The built environment domain and physical activity

Key messages

The built environment should support walking. This can be done through urban design that:

- Makes active transport safe, attractive, affordable and desirable
- Prioritises wide pedestrian paths and cycling lanes over motorised transport
- Makes neighbourhoods safe, pleasant and accessible
- Locates jobs, residences and schools where they can be accessed via active transport
- Supports ‘density for liveability’, that is, a critical mass of population to support local services, amenities and infrastructure.

Why is it important to address the built environment domain?

People’s physical activity is embedded in the built environment surrounding them. The built environment includes workplaces, schools, home, shops, and the space between these places. Urban design and infrastructure also includes public open space and green areas, footpaths, cycleways, and public transport systems. A better built environment encourages walking – the most common form of physical activity which is accessible across sociodemographic groups and has good potential to influence the most inactive in society in an equitable manner.

Note: The Transport Domain is addressed separately in Chapter 3.2 of the Getting Australia Active III (GAA III) report and in the corresponding Summary on the Transport Domain and physical activity.

What are the recommendations for action and investment?

Active built environments should consider the following areas (refer to Table 16 in GAA III for further details):

- **Active transport**
  - Safe, attractive, affordable and desirable
  - Prioritise wide pedestrian paths and non-motorised transport/cycling lanes over motorised transport
  - Sufficient separation of pedestrianised/non-motorised and motorised transport

- **Neighbourhoods**
  - Safe and attractive
  - Accessible destinations including green spaces and parks

- **Employment opportunities**
  - Equitable distribution of employment opportunities
  - Jobs and residences within commutable distances of each other

- **Educational institutions**
  - Locate away from high-traffic routes

- **Land use**
  - Increase density with mixed land use in very low-density areas
  - Decrease density in high-density urban areas
Useful toolkits and resources

**Healthy Active by Design**

The Heart Foundation’s ‘Healthy Active by Design’ web-based toolkit provides a one-stop-shop of useful advice, resources and case studies on how to plan environments in Australia for more physical activity and better health overall. Access it here, in this interactive 2 x 4 matrix:

![Interactive figure](image)

**Community sport infrastructure**

Sport and recreation are covered by a range of standards. Facility requirements and standards are available from the governing body for each sport. The Australian Sports Directory provides a list of National Sporting Organisations recognised by the Australian Sports Commission.

In NSW, the Community Sport Infrastructure Resource Library provides a guide for the planning, design and construction of innovative, sustainable and fit-for-purpose community sporting infrastructure. This includes a web portal with resources to assist with best practice design specification.

**Getting Australia Active III (GAA III)** is an Australian guide for policy makers to support the implementation of a whole-of-systems approach to increasing population physical activity. This policy brief summarises key points from Chapter 3.3 of this guide. For more detailed guidance and supporting evidence, you can access the full report at: [preventioncentre.org.au](http://preventioncentre.org.au)

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