



PREMIER'S COUNCIL
FOR ACTIVE LIVING
NEW SOUTH WALES

Why active living

A HEALTH, ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL
AND SOCIAL SOLUTION

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Introduction

Being active is good for our health and our economy. It also has real benefits for our communities and for us as individuals. Active communities are more connected, participate more in community activities, are more productive, and reduce the environmental impacts of car dependence. Active Living also reduces the risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, colon and breast cancer, depression and falls. The direct costs attributable to physical inactivity of these conditions is more than \$1.5 billion nationally a year.

Right now, just over half of the NSW population does the recommended level of at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week required to obtain health benefits. So all of us need to be more active, more often.

The Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) will assist leaders in the public, private and community sectors to generate greater involvement in all forms of active living. The Council has updated this Why Active Living Statement to show the evidence of the benefits of active living and the costs of a sedentary lifestyle.

This Statement is a call to action.



“As a society we have engineered active choices out of everyday life.”



PREMIER'S COUNCIL FOR ACTIVE LIVING

The NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) aims to encourage more people in NSW to be more active every day.

We do this by working with our government, business and community partners to:

- promote greater involvement in active living across all population groups in NSW;
- build and strengthen the physical and social environments that facilitate and support active lifestyles that are built around individual, incidental everyday activity as well as more formal activities such as fitness and sports programs;
- ensure that government policies and strategies provide every opportunity for the citizens of NSW to embrace active living through all stages of their life.

PCAL comprises senior representatives from NSW Government agencies, and members from the business and community sectors. The Council provides an important forum for interagency and intersectoral collaboration through the promotion and implementation of active living principles.

There is a rapidly growing body of evidence which shows that being active in everyday life not only has substantial positive impacts on our individual health, but also offers environmental, social and economic benefits. To help leaders in the public, private and community sectors to make decisions that will encourage active living, PCAL has summarised in this Active Living Statement the key evidence demonstrating the benefits of active living and the individual and social costs of a sedentary lifestyle.

KEY POINTS

- Across all aspects of their lives, most people are less physically active than they used to be.
- Inadequate physical activity is a serious health problem that results in poor health outcomes including a greater risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, colon and breast cancer, depression and more.
- These chronic conditions impose enormous direct and indirect health costs – heart disease, stroke and type II diabetes cost well over \$4 billion nationally in direct costs; obesity costs as much as \$2 billion. Of these direct costs over \$1.5 billion is attributable to physical inactivity.
- In Sydney, the health costs of motor vehicle emissions are estimated to be between \$600 million and \$1.5 billion every year – costs that could be cut by walking, cycling and public transport replacing more car trips.
- A more active population lives longer than an inactive ageing population and places less demand on the healthcare system.
- The solution to these problems is to create supportive environments and policies so that people find it easier to incorporate physical activity into the routines of daily life.
- Some of the changes required are simple and can occur in the short term – others require planning, coordination and long-term commitment.



What is Active Living?

Active living refers to opportunities for incorporating physical activity into the routines of daily life as well as for sport and recreation. Examples of active living include; walking or cycling with children to school; walking, cycling or catching public transport to work or replacing short car trips to corner shops and parks by walking or cycling.

From an integrated land-use planning and transport perspective key principles for active living are:

- **Walkability and Connectivity** – improve safe and easy active travel connections to local destinations.
- **Active Travel Alternatives** – promote public transport use, cycling and walking to help reduce car dependency.
- **Legibility** – make walking and cycling routes easier to find through signposting, direct walking/cycling routes and provision of public transport information.
- **Quality Public Domain** – provide well-located and designed open space, with facilities for all community members.
- **Social Interaction and Inclusion** – promote mixed retail districts that encourage walking and cycling for local short trips.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

To put it simply, most people are less physically active than they used to be. Only half the NSW population meets the recommended level of at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week required to obtain health benefits¹.

This costs the individual. People who are not adequately active are more likely to develop heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, colon and breast cancer. They are more likely to be overweight, and more likely to suffer from depression. They are less likely to take part in all that life has to offer.

But low participation in physical activity also costs society. The direct and indirect health costs are enormous, as are the environmental costs of car dependence, a major contributing factor of low physical activity levels. A growing body of evidence also demonstrates the social costs are also significant – active communities are more likely to be strong and connected communities showing greater participation in activities; inactive communities may be less inclusive and cohesive.

1. Centre for Epidemiology and Research. 2008 Report on Adult Health from the 2004 New South Wales Population Health Survey. NSW Department of Health, 2009.



