

Submission to Productivity Commission Issues Paper – 'Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation: *Planning, Zoning and Development Assessments*'

Healthy Spaces and Places

This submission is jointly made by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), the National Heart Foundation (NHF), and the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) in response to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper *Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation: Planning, Zoning and Development Assessments* dated May 2010.

By way of background, our three organisations are committed to planning and design principles that promote healthy living for all Australians. To this end, and with the financial support of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for phase one of the project (now complete), our three organisations have joined together in a unique collaboration, to produce a national planning guide *Healthy Spaces and Places*. The guide is designed to assist decision-makers and planning and health professionals to plan for and design healthy communities, and is believed to be significant by Australian and international standards for the way in which it has brought together representatives from the government, planning and allied health and related sectors. The guide was officially launched by the Australian Government in August 2009 and can be found at <http://www.healthyplaces.org.au>.

ALGA, the NHF and the PIA are strongly of the view that any national benchmarking and setting of 'best practise' of planning and zoning in Australia must examine the role that planning and zoning can play in fostering a broad range of public policy objectives, including those which ensure healthy sustainable communities and preventative health. *Healthy Spaces and Places* demonstrates how, through the proper planning of the built environment, Australians can be more active more often, helping to reduce the increasing prevalence of preventable disease in Australia, encourage social inclusion through greater opportunities to interact with others in the community, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions as more people walk, jog or cycle to move around their local areas and transport hubs.

Healthy Spaces and Places contains ten key principles that should be considered when developing benchmarking and best practise for liveable cities as well as when looking into land supply requirements:

[Active Transport](#)

[Aesthetics](#)

[Connectivity](#)

[Environments for All People](#)

[Mixed Density](#)

[Mixed Land Use](#)

[Parks and Open Space](#)

[Safety and Surveillance](#)

[Social Inclusion](#)

[Supporting Infrastructure](#)

There is a growing body of research showing a connection between our health and general well-being and the design and structure of our towns and cities. In the 21st century, urban planning decisions can either contribute to growing levels of inactivity and obesity, or help to prevent lifestyle-related diseases through facilitating physical activity and positive mental health.

Lack of physical Activity is a major health problem in its own right. About half of Australian adults (54%) are not sufficiently physically active to gain health benefits. Physical inactivity: costs the health budget an estimated \$1.5b a year and the economy \$13bn a year, contributes to 16,000 premature deaths a year and increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, colon and breast cancer.¹ It is a critical factor in Australia's obesity epidemic with more than half of all Australian adults being overweight or obese.

The way our cities and neighbourhoods are designed affects whether or not it is easy for people to walk, cycle, participate in active recreation or use public transport, and to interact with neighbours and other community members, activities that each contribute to lifelong health of the individual, community well-being and liveability. In communities where an individual is encouraged to be more active through well-designed infrastructure and well-maintained open spaces and public places, health outcomes can be improved and serious chronic disease can be prevented. This saves lives, improves mental and physical well-being, increases productivity, and decreases the fiscal pressures on the Australian Government budget for the treatment of preventable diseases.

Health problems related to excess weight and physical inactivity impose substantial economic burdens on individuals, families and communities. Society as a whole bears the economic brunt. It has been estimated that the overall cost of obesity to Australian society and governments was \$58.2 billion in 2008 alone. This estimate includes productivity costs of \$3.6 billion, including short- and long-term employment impacts, as well as direct financial costs to the Australian health system of \$2 billion and carer costs of \$1.9 billion. The net cost of lost wellbeing (the dollar value of the burden of disease, netting out financial costs borne by individuals) was valued at \$49.9 billion.²

Obesity was associated with over four million days lost from Australian workplaces in 2001. Obese employees tend to be absent from work due to illness significantly more often than non-obese workers, and for a longer time, and are more likely than non-obese people to be 'not in the labour force'. As a potential indicator of productivity, absenteeism is an important factor when assessing the economic implications of an ageing Australia.³

The National Preventative Health Taskforce established by the Australian Government in 2008 recommended urgent action to reduce the incidence of disease and obesity in Australia in its Technical Report No 1, Obesity in Australia. In doing so, it recommended that the Australian Government continue to support *Healthy Spaces and Places*, noting the importance of the guide in demonstrating "...effective policy development and implementation that encourages and requires integrated outcomes for wellbeing."⁴

The recommendations of the National Preventative Health Taskforce included that the Australian Government:

Establish partnerships with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) to develop programs that support and encourage local councils to adopt Healthy Spaces and Places planning guidelines⁵

¹Econotech 2007

²Access Economics. The growing cost of obesity in 2008: three years on. Canberra: Diabetes Australia, 2008.

³Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Obesity and workplace absenteeism among older Australians. Cat No. AUS 67. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005.

⁴Australia: the Healthiest Country by 2020 report of the National Preventative Taskforce, page 97.

⁵Op cit, page 14 recommended prevention framework for obesity section 3 (first phase).

Implement Healthy Spaces and Places planning guidelines through partnership with ALGA (in workplaces)⁶

The Australian Government in its response of 6 May 2010 acknowledged that:

The partnership produced a national web-based planning guide which was launched in August 2009, and which includes practical tools, case studies and guidelines, to provide guidance to planning and design practitioners and related professions (working in state and local government and the private sector) on how to incorporate active living principles into the built environment. <http://www.healthyplaces.org.au>.⁷

In addition, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing Inquiry into Obesity *Weighing it Up* report (2009)⁸ underlines how principles such as those contained in *Healthy Spaces and Places* can achieve multiple public policy aims: reducing obesity and increasing social inclusion, for example. The Committee noted that ‘urban planning plays a significant role in creating healthy urban environments which increase levels of physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviour. Healthy urban environments can encourage healthy living and urban planning has been identified as a key driver of obesity and an area where action must be taken in order to reduce the levels of obesity in Australia’. It recommended that:

“...the Federal government work with all levels of government and the private sector to develop nationally consistent urban planning guidelines which focus on creating environments that Australians to be healthy and active”.

The report further commented that ‘changes in this arena [i.e. urban planning guidelines] will result in significantly healthier environments being created for Australians to live and work in’.⁹

A project in East Perth is an example of design principles advocated for by Healthy Spaces and Places. It has transformed an industrial wasteland into a high quality mixed-use development focused around a constructed inlet of the Swan River now known as Claisebrook Cove. The development encompasses quality residential and commercial development along with parkland, waterways and public art.

Design guidelines have ensured that the development of a diverse and inclusive community, where safety and walkability are assisted through the creation of an active street network and passive surveillance. The project set new standards in terms of investment in the quality of public domain. It is linked directly to the city by the Central Area Transit (CAT) system.¹⁰

Key features of the project are:

- Provides a variety of housing types, mixed densities and affordable housing opportunities for the creation of an inclusive urban environment.
- Reconnects the urban environment to the waters edge, creating a high quality public realm that promotes integration of a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities.
- Creates a variety of accessible and interconnected high quality public open space destinations to facilitate both passive and active recreation opportunities.

⁶ Op cit, page 18 (second phase)

⁷ Taking Preventative Action: A response to Australia: the Healthiest Country by 2020 report of the National Preventative Taskforce, page 20.

⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing *Weighing it Up* report (2009), Recommendation 13, paragraphs 3.135 -3.148.

⁹ Op cit, paragraph 3.167.

¹⁰ Healthy Spaces and Places case study www.healthyplaces.org.au

- Improving safety in the public realm by facilitating the natural surveillance of streets, laneways parks and garden.
- High quality built form with landmark development that promotes a sense of place and local identity.
- Facilitates access through an interconnected street network to a wide range of retail, service, office and employment opportunities.
- Increasing residential densities close to a wide variety of services and amenities to create a walkable urban form.

Healthy and sustainable communities are those that are well-designed and safe, with local facilities (including school, corner store, childcare facilities, medical practice, recreation facilities, community services); streets designed for active transport, walking and cycling; with parks and public spaces for people to meet and interact; places for people to experience art and culture; and with cycle facilities and public transport. These are all attributes of a built environment that promotes increased liveability and healthier lifestyles and therefore any national benchmarking of planning and zoning should consider how design principles that help promote health as an aspect of planning and zoning are properly evaluated. Planning at both the strategic and statutory levels should be undertaken in such a manner as to ensure our cities and towns are developed with clear health related considerations in mind.

The ACT Greens, who hold the balance of power in the ACT Parliament, have recently included Healthy Spaces and Places in their Active Transport Plan (see media release at <http://act.greens.org.au/archives/1928> and the Plan at http://act.greens.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/ACT_Greens_Active_Transport_Plan.pdf) stating that

“This is a national guide that sets out design principles that provide a foundation for planning communities for active living, based around a quadruple bottom line sustainability measure (economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability).”

This highlights the potential of a guide like *Healthy Spaces and Places* to promote best practice planning for all Australians and achieve a range of public policy objectives. ALGA, the NHF and PIA continue to advocate strongly in this area, and significant interest has already been received from all levels of government, academia, professionals and international bodies. Our organisations believe that there is a strong case for the Productivity Commission to actively consider how to recognise design principles that help promote health as an aspect of planning and zoning in its national benchmarking of planning and zoning.