

Submission No. 151

(Inq into Obesity)

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FINAL

Response to request from House of Representative's Standing Committee on Health and Age – Inquiry into Obesity in Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Age – Inquiry into Obesity in Australia.

This submission is made by Caroline Raphael, Senior Environmental Planner on behalf of the City of Fremantle. The project received funding from the City of Fremantle and was supported by the Premier's Physical Activity Task Force and the South Metropolitan Public Health Unit.

The focus of this submission is to highlight the work undertaken by the City of Fremantle on the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework (Attachment 1) which attempts to fight obesity by increasing public participation in physical activity at the local level.

Local government plays an important role in fostering the wellbeing of local communities. As the sphere of government closest to the people it is best to identify the local needs of people it represents. Local government plays an important role in public health and conducts numerous activities in health protection, health promotion and illness prevention that positively impact on the reduction of chronic disease within communities. This is done by developing healthy public policy, providing education about healthy lifestyles, creating supportive environments which allow people to be physically active, reduce smoking and improve nutrition, and by providing infrastructure that promotes healthy lifestyle choices.

Active living can be supported by local government who are responsible for providing and servicing:

1. suburbs and neighbourhoods that people can easily walk around and access key facilities such as shops, schools, and public transport;
2. walking and cycling facilities (footpaths and cycleways);
3. activity centres with a variety of uses including leisure centres, parks, reserves, open space and smoke-free zones; and
4. alternative transport infrastructure and systems linking residential, commercial and business areas.

In making day to day decisions, from strategic planning levels of state, regional or local plans, to the detailed design of master planned neighbourhoods or centre redevelopment proposals, planners and other built environment professionals have an important role in providing and facilitating healthy living environments.

The purpose of the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework is to provide a framework for the assessment of development impacts on those aspects of the physical environment that support physical activity as part the land use planning and development process.

The Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework is an identified output of the overarching Physical Activity Strategic Plan 2005-2009 adopted by the City of Fremantle. The Strategic Plan made the specific recommendation “*to develop a process where physical activity impact statements are conducted on relevant planning applications*”. The rationale for developing the framework is premised on evidence based research which highlights that health promotion through behaviour change programs alone have not been sufficiently effective in addressing population levels of physical inactivity.

The Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework specifically acknowledges that participation in physical activity is affected by many factors such as availability, convenience, safety and attractiveness of pedestrian and cycling facilities, parks and playing fields. It recognises that these issues shape the physical, social and economically determined opportunities available to individuals and communities to engage in organised and incidental physical activity.

The Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework, as developed by the City of Fremantle, provides a more holistic approach that incorporates social, economic and environmental change. The Framework draws upon the suite of policies, plans, programs and current thinking in how to make urban environments supportive of active and passive recreation. The intent is that the use of the tool will in turn influence the policies and practices of land use planning and development and urban design directly, in order to have a significant impact upon the health outcomes residential communities.

This is achieved by integrating the many issues associated with physical activity into one single framework for consideration when assessing or preparing plans for development. Consequently, their consideration in the designing and assessment process of major development projects is undertaken in a systematic and conscious action. The ultimate goal is the design and development of urban environments that support physical activity as a result of being assessed against criteria, design elements, outcomes and policies that are aimed at increasing the opportunities for physical activity.

Intended Benefits

The intended short term impacts of the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework are to:

- increase awareness of the importance of physical activity considerations when designing urban environments;
- facilitate better communication between council departments;
- create local and strategic partnerships;
- bring kudos for the City with heightened media exposure; and
- integrate public health and planning practices to create longer-term health benefits.

In the longer term, the intention is to develop a planning code from the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework that would provide guidance to developers and to assist the city in making decisions under the local town planning scheme. It is

envisaged a range of regulatory components would be extracted from the advisory tool and integrated into the planning policies of the City of Fremantle.

Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework – post completion

1. The City of Fremantle Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework won the 2006 National overall winner award of the Heart Foundation Kellogg Local Government award, as well as winning the national category winner award for the implementation of plans and policies to support heart health.
2. Many requests have been received from other local governments for information on the tool.
3. Since the award the initiative has not been implemented in the City of Fremantle based on the following barriers:
 - The tool was prepared as a holistic document which cannot, at this stage, be simply ‘dropped into’ to an existing statutory planning framework.
 - The document covers a number of areas and principles already embedded in the planning system, and adjustments will be required to incorporate the document into the existing framework.
 - Additional resourcing is required to trial and pilot the tool, with possible statutory amendments, prior to full implementation.

Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework – Recommendations

The key recommendations we put forward to the House of Representative’s Standing Committee on Health and Age – Inquiry into Obesity in Australia, based on the lessons we have learnt from trying to integrate physical activity and urban planning and design include:

- Trialing and piloting of the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework is still required and needs funding to be completed and available for full application.
- A national approach to addressing physical and mental health and wellbeing is required, addressing environmental contexts (physical, social, economic, cultural contexts), lifestyle risk behaviours, and the psychosocial factors that underpin engagement in such behaviours and linked to assessment tools such as the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework.
- The national approach is then filtered down and funded adequately for implementation by State and Local Government to ensure consistency in activities, programs and plans.
- Significant research based evidence exists on the relationship between the design of the built environment and health outcomes of the community but there is still a significant implementation gap and deficit from all sectors involved in urban design, form and function. A barrier/opportunity/benefit analysis needs to be undertaken to uncover and respond to implementation barriers.
- New initiatives need to be adequately resourced and integrated into existing operational frameworks throughout the layers of government and particularly at the local government level.
- New initiatives require a process, impact and outcome evaluation framework to inform future planning and resource allocation that should be assisted by the

Federal and State Government through funding and other governance systems and structures.

- Addressing health and wellbeing outcomes through the built environment can have benefits to broader sustainability outcomes and should be sought after, enhanced and enforced by the range of sectors involved in urban design, form and function.
- Regulation should be required to enforce the key and fundamental design criteria that supports physical activity.
- Demonstration sites for new and retrofitted sites should be funded and supported by the Federal Government that demonstrate the key principles of the Physical Activity Impact Assessment Framework.
- Training programs for planners, urban designers and developers be developed and implemented to support the application of good design principles and criteria that encourage physical activity.
- Federal Government takes a more proactive, substantial and functional role in the planning, designing, forming and functioning of cities and urban areas and works collaboratively with State and Local Government to deliver on agreed principles and criteria for physical activity.

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