“Just over 50 percent of the population does enough physical activity each week. If the proportion could be raised to 70 per cent, that would save 2000 lives a year throughout Australia – equivalent to stopping all deaths on Australian roads, and more.”

HOW DOES PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IMPACT PEOPLE'S HEALTH?

Physical inactivity contributes to the deaths of over 13000 people a year in Australia².

Direct comparisons are difficult, but breast cancer kills about 2500 people a year, heroin up to 500 and drink-driving more than 300. Physical inactivity is the fourth most significant preventable cause of illness and premature death for Australians, after tobacco smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and poor nutrition³.

Specifically, physical inactivity is a major contributing factor to obesity – more than a third of NSW adults are overweight, and 19 per cent are obese⁴. Even more striking is that approximately 25 per cent of school students are either overweight or obese – this figure has doubled in the past 20 years⁵. For the first time in living memory life expectancy in developed countries such as Australia may start to fall due to the obesity epidemic in children and young people⁶.

HOW DOES ACTIVE LIVING IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT?

Demand for car travel is increasing faster than population growth. Over the last 20 years, Sydney's population has grown by 21 per cent, while the number of car trips has increased by 41 per cent and the number of cars by 58 per cent⁷. We are even relying on the car for short trips instead of walking or cycling – in Sydney, for example, 55 per cent of all car journeys are less than five kilometres and 33 per cent are less than three kilometres⁸.

We are also teaching our children to be less active. Since 1981, the proportion of children driven to school in NSW has doubled to more than 50 per cent, while the share of children walking and cycling has almost halved to about 20 per cent⁹. These car trips to school tend to be short and contribute significantly to the demand by families for a second car¹⁰.



2. Begg S, Vos T, Baker B, Stevenson C, Stanley L, Lopez AD. *The Burden of Disease and Injury in Australia*. Canberra, 2003.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Australia's health 2008*. Canberra, 2008.
4. Centre for Epidemiology and Research. *2008 Report on Adult Health from the 2004 New South Wales Population Healthy Survey*. NSW Department of Health, 2009.
5. *Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2004: The Short Report*. NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity. Sydney, 2006.
6. Olshansky SJ et al. *A potential decline in life expectancy in the United States in the 21st century*. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2005; 352:1138-1145.
7. *NSW State of the Environment*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation. Sydney, December 2006.
8. *Sustainable Cities (Report of the Inquiry into Sustainable Cities by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage)*. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, August 2005.
9. *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – City of Cities: A plan for Sydney's Future*. NSW Department of Planning. Sydney, December 2005.
10. Smith G and Scott J. *Living Cities: An urban myth? Government and Sustainability in Australia*. Dural, Sydney: Rosenberg Publishing, 2006.



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The transport sector is NSW's second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions¹¹. Car use is a significant contributor to this – transport emissions account for 15 per cent of total NSW emissions, and cars account for nearly half of this¹². Car emissions are a major source of air pollutants which, coupled with an inactive lifestyle, may contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and early mortality¹³. Motor vehicle-related ambient air pollution, for example, is estimated to account for between 900 and 2000 early Australian deaths annually¹⁴.

On the other hand, active people demand less of their environment and make their neighbourhoods more liveable. Active travel can also be good fun. Walking, cycling and public transport provide opportunities for social connection and inclusion with neighbours, friends and other community members. Neighbourhoods are safer when more people are on footpaths, streets and in parks.

WHAT DOES LOW PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY COST?

Low participation in physical activity impacts on the healthcare system, individual health and the environment. Long-term economic growth requires a healthy population and a healthy environment.

Consider the healthcare costs of non participation in physical activity, particularly as it contributes to chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke and type II diabetes. The direct costs alone of these conditions equate to \$4 billion nationally a year¹⁵; obesity costs as much as \$2 billion¹⁶. Of these direct costs over \$1.5 billion is attributable to physical inactivity.

The indirect costs – lost productivity, time off work, lost time, loss of productivity of carers, need for adaptation of living environments – are also substantial. These figures do not include the costs associated with suffering and premature death – for heart disease these have been estimated to be \$6.6 billion¹⁷.



11. *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation. Sydney, December 2006.

12. *NSW Greenhouse Plan*. The NSW Greenhouse Office. Sydney, November 2005.

13. *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation. Sydney, December 2006.

14. *Health impacts of transport emissions in Australia: Economic Costs*. Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, Canberra, 2005.

15. *The cost of physical inactivity – What is the lack of participation in physical activity costing Australia?* Medibank Private. August 2007.

