



# active healthy communities

a resource package for local government to create supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating

**Toward**   
Tomorrow's Queensland

 **Queensland**  
Government

  
Heart  
Foundation

 LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
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OF QUEENSLAND INC.

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active  
healthy  
communities

## What is the *Active, healthy communities* resource package?

*Active, healthy communities: A resource package for Local Government to create supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating* is a suite of tools to assist Queensland councils create local environments that support active, healthy communities and lifestyles.

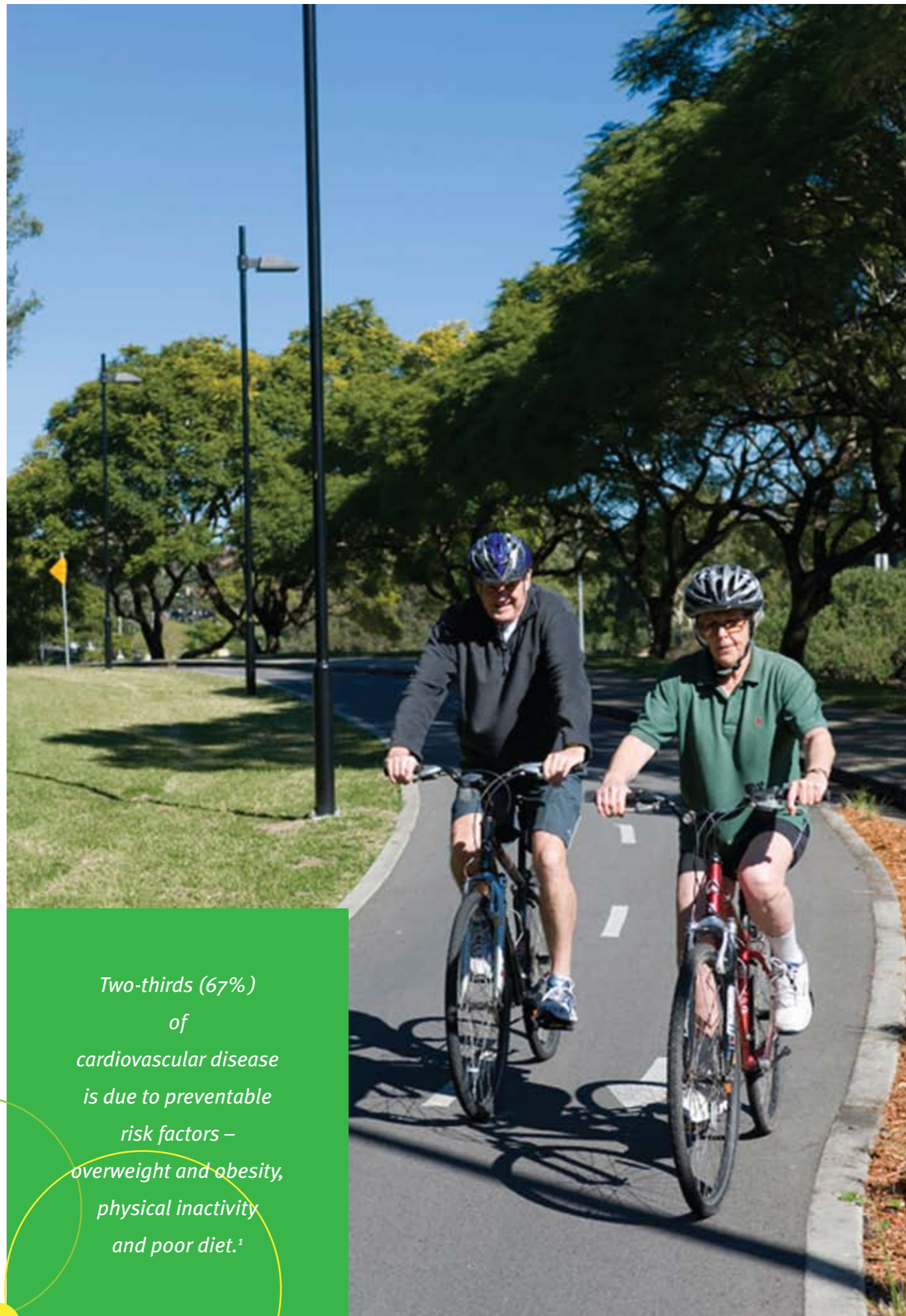
Queensland councils already play a significant role in creating local environments that support physical activity and healthy eating. The resource package builds on this by presenting useful ideas, practical information, and case studies based on the latest research on the impact of the built and social environment on health.

