



SYDNEY WEST Area Health Service

17 May 2006

Mr Robert Little,
Inquiry Secretary,
House of Representatives
Standing committee on environment and Heritage
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

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Our Ref: TRIM06/04495
Your ref:

SUBMISSION NO. 79

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed the submission from the Sydney West Area Health Service to the Sustainability Charter Inquiry

Further information on this submission can be obtained from Dr Stephen Corbett, Director, Centre for Population Health on 98403603 or by email at stephen_corbett@wsahs.nsw.gov.au

Yours sincerely,

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Providing health services to the communities of Auburn • Baulkham Hills • Blacktown
Holroyd • Parramatta • Hawkesbury • Penrith • Blue Mountains • Greater Lithgow

Submission to the Discussion Paper on a Sustainability Charter

Healthy and Sustainability

The link between sustainability and community well-being is clearly stated as one of the core objectives of the National Strategy for Environmentally Sustainable Development.

"To enhance individual and community well being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations."

Agenda 21 recognises that health is an outcome of the same environmental, economic and social factors that are the keys to sustainability. "Human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development." A sustainable community must also be a healthy community. Health outcomes of the population must also be considered when developing programs for sustainable communities.

Conversely a healthy community will contribute to social and environmental sustainability. For example, a healthy community based on a health promoting urban form that encourages higher levels of physical activity is likely to use less energy to satisfy transport demand. Furthermore, providing greater opportunity for personal mobility and travel choices through the provision of public transport and walking / cycling facilities can reduce inequities in a community, now and into the future.

Greater Western Sydney

Greater Western Sydney has, after the Central Business Districts of Sydney and Melbourne the third largest economy in Australia. The region generates \$52 billion in economic output per annum and is home to over 72,000 enterprises, including almost 20 per cent of Australia's top 500 exporters. Since the Olympic Games, the Greater Western Sydney Region has experienced a building and construction boom, which, along with associated growth in tourism and industry, has reinforced its reputation as a region that blends economic opportunity with a comfortable lifestyle.

Sydney West Area Health Service is one of two Area Health Services in the region and has a population of 1,044,202 (2001 census). By 2016 the population is projected to be over 1,200,000, an increase of 17%, compared with 14% for the rest of urban NSW. Greater Western Sydney experienced the highest rate of population growth of any region in Australia between 1991-2001. Between 1991 and 1996, the region expanded by 7.9% - far higher than Sydney's 5.9% and Australia's 1.2%.

A Sustainability Charter

Sustainability - of the economy, the environment and the social cohesion of Western Sydney - is vitally important for the future health and well being of the population in this region. Sydney West supports the development of a Sustainability Charter, and in this submission will address some of the questions raised under the main headings: the built environment, water, energy, and transport. We will also suggest some inclusions in a list of sustainability indicators that may be relevant for human health.

General Considerations

The most important general principle which should be invoked in a sustainability charter is an acceptance that the health of the population is an aspiration and an outcome of improved sustainability.

The adoption of well chosen benchmarks of across-government performance in relation to health may drive change. Reductions in average weekly travel time, for example, has the potential to be a proxy measure of both the success of city planning and of a number of risk factors affecting physical and mental health. Research is needed to develop these indicators as useful measures of performance.

The scope of both Environmental Impact Assessments of major developments and State of the Environment Reports needs to be broadened to include explicit and properly specified considerations of health.

The Built Environment

The health sector has a number of important inputs in to the regulation of the built environment, either explicitly such as in the Legionnaires disease controls in the Public Health Act, or through other mechanisms such as the Building Code of Australia. It is also actively involved in public health issues in relation to the redevelopment of contaminated land. A number of specific issues can be highlighted:

Conflicting Land Uses

The use of contaminated land for residential or other development can only proceed under strict regulatory supervision and with protocols for the remediation of that land. Functioning regulatory systems both in relation to the zoning of this land, and subsequent remediation are important issues both for health and sustainability. Often contaminated former industrial land is one of the few sources of vacant land in our cities available for high density development.

Insect Vectors of Disease

Climate change is likely to alter the distribution of mosquito and other insect vectors of disease. The encroachment of some habitats by urban development may place at risk larger numbers of people to mosquito-borne diseases such as Ross River fever and/or may inhibit the deployment of effective means to control insects in some areas. Impacts on potential insect vectors should be included in the already weighty requirements for urban development.

Healthy Building Materials and the Indoor Environment

Sydney West supports the adoption and expansion of systems such as Basix in NSW. Mandating the use of materials which are both energy and water efficient could usefully be augmented by including requirements which for example do not contribute to indoor air pollution.

Water

The maintenance of a safe and plentiful water supply is a key element of the public health infrastructure. Health agencies are key partners with water utilities in the assessment of new technologies and in the immediate and organisational response to water borne disease outbreaks. Two of the largest water recycling facilities in Australia are or will be located in this area. Accordingly SWAHS would argue that :

- Health agencies need to actively support and validate the use of cutting edge water treatment technology through improved surveillance systems for water borne disease, and through risk assessment of new technology.
- SWAHS would support the adoption of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) approaches to the management of potential health risks from water delivery systems. IN particular this approach places more emphasis on system integrity than on the results of water monitoring. The adoption of these systems is likely in the long run to lead to more rational decisions about the protection of water catchments in areas of increasing human habitation.

Transport

Transport is the key issue both for sustainability and public health. Car dependence, for example is critically linked to the health impacts of air pollution, diminished personal and family time, inadequate levels of physical activity and road traffic injury. It is also linked to carbon dioxide emissions and fossil fuel use. In turn car dependence is intimately linked to urban form.

This Area Health Service is transected by many of Sydney's main road arteries. Many people spend 2-3 hours per day commuting to and from work. Furthermore the projected population increases in this area will place more pressure on transport infrastructure. It is immensely important that sustainable transport options be developed and implemented in Western Sydney, and that these options be closely aligned with land use release and planning, and employment.

Metropolitan planning, such as the recently released Sydney Metro Strategy is one means of achieving this end. Recent studies by NSW Health and the Commonwealth Treasury have demonstrated that the current diabetes epidemic, which is closely linked to diet and levels of physical activity will have major impacts across NSW, not only on health but on workforce participation and economic productivity.

The inter-connectedness between urban planning , transport and health outcomes and expenditure cannot be emphasised too strongly.