

Active Streets

– The new normal for public space

CALL TO ACTION

The Heart Foundation is calling on local government to ensure all Australians have safe streets for walking and cycling by:

- allocating extra street and footpath space for people walking and riding bikes to support social distancing;
- reducing vehicle speeds on local neighbourhood streets; and
- automating street crossings to eliminate the need to touch the ‘push buttons’.

Streets play an important role in public life, beyond the movement of traffic. Streets make up a substantial part of the open space available to communities, and can be utilised as places to walk, cycle, exercise, play, socialise, grow food, rest, create and do business. Never has the diverse function of streets been more apparent as during the time of COVID-19.

“A street that works for people is a street that is good for health.”¹

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges including finding new ways to be active, while adhering to local restrictions. Australian Government guidelines for social distancing recognise personal exercise as one of five essential activities that Australians could leave their homes for. This, together with the closure of recreation facilities and the cancellation of group fitness and sporting activities, has seen many more people exercising in our streets and public spaces, with apparent increases in the number of people walking and cycling, including children and family groups.

The Heart Foundation works to improve the heart health of all Australians, and promoting physical activity is one of our key recommendations for improving heart health and mental wellbeing at a population level.

There is a considerable body of evidence that well-planned neighbourhoods, healthy street design and access to public green spaces make it easier for people to be more active and lead heart-healthy lives.



The Healthy Active by Design website is a free online tool that showcases the latest evidence and Australian case studies of best practice, with checklists, and supporting analysis as guidance for implementation – visit healthyactivebydesign.com.au

Suburbs around Australia vary in their provision of walking and cycling-friendly options, public open spaces and easy access to local destinations and services without needing a car. People living in denser suburbs often enjoy better amenity and a good public realm. However, there is often inequity between suburbs, and between metropolitan and regional areas. Addressing these gaps would benefit us all, leading to healthier, more resilient communities.

We want to ensure that all Australian neighbourhoods have access to safe public spaces for activity. This is particularly important for our regional towns, or those areas identified as being disadvantaged and/or having poorer health outcomes.



The Heart Foundation supports recent calls for state governments to prioritise and allocate funding for urgent walking and cycling infrastructure improvements and upgrades. The Heart Foundation also recognises the vital role that councils play in achieving healthy communities.

Now is the time to rethink how we respond to the 'new mobility' for a healthier and more equitable future.

COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS FOR WALKING AND CYCLING

MORE SPACE FOR ACTIVE STREETS

With increased numbers of people reported to be exercising in their local areas, it is important to ensure sufficient space is provided to maintain social distancing (1.5m in Australia).

- Short-term: low-cost and temporary actions such as the use of bollards, traffic cones or other similar measures to provide additional space for wider footpaths and segregated cycle lanes.
- Short- to medium-term: bringing forward 'shovel ready' projects for planned new walking and cycling infrastructure. Opportunities could be considered to bring forward funding and infrastructure projects already in the pipeline.

SLOWER STREETS

Street environments that promote low car speeds support pedestrians and bike riders, and they improve overall amenity and safety in neighbourhoods.

Safety, including the speed of vehicles on streets, is a consideration for people in their decision to take part in forms of exercise including walking and cycling, especially on or near busy streets with fast moving vehicles.

Speed is an even more important consideration currently, with people of all ages walking and cycling in greater numbers.

NO-TOUCH CROSSINGS

Several Australian cities have recently implemented automated crossings, removing the need to press buttons to 'request' crossing of a carriageway. Reducing use of push buttons is more important than ever in light of current public health conditions.

May 2020

¹ Healthy Streets. <https://healthystreets.com/>. Accessed 29/04/2020

Further resources

Heart Foundation. 2019. Blueprint for an Active Australia. (3rd Ed.)
www.heartfoundation.org.au/Activities-finding-or-opinion/physical-activity-blueprint

About the Heart Foundation

The Heart Foundation is the leading Australian non-government organisation working to improve the design of our cities, neighbourhoods, streets and buildings to make it easier for Australians to lead heart-healthy lives. The Heart Foundation advocates for policy and activities of governments that facilitate and encourage physical activity.

Contact

Trevor Shilton, Director of Active Living: trevor.shilton@heartfoundation.org.au

Helpline 13 11 12

#supportsharedstreets; #healthyactivebydesign; #spaceforhealth

©2020 National Heart Foundation of Australia ABN 98 008 419 761

Terms of use: This material has been developed by the National Heart Foundation of Australia (Heart Foundation) for general information and educational purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have, or suspect you have, a health problem. The information provided is based on evidence available at the time of publication. Please refer to the Heart Foundation website at www.heartfoundation.org.au for Terms of Use.