Creating local environments that support physical activity and healthy eating doesn't have to mean allocating significant new resources. Many of the ideas to create active, healthy communities can be implemented into councils' work practices within existing resources. The information in the resource package:

- covers a broad range of council functions
- suits councils of different sizes and levels of remoteness
- can be easily incorporated in stages into the policies and practices of councils
- contains options that can be undertaken with limited resources (i.e. little or no budget or additional staff allocation)
- contains options that provide good return on investment in the short and long term.



**Supportive environments**  
refer to aspects of the community that help people to easily incorporate physical activity and healthy eating into their lives through providing opportunities, supports and cues for healthy lifestyle behaviours.



Two-thirds (67%)  
of  
cardiovascular disease  
is due to preventable  
risk factors –  
overweight and obesity,  
physical inactivity  
and poor diet.<sup>1</sup>

## Why create supportive environments?

### The health of Queenslanders

Chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers, are the major cause of illness, disability and early death among Queenslanders. Almost nine out of ten (88%) premature deaths and disability is caused by chronic diseases, and 74% of these premature deaths are avoidable.<sup>1</sup> Overweight and obesity, physical inactivity and poor diet are the leading health risk factors for chronic diseases, having overtaken tobacco smoking as the leading cause.<sup>1</sup>

Queensland does not compare well against other states and territories on a range of health indicators. For example, deaths from cancer, heart disease and stroke are higher than the national average. Queensland also performs poorly on risk factors for chronic diseases with rates of overweight and obesity and physical inactivity being some of the highest in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Chronic diseases have been estimated to cost Queenslanders \$5 billion per year in direct health care costs, and an additional \$22 billion in lost productivity and other costs such as lost earnings and the cost to carers.<sup>2</sup> In Queensland the total cost of obesity alone is estimated to be almost \$12 billion annually.



### Local environments and health

Behavioural changes towards a healthier lifestyle need to occur with a minimum amount of effort for the individual; the healthy choice needs to be the easy choice. There is strong national and international evidence that local environments can help people to adopt and maintain healthier lifestyles.<sup>3,4</sup> However, even with personal motivation healthy lifestyle changes are difficult to adopt and maintain if not supported by the local environment. The World Health Organization reports that one-third of physical inactivity levels can be prevented by changing the local environmental alone.<sup>5</sup>

Supportive environments are those that enable and encourage healthy lifestyle behaviours as part of daily activity. They cover the natural and built environment, as well as the social, political and cultural environment.<sup>6</sup>

Research shows strong links between people's overall health and healthy lifestyle behaviours.<sup>7</sup> Regular physical activity and healthy eating reduce the risks of cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes, and the risk factors for these chronic conditions such as overweight and obesity, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Physical activity has other benefits such as strengthening the musculoskeletal system reducing the likelihood of osteoporosis and the risk of falls and fractures in older people, and improves mental wellbeing by reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression. It also has community benefits such as increasing social inclusion and community safety.<sup>1</sup>

Health experts recommend that adults should accumulate 30 minutes of physical activity a day on most, preferably all days of the week,<sup>8</sup> and enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods high in fibre and low in fat, salt and sugar.<sup>9</sup> Children need at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day,<sup>10</sup> and a wide variety of nutritious foods for healthy growth and development.<sup>11</sup>

Sedentary behaviours (that is prolonged sitting time) at home, in transit and at work are also independently linked with poor health. Being too sedentary increases the risk of developing chronic diseases, even if physical activity levels are adequate. Sedentary behaviours are influenced by increasing car dependency, urban areas with built environments not supporting active and healthy lifestyles, increasing reliance on advancing technology and modern conveniences such as televisions and internet, and occupations which increasingly impose sedentary behaviours.<sup>6</sup> One research study found that each additional hour spent in a car each day was associated with a six per cent increase in the likelihood of obesity.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, each additional kilometre walked per day was associated with a five per cent reduction in the likelihood of obesity.

Eating a healthy diet is essential for good health and preventing the development of chronic diseases. There is growing evidence of the role local environments have on food choices and eating behaviours and ultimately on health. The types of food retail outlets available, their proximity to schools, workplaces and homes, the foods available at these outlets, and the advertising and signage used all shape the local food environment and can influence food choices.