16. *The Growing Cost of Obesity in 2008: Three years on*. Report by Access Economics for Diabetes Australia. 2008. Available from <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Pagefiles/7832/FULLREPORTGrowingCostOfObesity2008.pdf>

17. *The shifting burden of cardiovascular disease in Australia*. Report by Access Economics for the National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2005.



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Then there's the cost of the illness and death associated with motor vehicle pollution. In Sydney, the health costs of motor vehicle emissions are estimated to be between \$600 million and \$1.5 billion per annum¹⁸. Various estimates have been made of the costs of Sydney's reliance on cars. The Centre for International Economics put the cost at \$18 billion in 2005, made up of congestion, accidents, air pollution, greenhouse emissions and government subsidies. This is projected to rise by 32.5 per cent to nearly \$24 billion in 2020¹⁹.

Work has also begun on estimating the potential economic impact on Australia of unabated greenhouse gas emissions. For example, a study by the CSIRO has concluded that climate change is likely to have significant effects on the Australian wheat industry, impacting on yields, regional productivity and the value of wheat exports²⁰.



WHY AREN'T MORE OF US PHYSICALLY ACTIVE?

There are many reasons for the concerning low levels of physical activity in NSW. Three groups of factors are important – factors to do with the physical environment, the social environment and the individual. These are clearly interrelated and interdependent in complex ways.

The physical environment is easy to see – footpaths and streets, walking and cycling trails, parks and beaches, and recreation facilities such as swimming pools, ovals and sports centres.

The social environment is less visible – it includes things like having someone to be active with, being involved in a sport or recreation club, or even owning a dog.

And individual factors may be the most influential of all – such as understanding the benefits of moderate intensity physical activity, cultural attitudes, skills, self-belief and perceptions of the benefits of being active.

Overlaying these factors is the reality that as a society we have engineered active choices out of everyday living. Service industries continue to grow for activities that people used to do themselves such as car washing, house cleaning, dog walking and lawn mowing. We have easy access to prepared meals, dishwashers and remote controls. We have the internet and computer games. We shop for recreation.

There are benefits to all this, but the downside is that many people have lost the time and energy, and even the reason, to be active.

18. *Health Impacts of Transport Emissions in Australia: Economic Costs*, Working Paper 63. Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics. Canberra, 2005

19. *A city going nowhere fast*. Sydney Morning Herald 23 January 2006.

20. Howden M & Jones R. *Costs and benefits of carbon dioxide increase and climate change on the Australian wheat industry*. Australian Greenhouse Office. Canberra, 2001.



What's the solution?

Initially, we need to raise awareness and understanding of the need to increase community participation in physical activity, not just in the health sector but in all areas of NSW society. Supportive physical and social environments then need to be created through a multidimensional approach, so that people find it easier to incorporate physical activity into the routines of daily life.

Some of the changes required are relatively simple and can occur in the short term. Do streets have footpaths and are they in good repair? Are there pedestrian facilities so that people can safely cross the road? Are there seats along walking routes so that people can rest if they need to? Is there enough lighting in public places and do the lights work? Are there secure bicycle storage facilities at public transport stops and workplaces? Do workplaces provide shower and change room facilities for staff? Do workplaces promote staff participation in physical activities such as walking groups and lunch time recreational games? Do our beaches, coastline, parks and bushland have trails to promote walking and cycling?

Others are complex and require planning, coordination and long-term commitment.

Do State, regional and local planning policies encourage walking, cycling and access to parks and open space for sport and recreation? Do developers design suburbs that encourage active living – with safe and aesthetically pleasing streets and local facilities? Are there adequate transport options to help prevent reliance on the car? Do we have a culture that encourages active choices in favour of convenience?

Consider the benefits of all of this. The medium and long-term gains are quite obvious. A more active population would be a happier, healthier population with less heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and depression. There would be less pressure on the healthcare system, less time off work, less need for carers ... the benefits are endless. Just over 50 per cent of the population does enough physical activity each week²¹. If that proportion could be raised to 70 per cent, that would save 2000 lives a year throughout Australia²¹ – equivalent to stopping *all* deaths on Australian roads, and more.

21. Stephenson J, Bauman A, Armstrong T, Smith B, Bellew B. *The Costs of Illness Attributable to Physical Inactivity in Australia*. Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000.



“Studies show that communities designed with active living-friendly design considerations in mind benefit from reduced car trips, increased walking trips and reduced overall housing costs.”

But there is also a short-term gain on offer. More active people are happier, healthier population from the day they start moving. They see doctors less often. They need less medication. They demand less of the healthcare system. They use cars less often, have less congested roads and benefit from less greenhouse emissions and air pollutants. Such people are also more likely to be both employable, reaping benefits for business, and employed, reaping tax benefits for government. The ageing of the population will be less of an issue if the ageing population is active.

