – *Smoke-free policies in outdoor areas: A resource kit for Victorian local governments* – can be found at this [link](#).

A copy of our 2012 Smoke-free policies in outdoor areas survey can be found at this [link](#).

More information

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Heart Foundation Healthy Community Awards

Heart Foundation Healthy Community Awards provides an opportunity for local governments to celebrate their achievements and receive recognition for their commitment to creating healthy communities. Healthy communities require positive environments and initiatives that support physical activity, healthy lifestyles and community connection.

The Healthy Community Awards reward councils at a national and state level with cash awards, commemorative frames and certificates. Winners are awarded across two categories, ‘councils with populations of 15,000’ or less and ‘councils with populations greater than 15,000.’


More information

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References


4 ibid

5 Department of Health 2012, The Victorian Health Monitor, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne. p. 46

6 Department of Health 2011, Victorian Population Health Survey 2009, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne

7 Food Alliance and National Heart Foundation of Australia (Victorian Division). Planning for food: Towards a prosperous, resilient and healthy food system through Victoria’s Metropolitan Planning Strategy. Melbourne: Food Alliance and National Heart Foundation of Australia (Victorian Division), 2012.