As our lifestyles get busier, enabling people to routinely include physical activity and healthy eating as a part of their everyday lives is important. This includes incorporating physical activity into the day by using active modes of travel to work or school instead of using the car, and making healthy foods more accessible and affordable.



*The total cost of obesity in Queensland is almost \$12 billion annually.<sup>1</sup>*

## Why focus on Local Government?

### Councils have a role to play

Councils have an important role in shaping healthy local environments through their roles in planning and development, and the provision and management of facilities and services. All areas of council have a role to play. In fact, the community outcomes will be greatest when all departments and services coordinate their efforts to create supportive environments.

While councils have been creating environments that support physical activity for some time, supportive environments for healthy eating is a relatively new concept. However, there is growing evidence that local environments influence food choices and healthy eating behaviours.

Councils can create environments that support healthy eating by:

- providing breastfeeding and baby-care facilities (e.g. ensuring breastfeeding and baby-care facilities are established in new and modified developments)
- encouraging local food systems and agriculture (e.g. identifying and developing sites for community gardens)
- planning the location of food outlets
- considering the location of fast food outlets and signage regulations
- ensuring healthy foods are available at meetings and community events.

### **Councils can encourage healthy eating by:**

- *improve access to baby-care facilities and breastfeeding friendly places*
- *identifying and developing sites for community gardens*
- *reduce the costs for healthy food stalls at community events*
- *support home delivery schemes of healthy foods for the elderly and people living with a disability.*

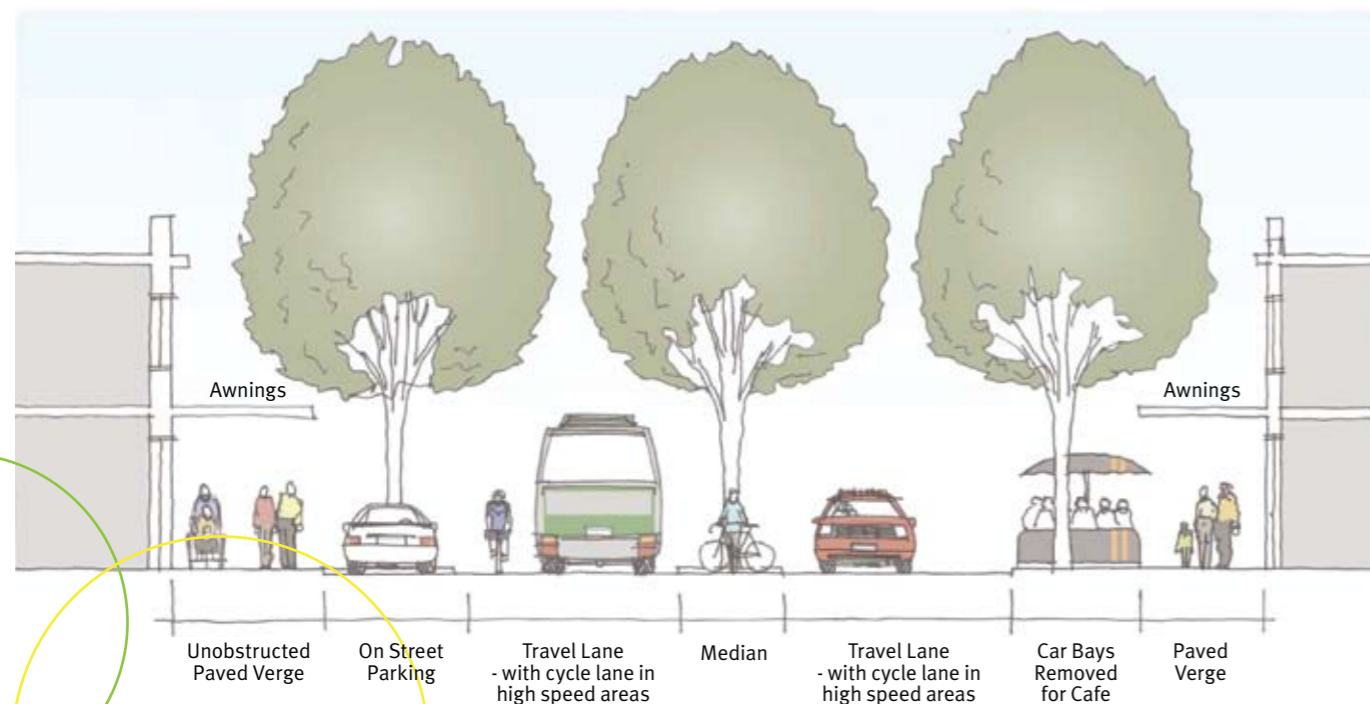


Creating local environments that support physical activity can be achieved through:

