

# Healthy Active by Design™

## Walkshops How to guide

This guide supports industry practitioners to conduct Walkshops using Healthy Active by Design principles

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Prepared by the National Heart Foundation of Australia.



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# What is a Walkshop?



A Walkshop is a workshop that's undertaken in the streets, while walking.

## What are the benefits of Walkshops?

Walkshops provide an opportunity to observe, learn and discover the built environment from user experience.

They allow insights and conversation that might not otherwise occur within a typical meeting environment.

## Who should attend?

The attendee profile will depend on the objective of your Walkshop.

If your objective is to raise awareness and education among colleagues and other stakeholders, these are the people you need to invite. You should think broadly across industry sectors and consider including urban designers and planners, architects and landscape architects, transport planners, traffic engineers, civil works and asset managers, as well as sport and recreation, community development and public health professionals.

If your objective is to gain support to progress a specific project, you should invite decision makers from within your organisation, as well as elected leaders and others who may play a role to influence or help shape outcomes.

Walkshops can also be conducted with community members. This might be the case where you want to gain greater levels of community awareness and support, or where you want to obtain community insights and lived experience.

Consider inviting guest speakers with specific subject matter expertise or lived experience, including for equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. Their input can help strengthen the evidence provided during the walk.



# Planning and delivering a Walkshop

## Identify your objective

This could be:

- to increase general awareness and support for healthy built environments among staff, elected members or the community,
- to explore opportunities and design outcomes for a specific project or area,
- to consider features at the macro and/or micro level that help or hinder walkability,
- focusing on a specific design feature such as movement networks, housing diversity, sense of place or public realm upgrades, or
- other tailored purposes, depending on local needs, planning processes or strategic priorities.

Your objective will influence your route, the people you invite, and the type of insights you aim to collect.

## Determine the Walkshop location

Walkshops can be conducted almost anywhere. There is something to be observed and discussed about walkability and liveability in any built environment.

Your Walkshop location could be at:

- a project-specific location (e.g., a main street, residential neighbourhood, or the walkable catchment of a proposed redevelopment site),
- an area near a conference venue or meeting place (if the Walkshop forms part of an event or needs to be held near an office location), or
- a neighbourhood experiencing change (e.g., new growth areas, renewal or redevelopment sites, or other areas undergoing proposed change).



*Image: A typical suburban streetscape providing a variety of features to talk about during a Walkshop. These include greenery and shade cover; footpath width and maintenance; street lighting; sense of place and community; passive surveillance; density; land use and transport mix; road crossings and more.*

## Map out your route

When planning your Walkshop, aim for a route that showcases a variety of walkability features and opportunities for discussion. Some tools you can use include:

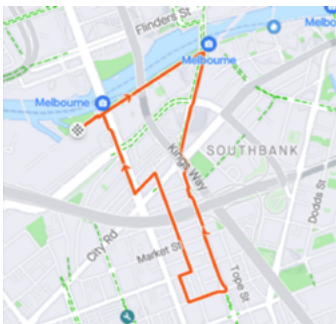
- Google maps for overall route development,
- Google street view to preview specific features and identify potential discussion points,
- the Heart Foundation's interactive [Community Walkability Map](#), and
- other mapping tools, such as Strava or All Trails can also be used, if you or your organisation has an account.

When planning your route, you should note in advance where amenities are located. These include toilets, bike racks, drinking fountains and AEDs among others.

As a general guide, it usually takes around 90 minutes to cover a 3km Walkshop. This includes time for a short introduction, pauses at key locations and a debrief.

You should always walk the route in advance of your Walkshop to:

- confirm features you want to talk about, including places to pause and discuss,
- ensure it is inclusive and accessible for all potential participants,
- avoid locations where background noise - particularly from traffic - might interfere with participants' ability to hear instructions and follow group discussions,
- note any site-specific constraints (e.g. construction or other works), and
- check the timing and refine the schedule as needed.



*Example of route planning using an activity-based app like Strava.*

## Invite participants

Depending on your target audience, this might include:

- an email and calendar invitation
  - consider both internal and external stakeholders,
  - an example email is included at Appendix A,
- an online event registration platform such as Eventbrite, or
- community advertising and promotion (e.g., newsletters, noticeboards and social media).

