

Healthy Urban Planning

Recommendations from the New South Wales
Health Impact Assessment Project



**UNSW Research Centre for
Primary Health Care & Equity**
Research that makes a difference

**Prepared by the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and
Evaluation CHETRE and NSW Health**

29th August 2006

Background

Rapid expansion in the population of urban NSW is creating challenges in planning for healthy and sustainable communities. This has been reinforced recently by the release of the NSW State Plan ¹. Under the theme of 'Environment for Living', the plan outlines a renewed commitment by the NSW Government to an improved urban environment. Healthy planning underpins this through the emphasis on the greater 'liveability' of and mobility within NSWs urban areas, and the creation of greater opportunities for recreation.

A number of activities have recently been occurring in NSW as part of the NSW Health Impact Assessment Project at the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation (CHETRE), funded by NSW Health. This report details recommendations and action items based on the work of the NSW HIA project to inform decisions on how to progress a healthy planning agenda in NSW. While ongoing work is required, **in the first instance these may inform a submission to the NSW State Plan by NSW Health, the deadline for which is Friday 8th September**. Sources for these recommendations are:

- The work of the NSW HIA project on urban planning. In operation since 2003, the project has supported a number of agencies and organisations develop capacity to undertake Health Impact Assessments on policy, program and project proposals ². Six of these have been on Urban Planning proposals, ranging from major urban development initiatives including the Sydney Metropolitan Plan and Lower Hunter Regional Development strategy to more local proposals such as population plans and regeneration projects.
- A workshop was held in late 2005 by the Centre for Health Equity, Training, Research and Evaluation in partnership with NSW Health ³. The workshop was attended by 26 senior planning and health professionals from various levels of the health and planning sectors in NSW, including NSW Department of Health, NSW Department of Planning, Area Health Services, Local Government Agencies, and Academia.
- The NSW HIA steering committee is the reference group for the NSW HIA project. The committee comprises key senior representatives from NSW Health and Area Health Services, and is chaired by the Deputy Director-General, Public Health and Chief Health Office

Key Focus Area One

The health and planning sectors work in collaboration to plan for healthy and sustainable communities in NSW.

Recommendation for Action

NSW Health to organise a meeting between Directors-General of NSW Health and the NSW Department of Planning to discuss health and sustainability priorities and develop practical options for supportive engagement between the two Departments, to inform the release of the NSW State Plan and other NSW Government initiatives.

Rationale

The work of the NSW HIA project has emphasised the strong links between health and planning, and the acceptance of professionals across both sectors to work in partnership on healthy planning. For this to become a reality, health should be recognised as a broad concept that includes the promotion and protection of ‘well-being’ and ‘living’, and not simply prevention of sickness and the provision of health services. In this way, health becomes an integral part of a broader sustainability agenda based on the creation of healthy and liveable environments that place people at their centre.

Current initiatives across the NSW State Government provide a platform for health and planning to work together. In addition to the NSW State Plan, examples of emerging opportunities are:

- the ‘Sydney Metropolitan Strategy’⁴ and recently established ‘Growth Centres Commission’⁵.
- ‘Futures Planning’⁶ by NSW Health, that aims to set directions for the NSW Health system for the next 20 years, including linking the Health System to the Urban Planning sector.

Key Focus Area Two

NSW Health identify opportunities to work with other stakeholders in the development of planning for healthy and sustainable communities, including but not limited to the NSW Department of Planning, NSW Department of Local Government, and the Premier’s Department.

Recommendation for Action

NSW Health to take a leadership role in identifying and collaborating with cross-sectoral structures to develop practical options that will strengthen planning for healthy and sustainable communities.

Rationale

Working with and developing new and existing cross-sectoral mechanisms provides NSW Health with opportunities for considerations of health and wellbeing to be incorporated within a broader sustainability agenda. Some practical examples include:

- the Local Government Strategic Liaison Group aims to examine issues of mutual interest and promote collaboration and communication between the health and local government sectors. Over the next 12 months the group will examine issues related to urban planning within the local government setting.
- the Human Services Chief Executive Officers Group has implemented a number of innovative cross-sectoral (including the NGO sector) initiatives^{7,8}; that can contribute to models for healthy planning.
- the NSW Premier’s department’s ‘strategic projects division’ assists development of ‘state-wide capacity to manage complex projects and issues’⁹ through collaboration and partnerships with community groups, Government agencies and the business sector.

- Among a number of relevant projects, the division oversees the ‘Regional Coordination Program’, that supports Regional Coordination Management Groups consisting of regional managers of state government agencies, including Planning agencies, to ‘prioritise and manage’ issues impacting on communities.
- The Premier’s Council for Active Living, as the primary intersectoral body for promoting physical activity in NSW¹⁰, aims to build and strengthen the physical and social environments in which communities engage in active living.
-

Key Focus Area Three

Strengthen existing regulatory and accountability frameworks to incorporate health and well-being as core components of sustainable planning in NSW.

Recommendations for Action

Strengthen existing frameworks in NSW to encourage planning for healthy and sustainable communities:

- *as part of the review of the Public Health Act, include a clause providing the Chief Health Officer the power to inquire into the health impacts of major policy or projects.*
- *NSW Health to work with the planning sector to review existing guidance on Environmental Impact Assessment to more explicitly include consideration of health impacts*
- *build health and well-being as a function within the Charter of Local Government and sustainable communities into the mission statement of NSW Health*

Rationale

Existing legislative structures and frameworks can provide mechanisms to encourage and give legitimacy to working towards healthy urban planning. Improved articulation of health and wellbeing considerations within the core business of other departments and agencies involved in planning will place health as a key sustainability issue.