- changes to walking and cycling infrastructure (e.g. providing for pedestrians and cyclists as part of road upgrades and maintenance)
- neighbourhood planning (e.g. developing communities with mixed land use, such as local shops and connected road networks)
- information dissemination and awareness programs
- providing physical activity facilities.

Other mechanisms that councils can use to create supportive environments that will make a difference to the health and wellbeing of the community include:

- incorporating physical activity and healthy eating considerations in the strategic and operational activities
- addressing Strategic Outcomes and codes on active transport infrastructure, breastfeeding and baby-care facilities, and signage and advertising devices in planning schemes
- incorporating the commercial use of parks, food licensing and roadside stalls, and food availability through council operated venues and functions into local law and policy
- council leadership can also bring together agencies and community groups to improve the health of their communities.



**Streets: A street with well defined edges, sufficient pavement width, shade for pedestrians and strong vertical elements to encourage reduce traffic speeds.**

## What are the benefits of supportive environments for local communities?

Creating environments that support physical activity and healthy eating can benefit Queensland communities in many ways, such as:

- increased liveability of the local government area
- improved open spaces, physical infrastructure and community facilities
- protection of local habitat and biodiversity through the provision of parks, open space, linked green corridors and natural environments
- improved perception of community safety through an increased presence of people in public spaces
- strengthened inter-governmental and community partnerships
- benefits to tourism through infrastructure such as walking trails
- benefits to the local economy through buying local produce and accessing local businesses
- improved air quality and safety from reduced vehicle congestion around key activity centres and higher levels of cycling and walking
- contributing to sustainable communities through the reduction of vehicle kilometres travelled and the carbon footprint
- a legacy of improved community health, social inclusion and quality of life.<sup>6</sup>

Creating local environments that support physical activity and healthy eating can help achieve other council objectives, such as:

- recognition as a progressive and responsive organisation that leads the way in this field
- positive public relations opportunities
- enhancing councils' role as a proactive leader within the community.



# What makes an environment supportive for physical activity and healthy eating?

The evidence for community- and street-scale urban design and land-use policies and practices in increasing active and healthy lifestyles is compelling. Leading international health and planning authorities are calling for community-level intervention as a priority for public health and community decision makers.

For physical activity, international studies have shown good urban design and land use to be important for health at three levels:<sup>13</sup>

1. the **community level**, such as, proximity of residents to commercial opportunities and schools, connectivity of streets, population density, green spaces. This has been shown to increase physical activity levels by 161 per cent;
2. the **street level**, such as, improved lighting, ease and safety of street crossings, pathway continuity, presence of traffic calming structures, aesthetic enhancements. This has been shown to increase physical activity levels by 35 per cent; and
3. **access to places for physical activity**, such as, trails, physical activity facilities, parks and reducing barriers to these including safety and affordability. This has been shown to increase physical activity by 48 per cent.



Walking and cycling can be encouraged by creating compact, connected local environments with a mixture of densities and land uses.<sup>14</sup> This results in shorter travel distances from home to destinations of everyday use, such as local stores and schools. Greater participation in active recreation can be encouraged by creating aesthetically-pleasing local environments and communities with convenient spaces and facilities for physical activity.<sup>15</sup> Neighbourhood studies linking built environment characteristics to physical activity have found:

- residents with a variety of destinations of interest in close proximity to home walk and cycle more<sup>16</sup>
- walking and cycling is greatest in areas with higher residential densities that are able to support the presence of shops and services<sup>13</sup>
- walking is greatest in communities with high connectivity and direct travel routes with few obstacles and major road crossings between homes, shops, workplaces and other destinations.<sup>17,18</sup> This is typically found in neighbourhoods with grid-pattern street networks
- recreational physical activity is greatest in neighbourhood communities that are attractive or aesthetically-pleasing<sup>19</sup>
- residents have higher levels of physical activity in communities with access to large attractive public open space<sup>15,20,21</sup>, and convenient facilities for physical activity such as cycling and walking trails and parks<sup>14,22</sup>
- high traffic volume and unsafe traffic discourages physical activity, particularly in children<sup>23,24</sup>
- children travel more by active modes of transport in communities that have footpaths and traffic lights leading to schools<sup>22</sup>
- residents are more physically active in communities with pedestrian and bicycle-friendly infrastructure to destinations of interest.<sup>20,22</sup>