Email all registered participants one week ahead of the Walkshop with information including:

- what to wear (comfortable walking shoes and clothing),
- wet weather contingency plan (bring an umbrella and raincoats or outline the process if a reschedule is required),
- the meeting point and time,
- what to expect during the Walkshop (see Appendix A for suggested email content), and
- digital or pdf image consent form if you wish to take and use photos during the Walkshop.

Consider collecting participant email address, mobile number, accessibility needs, ICE contact or other details.

## Prepare your speaking points

Speaking points should be guided by your Walkshop purpose and will help guide participant discussion.

You can use [Healthy Active by Design](#) resources including:

- the eight design features,
- the two supporting modules,
- Design Checklists, and
- evidence papers and their recommendations.

Guidance for speaking points is provided at Appendix B.

## Arrange logistics

### Risk, insurance and safety

Before conducting a Walkshop, you should ensure that appropriate health and safety measures are in place by:

- conducting a risk assessment to identify and manage foreseeable risks having regard to the nature, location and risks of the Walkshop,
  - The Heart Foundation's [Community Walkability Checklist](#) can help identify risks on the proposed Walkshop route.
- ensuring that your organisation holds appropriate insurance (including public liability insurance) that covers the Walkshop and all participants, and
- providing access to appropriate first aid arrangements, which may include carrying a first aid kit and/or ensuring that a trained First Aid Officer is available, and carrying a mobile phone.

### Group size and support

We suggest capping participants to a maximum of 20 people to ensure the group can stay together and remain on schedule.

While a participant cap of 20 is recommended, consideration could also be given to outlining how smaller or larger groups may be safely managed, and whether any notifications or approvals are required (such as from land managers or local councils).

You should recruit a colleague to attend and support the Walkshop by:

- helping keep the group together, and
- taking notes of observations and discussion – This is particularly important if your objective is to explore design outcomes for a specific project.

### Transport and visibility

If necessary, arrange transport for your participants to reach (or return to) the starting point.

Consider providing participants with a high-vis vest, hat or other identifying item to help keep the group together and safe.

### Materials and resources

Consider and collate any materials you want to provide to participants. These could include:

- [Healthy Active by Design guide](#), and
- Project-specific plans, maps, or checklists.

To request printed copies of the [Healthy Active by Design guide](#) (in colour A5 format contained in envelope folders) please email us at [HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au](mailto:HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au)

# During the Walkshop



## Welcome and introduction

Gather your group together and provide a welcome and clear introduction that covers:

- the purpose or objective of the Walkshop,
- an outline of the route, and that you will stop to discuss certain features,
- an introduction to the Healthy Active by Design principles (see Appendix B), and
- an invitation for participants to join the conversation and provide observations, ideas and reflections along the way.

## Facilitating the walk

During the walk:

- Encourage your group to see and experience the place differently – Appendix B includes helpful prompts.
- Encourage all participants to contribute their perspectives, particularly those with specialist expertise or community insight.
- Stop at key points to:
  - highlight good examples of walkability and healthy environments,
  - discuss where improvements may be needed, and
  - explain why the feature matters for community health, safety, or liveability.

## Safety and comfort

Throughout the Walkshop ensure that:

- paths remain clear for the public when walking or at stopping points,
- the group uses shaded areas when stopping if possible, and
- participants aren't standing in roadways or unsafe spaces.

## Documentation

Take photos to visually record key moments, examples and issues and to share your Walkshop experience.

Your supporting colleague can take notes on discussion, observations, feedback and ideas shared by participants.

## Debrief

At the end of your walk, conduct a short debrief with participants. This could be held informally, or you might wish to return to a meeting room or other venue for a more structured discussion and documentation of your session.

A more formal debrief can benefit Walkshops that are conducted for project-specific and design solution purposes.

Encourage participants to share:

- insights they gained,
- issues they noticed, and
- any reflections or ideas sparked during the walk.

Thank participants for their time and input and explain any next steps. This is particularly important where the Walkshop outcomes will feed into council projects or planning processes.



*Image: Participants in a Healthy Active by Design Walkshop, Planning Institute of Australia National Congress, Darwin, 2025.*

# Post-Walkshop activities



## Documentation

Formalise notes, especially if your Walkshop was project-specific, to document observations, design implications and proposed solutions.

Send a follow-up email to all participants including:

- photos from the Walkshop (if image consent has been provided by everyone who is identifiable) – and encouragement to share via participants' social media if appropriate (mindful of participants' privacy and the need to gain consent for images shared publicly),
- a summary of key outcomes - the level of detail will depend on your Walkshop purpose, with project-specific Walkshops likely needing greater levels of documentation,
- any required follow-ups or action items, with responsibilities assigned, and
- an invitation to provide further input and feedback.