Key Focus Area Four

The creation of a coordinating healthy planning unit at the state level

Recommendation for Action

Establish an ‘Urban Planning’ unit within that part of NSW Department of Health, funded by NSW Health with contributions from stakeholder agencies on a project basis. Core functions of the Unit would be:

- *coordinating broader healthy planning policies into action at the appropriate levels of health, planning and local government sectors.*
- *identifying opportunities for intersectoral work and the appropriate points within each sector to progress work on healthy urban planning.*
- *gather evidence on best practice across NSW, nationally and internationally*
- *providing resources on the health impacts of planning- and local government-related activities;*
- *media liaison; and*
- *developing capacity to work on healthy urban planning within Area Health Services.*

Rationale

For health and planning to engage and make well-informed contribution to healthy planning, organisational and workforce capacity needs to be built. This would include establishment of an ‘Urban Planning’ unit within that part of NSW Department of Health, funded by NSW Health and other stakeholder agencies on a project basis. This unit will be the central action arm for higher level strategic committees and groups to feed into, dealing specifically with Healthy Public

Policy, and developing identifiable capacity to work on healthy urban planning within Area Health Services.

A similar model has been implemented by the NHS in London ¹¹.

Key Focus Area Five

The collection and use of evidence on healthy planning.

Recommendations for Action

NSW Health to resource a clearinghouse of evidence on healthy urban planning

Rationale

Good quality and accessible evidence was recognised as an important platform for effective action on healthy urban planning. There is a significant amount of evidence existing and emerging on the health impacts of urban planning in NSW and elsewhere. A sound program of evidence gathering and dissemination, supported by all key stakeholders, is required. As the evidence base increases it will be important to create a clearinghouse for this to become easily accessible for both health and planning professionals.

Examples of types of evidence resources are grey water, buffer zones and active living.

Key Focus Area Six

NSW Health and other stakeholder develop and use guidance and tools to encourage health and wellbeing considerations within sustainable planning in NSW.

Recommendations for Action

- *NSW Health and key stakeholders develop guidance on healthy urban planning in NSW, including:*
 - *incorporating health and wellbeing into current strategic planning processes such as: Strategic Environmental Planning Policies, Regional Environmental Plans, and Local Environmental Plans*
 - *a guide on considerations of health and wellbeing within local government social/community/public health plans*
- *NSW Health actively promote the use of tools that encourage health to be considered within the planning cycle, such as Health Impact Assessment, Health Risk Assessment, checklists and best practice models.*

Rationale

Guidance and tools encourage greater consideration of health and wellbeing within planning. Guidance is more likely to be used if jointly developed and owned by a range of key stakeholders, including the private sector and the community. For local level examples see local plans developed by Kiama ¹² and Auburn ¹³. Other States and Territories have developed guidance on healthy planning that could be developed for the NSW context, for example the Heart Foundation in Victoria ¹⁴.

As an example of tools within the planning cycle, Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has been shown to be a practical tool to encourage healthy urban planning in NSW and elsewhere ¹⁵.

References

1. NSW Government. *A New Direction for NSW: State Plan (Draft for Consultation)*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.nsw.gov.au/stateplan/Docs/DraftStatePlan.pdf>
2. Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation. *HIA Connect: Building Capacity to Undertake Health Impact Assessment*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from <http://chetre.med.unsw.edu.au/hia/index.htm>
3. Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation. *Urban Development & Health Workshop*, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from http://chetre.med.unsw.edu.au/events/urban_dev_workshop.htm
4. NSW Department of Planning. *City of Cities: A Plan for Sydney's Future. The NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy*, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from http://www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au/dev/uploads/paper/introduction/MS_Overview_Document.pdf
5. NSW Government. *Growth Centres Commission*, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.gcc.nsw.gov.au/the-commission.aspx>
6. NSW Health. *Planning for the Future: NSW 2025*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/futuresplanning/>
7. Human Services Better Services Delivery Program. *A Policy and Operational Framework for the BSDP*, 2002. Accessed August 2006 from http://bsdip.hsnet.nsw.gov.au/framework/bsdip/bsdip_framework.htm
8. NSW Department of Community Services and the Forum of Non-Government Agencies. *Working Together for NSW*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.ncoss.org.au/hot/compact/working-Together-pdf-final-June06.pdf>
9. NSW Government Premier's Department. *Annual Report*, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.premiers.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/A3939F1D-CF7D-47C7-9FCC-48157877C3A6/0/ARBody.pdf>
10. Premiers Council for Active Living. *Premiers Council for Active Living*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from www.pcal.nsw.gov.au
11. NHS. *NHS London Healthy Urban Development Unit*, 2004. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.healthyurbandevdevelopment.nhs.uk/>
12. Kiama Municipal Council. *Kiama Municipal Health Plan 2005-2008: Healthy Communities, Town and Country Coast, Creating Environments for Health*. Kiama, NSW, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.kiama.nsw.gov.au/envserv/pdf/Health/Health%20Plan%20-%20Final.pdf>
13. Auburn Council. *Strategic Social Plan 2005 – 2010*, 2005. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.auburn.nsw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/AuburnWeb/Community/Action%20Plan%20Social%20Planning.pdf>
14. National Heart Foundation of Australia. *Healthy by design: a planner's guide to environments for active living*. National Heart Foundation of Australia (Victoria Division). 2004. Accessed August 2006 from <http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/downloads/Healthy%20by%20Design.pdf>
15. Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation. *Completed HIAs: Examples of Completed Health Impact Assessments. HIA Connect*, 2006. Accessed August 2006 from http://chetre.med.unsw.edu.au/hia/completed_hia.htm