## ***In Queensland:***

- *10 percent of all trips are less than 1 kilometre (the equivalent to a 10-minute walk)*
- *20 per cent are less than 2 kilometres*
- *30 per cent are less than 3 kilometres (the equivalent to a 10-minute bicycle ride).*

The research linking the characteristics of the environment with healthy eating is also growing. Several key features of local environments are associated with healthy eating.

These include:

- destinations in close proximity to places of residence, schools and work including local shops, community gardens and public transport
- reduced density of food outlets selling unhealthy foods
- availability of farmers' markets and community gardens
- limited signage and advertising of unhealthy food
- availability of public baby-care rooms and breastfeeding facilities
- access to water fountains in public spaces.

Neighbourhood studies linking built environment characteristics to healthy eating have found:

- low-income communities are more exposed to fast food outlets and convenience stores selling unhealthy foods<sup>25</sup>
- the presence of supermarkets in neighbourhoods is associated with higher fruit and vegetable consumption<sup>26</sup>
- access to farmers' markets and community gardens may increase fruit and vegetable consumption.<sup>27,28</sup>



# The Active, healthy communities resource package online

What does the online resource package contain?

The online resource package provides practical and easy to use ideas and information for councils to make it easier for people to be physical active and eat a healthy diet. The package is designed for council officers to find information relevant to their area quickly and easily.

The online resource package is easy to use. Councils can simply select appropriate physical activity and healthy eating goals in the corporate plan section of the resource package to suit the local government area, and the corresponding objectives and strategies to achieve the goals. Practical information and tools on how to implement each strategy is then presented in other sections of the resource package, along with information on where and how to access funding for your physical activity and healthy eating initiatives.

The resource package is divided into six sections:

1. Corporate plans
2. Operational plans
3. Planning schemes
4. Local law and policy matters
5. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and analysis tools
6. Funding and award opportunities



A range of user-friendly tools are provided in each section.

The suite of tools includes:

- tips on how to create a community garden program
- how to develop an Active School Travel Plan
- draft codes for community gardens, breastfeeding and baby-care facilities, walking and cycling facilities, and end-of-trip facilities for walking and cycling
- a checklist on best-practice neighbourhood design including principles for sustainable environments for physical activity
- how and where to collect data on food accessibility, open space inventories, walking conditions and creating My Neighbourhood maps for your council
- case studies to demonstrate state, national and international examples of council actions.

All ideas provided in the resource package are optional, and each may be partially or fully implemented. There are a range of ideas included to suit the different priorities across councils.

## An overview of the online tools and resources

The **Active, healthy communities online resource package** is available at [www.activehealthycommunities.com.au](http://www.activehealthycommunities.com.au).

Each section of the resource package includes information on how councils can use the range of practical tools developed to create local environments that support physical activity and healthy eating. An overview of each section follows.



### Corporate plans

What you will find:

- examples of corporate plan goals and objectives to incorporate supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating into council planning and policy
- strategies to help achieve the suggested goals and objectives.

Content includes:

Physical activity

- Travel behaviour
- Walking and cycling
- Neighbourhood planning
- Information dissemination and awareness programs
- Physical activity facilities

Healthy eating

- Breastfeeding and baby-care facilities
- Community-supported local food systems and agriculture
- Increase access to healthy foods
- Limit access to fast foods
- Signage regulation
- Policy strategies

### Operational plans

What you will find:

- suggestions on how to implement the strategies or programs in operational plans
- useful tips and lessons from other councils
- useful data sources to gather further information on the programs.

Content includes:

Physical activity

- Physical activity plan
- Active and healthy lifestyle programs
- Cycle network strategy and plan
- Travel behaviour change – active school travel plan
- Public art program

Healthy eating

- Community-supported local food systems and agriculture

### Planning schemes

What you will find:

- a selection of draft Strategic Outcomes and planning scheme provision codes that assist in achieving the objectives of active, healthy communities
- ideas on how each Strategic Outcome and code can be easily incorporated or adapted into existing codes in a planning scheme.