## Promote broader engagement

We encourage you to share how your Walkshop went. Please email us at [HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au](mailto:HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au) and tag @HealthyActivebyDesign and @HeartFoundation on any LinkedIn or other social media posts.

If your Walkshop involved community members, we recommend you invite them to show their support for walkable local neighbourhoods by [signing our petition](#).



*Image: Participants in a Healthy Active by Design Walkshop, Planning Institute of Australia National Congress, Melbourne 2024.*



# Appendix A – Suggested content for Walkshop participants

## Invitation to attend Walkshop

### INVITATION: Healthy built environment Walkshop

We'd like to invite you to attend a free Walkshop focused on neighbourhood walkability and active, healthy living **{or insert project specific title}**.

A Walkshop is a workshop delivered on foot, in the local environment. It offers participants an opportunity to observe, learn and experience how the built environment influences daily life.

Research shows that people living in walkable environments are 1.5 times more likely to get enough physical activity compared to those living in areas where walking is unsafe, inconvenient or difficult.<sup>1</sup> People living in walkable neighbourhoods are also 58% more likely to have a good cardiovascular risk profile.<sup>2</sup>

Walkability refers to factors within the built environment that help - or hinder - our ability to incorporate walking into everyday life.

The Walkshop will be led by **{insert title/name}**. It will be held **{location, day, time – start and finish}**.

This session is an opportunity to explore how walkable the **{insert name}** area is, and to identify opportunities for improvement. *Alternatively: The Walkshop will explore potential design solutions for the **{insert project name}**.*

Throughout the Walkshop we'll share evidence-based insights and practical guidance from the National Heart Foundation of Australia's **Healthy Active by Design** program.

Please RSVP and we'll provide further details closer to the date.

1. Monica L. Wang, Marie-Rachelle Narcisse, Pearl A. McElfish, 2022, 'Higher walkability associated with increased physical activity and reduced obesity among United States adults', published in Obesity – A Research Journal, 12 Dec 2022, Vol 31 Issue 2, pp553-564.

2. Makram et al., 2023, 'Favourable Neighbourhood Walkability is Associated with Lower Burden of Cardiovascular Risk Factors Among Patients Within an integrated Health System', <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0146280623000592>

## Email to participants, one week ahead

Thank you for registering to join our Walkshop next week. We're really looking forward to it and hope you are too!

This Walkshop is a great way to learn more about healthy built environments and why they're so important in our community. Throughout the walk we'll be sharing insights from the Heart Foundation's evidence-based [Healthy Active by Design](#) resources and discussing how active living principles can be applied in our work.

The walkability of local areas can influence whether community members achieve enough physical activity each day which in turn reduces their risk of heart disease. Walkability also contributes to a wide range of health, social, environmental and equity benefits.

At the start of next week's walk, staff from the [{organisation, department}](#) team will introduce the purpose and objective of the Walkshop, along with a brief overview of the Healthy Active by Design principles.

We've mapped out a great route that will allow you to consider a range of walkability features. The route is around [{XX km, relatively flat}](#) and includes several planned stops to discuss what's working well, where improvements could be made, and what you might do differently to enhance walking.

We anticipate the walk will take approximately [{duration}](#). Please meet promptly:

[{Time:}](#)

[{Meeting place:}](#)

[{How to get there - this should include information about walking, wheeling and bike riding, as well as public transport:}](#)

Please wear comfortable clothing and walking shoes and bring some water with you. If it's raining lightly, the walk will go ahead, so please bring a raincoat or umbrella just in case. If the weather is unsuitable, I'll be in touch to advise on a reschedule.

The walk will return to the [{starting point/conference venue}](#) and conclude by [{finish time}](#).

Finally, if you haven't already, please sign up to the [Healthy Active by Design e-newsletter](#) and follow Healthy Active by Design on [LinkedIn](#) to stay up to date on the latest news and resources on healthy built environments.

We look forward to seeing you [{next week}](#)!

# Appendix B – Suggested speaking points



## Overview

The Walkshop focuses on the need to embed public health and heart health into the design of built environments, and ways in which we can do this.

Four in five adults in Australia are not getting enough exercise. Participating in active transport is an effective way to build physical activity into daily life. Yet car-centric design means that in many places walking, wheeling, bike riding and public transport remain less convenient and less attractive than driving.