AREN'T WE ALREADY DEALING WITH OBESITY?

Obesity is important, and strong efforts are being made by the NSW Government and by parts of the corporate sector to deal with it. But obesity is only part of the problem. There are far more benefits to increasing physical activity levels than just those that relate to obesity.

Physical activity has an independent protective role against illnesses including coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, colon cancer and breast cancer, and reduces the impact of clinical depression and anxiety. The wide-ranging positive health effects of physical activity are independent of obesity²².

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE FOR ENCOURAGING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

The creation of supportive environments for active living requires intersectoral commitment, coordination and action – between government departments, between government and business, between government and business and the community sector, between people and their elected officials. Sharing the load is the only way to do this.

We can help. PCAL comprises representatives from across government, as well as from business and the community sector. We have expertise on our Council, and knowledge of how to co-opt further expertise. Part of our role is to assist and advise – we would like to help.

HAVE YOU GOT ANY EVIDENCE THIS WILL WORK?

Yes. Studies show that communities designed with active living-friendly design considerations in mind benefit from reduced cars trips, increased walking trips²³ and reduced overall housing costs²⁴.

22. Bauman A, Miller, Y. *The Public Health Potential of Health Enhancing Physical Activity*. Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd, 2004.

23. Khattak and Rodriguez 2005 quoted in New Urbanism (Online TDM Encyclopedia).

24. Litman 2000 and Arigoni 2001 quoted in New Urbanism (Online TDM Encyclopedia).



“The challenge is for government to be proactive, supported and assisted by the private sector and community sector, to develop the legislation, the policies and the strategies that will create environments that encourage a more active lifestyle for all the people of NSW.”

IS THIS IN LINE WITH THE REVISED NSW STATE PLAN?

Yes. More than a third of the 44 priorities listed in the revised NSW State Plan are directly addressed by increasing population levels of active living. These include:

- Increase walking and cycling
- Increase the number of people participating in sporting activities and physical activities
- Increase the number of people using parks
- Improve health in the community
- Improve survival rates and quality of life for people with potentially fatal or chronic illness
- Reduce potentially preventable hospital admissions
- Improve outcomes in mental health
- Increase share of journey to work trips on a safe and reliable public transport system
- Improve the efficiency of the road network
- Grow cities and centres as functional and attractive places to live, work and visit
- Increase the number of jobs closer to home
- Tackle climate change
- Improve air quality
- Strengthen Aboriginal communities
- Increase employment and community participation for people with disabilities
- Reduce levels of antisocial behaviour.

IS THIS IN LINE WITH OTHER NSW GOVERNMENT POLICY?

Yes. Many NSW Government policies seek to promote aspects of physical activity and active living, and to capitalise on their health, environmental, economic and social benefits. These include:

- Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and subregional strategies
- NSW Metropolitan Transport Plan
- NSW Childhood Obesity Action Plan
- NSW Chronic Disease Prevention Strategy
- NSW Greenhouse Plan
- Action for Air: The NSW Government's 25-Year Air Quality Management Plan
- Management Policy to Reduce Fall Injury among Older People
- NSW Framework on Ageing
- NSW Urban Transport Statement
- NSW Youth Policy.





“PCAL with its broad government, private and community sector representation, is ideally placed to engage decision-makers and link agencies, achieving the whole-of-community approach required to get the people of NSW more active more often.”

WILL PUBLIC SUPPORT GET BEHIND CHANGE?

Yes. Opinion polls and recent government community consultations have shown consistently that people place great importance on their health, their independence, their happiness and a feeling of well-being. People want a sense of community and social connectedness. They want more freedom to move, and places to move in. They want cleaner air, greener streets and a greater sense of well-being.

The challenge is for government to be proactive, supported and assisted by their private sector and community partners, to develop the legislation, the policies and the strategies that will create environments that encourage a more active lifestyle for all the people of NSW.

PCAL with its broad government, private and community sector representation, is ideally placed to engage decision-makers and link agencies, achieving the whole-of-community approach required to get the people of NSW more active more often.

WHY ACTIVE LIVING STATEMENT

Prepared by: NSW Premier's Council for Active Living
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Photos

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NSW PREMIER'S COUNCIL FOR ACTIVE LIVING
MEMBER AGENCIES



Department of Education and Communities
Department of Education and Communities – Commission for Children and Young People
Department of Education and Communities – Sport and Recreation
Department of Family and Community Services, Ageing – Disability and Home Care
Department of Family and Community Services – Housing NSW
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
Department of Premier and Cabinet
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