**Research shows** that people who live in walkable communities are 1.5 times more likely to get enough physical activity compared to those who live in areas where walking is unsafe, inconvenient or difficult and are 58% more likely to have a good cardiovascular risk profile.

The Heart Foundation has a vested interest to help create environments and systems that enable healthy behaviours. Physical inactivity is a key preventable risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

**Walkability** refers to factors within the built environment that either help or hinder us incorporating walking as part of our regular activities in daily life.

**Healthy Active by Design** is the Heart Foundation's digital toolkit translating research into practical guidance for healthy environments. It was inspired by the Healthy Spaces and Places collaboration between the Planning Institute of Australia, The Australian Local Government Association and the Heart Foundation in 2008.

Today, it's owned and managed outright by the Heart Foundation.

Its key point of difference to traditional planning and works guidance is the incorporation of physical movement and health considerations to create healthy spaces and places that promote walking, wheeling, bike riding and use of public transport in neighbourhoods, towns and cities across Australia. It provides a strong evidence base to support messaging and narrative and influence decision making.

**Audience:** urban and transport planners, traffic engineers, civil works and asset managers, architects, landscape architects, elected officials and decision makers, health professionals, developers and others involved in the built environment, and community members.

## Walkshop notes: seeing and experiencing differently

### 1. Observe what the environment is telling you.

- What's working well?
- What feels like it needs improvement?
- What would you change – and why?

### 2. Consider who the place is designed for.

- Who appears to be prioritised or designed for – by age, gender, culture, ability, mode of transport, other...
- Is that intentional? Is it appropriate?
- Does that need to be the case; or should it be?
- Who might feel excluded or unsupported?
- What could be done differently to ensure the place caters for everyone?

### 3. How comfortable and welcoming does the area feel?

- Does this place feel safe?
- Is it a comfortable environment to move through (shade, seating, noise, lighting)?
- Is it welcoming for all members of the community, including those with mobility aids, children, or older adults?

### 4. Is this place equitable?

- Can everyone use this space easily?
- Are there barriers that make walking, wheeling, bike riding or using public transport harder for some people?

### 5. Does this place contribute to a person's health and wellbeing – how?

- Does this place encourage or discourage walking, wheeling and bike riding?
- What elements support being active and what elements make it harder?

**6. How well does this place serve different purposes?**

- Does the design accommodate varied users – commuters, families, people exercising, people strolling, people riding bikes?
- How does it feel for recreational walking or social connection?
- Is it easy to move through when you're trying to get from A to B?

**7. How would the time of day or weather change the experience?**

- Would this feel different early in the morning, after dark, on a hot day, or in the rain?

**8. What, if anything, could be done differently?**

- What simple changes would improve comfort, safety, connectivity, or enjoyment?
- What bigger shifts might transform this area into a more walkable, welcoming, healthy place?
- How could these changes benefit health, community connection, or local businesses?

## Specific features to observe and consider

### Macro-scale:

- **Density and diversity of housing**  
to meet different living situations – accommodating a mix of different household sizes and composition, incomes, life stages and ability to age in place
- **Destinations within walking distance**  
– A mix of land uses; distance to shops, activity centres, community facilities, public open spaces
- **Access to fresh, healthy food**
- **Integrated land-use and transport planning**
- **Public transport connections**, including comfortable, safe stops near housing
- **Sense of place and community**
- **Safety and security** – both real and perceived

### Micro scale:

- **Footpaths** - quality, connectivity, width, maintenance
- **Road crossing experience** - time required to cross, crossing distance (road width)
- **Mobility accessibility** – suitability for prams, wheelchairs, mobility aids
- **Kerb ramps and treatment at crossings**
- **Tree canopy and shade**
- **Separated infrastructure** for different modes of transport
- **Quality public open space close to homes** – safe, appealing and easy to access
- **Multi-purpose community facilities and services** within walking distance
- **Traffic-related air and noise pollution**
- **Amenity** – places to stop and rest, public toilets, rubbish bins, drinking fountains, shelters
- **Street and path lighting**
- **Passive surveillance**
- **Points of interest** – placemaking elements, street art, building facades, colour and vibrancy

You can also use the following Healthy Active by Design tools to provide further guidance and structure:

- [Design feature checklists](#)
- [Community Walkability Checklist](#)



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[HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au](mailto:HealthyActivebyDesign@heartfoundation.org.au)

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