Content includes:

Physical activity

- Strategic Outcomes
- Active transport infrastructure code
- Neighbourhood planning – Active communities checklist
- Desired Standards of Service – Public parks, pedestrian and bicycle facilities

Healthy eating

- Strategic Outcomes
- Breastfeeding and baby-care facilities code
- Community-supported local food systems and community-supported agriculture residential unit developments code
- Signage and advertising devices code
- Restricting access to fast foods discussion paper

### Local law and policy matters

What you will find:

- references to specific local law and policy to regulate and influence supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating.

Content includes:

Physical activity

- Local law matters - Commercial use of parks

Healthy eating

- Local law matters - Healthy eating
- Policy – Food availability through council-operated venues and functions
- Improve access to and availability of healthy food

### Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and analysis tools

What you will find:

- a variety of GIS and analysis tools to establish local evidence to support policy and planning positions.

Content includes:

Use of Australian Bureau of Statistics data

Physical activity

- Walking and cycling – PedShed analysis
- Neighbourhood planning – Walkability
- Open space inventory
- My Neighbourhood maps

Healthy eating

- Food accessibility
- Food deserts

### Funding and award opportunities

What you will find:

- National and State Government funding opportunities, as well as privately managed community funds
- awards available for councils to enter which have financial and publicity benefits.

Content includes:

- Queensland State Government Funding
- National Funding Programs
- Community Grants
- Award Opportunities

If you do not have access to the internet, an interactive CD of the resource package is available to order free of charge (please complete the order form on page 15).

# Glossary

## Active transport

Human-powered forms of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport.<sup>29</sup> Journeys by public transport are also considered active forms of transport as they often elicit walking to transit stops at the beginning of the journey and to destinations at the end.

## Corporate plan

A five year plan that states how the community plan will be implemented, including performance indicators for measuring the local government's progress in achieving its vision for the future.

## Healthy eating

Eating patterns consistent with Australian dietary guidelines that contribute towards good health and protect from developing nutrition related chronic diseases.<sup>30</sup>

## Local laws

Laws adopted by a council that reflect community needs and ensure the good rule and governance of the area. Through local laws, local governments can establish permit or licence regimes for activities they want to regulate, create offences for unacceptable behaviour and allow for compliance or abatement notices.

## Operational plan

How the council will apply its resources to achieve the corporate plan strategies in a specific financial year.

## Physical activity

All movement in everyday life, including work, recreation, exercise and sporting activities.

It can include:<sup>31</sup>

- active recreation – bush walking, skateboarding, surfing
- sport – netball, soccer, volleyball
- dance – line dancing, ballet, ballroom dancing
- exercise – strength training, balance exercises, Tai Chi and flexibility activities
- active play – using playground equipment, skipping
- active living – physical activity is integrated into everyday life, e.g. using the stairs, energetic housework, gardening and energetic occupational activities
- active transport – walking to public transport and walking or cycling to locations.

## Planning scheme

A statutory instrument made by a local government that identifies the strategic outcomes for the planning scheme area and measures that facilitate achieving them. In doing so, it must coordinate and integrate matters including land use and development, infrastructure and valuable features.

## Supportive environments

Environments that enable and encourage healthy lifestyle behaviours as part of daily activity. They cover the natural and built environment, as well as the social, political and cultural environment.<sup>32</sup>

## Unhealthy foods

Foods and drinks that are high in fat, and/or salt, and/or sugar and low in fibre and micronutrients and as such are energy dense and nutrient poor. The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating classifies these foods as 'extra' foods.<sup>33</sup>

## Walkable neighbourhood

A walkable neighbourhood is one where it is easy and safe to walk to goods and services (i.e., grocery stores, post offices, health clinics, etc.). Walkable communities encourage pedestrian activity, expand transportation options, and have safe and inviting streets that serve people with different ranges of mobility.<sup>34</sup>



# CD Order Form

*Active, healthy communities* is available at [www.activehealthycommunities.com.au](http://www.activehealthycommunities.com.au)

A limited number of CDs have been produced for people who have poor internet access. Please note that the internet version of *Active, healthy communities* is constantly being updated and is the primary source for the resource package.

The CD version contains the original version of the resource package. It is recommended that CD users regularly check the website for the most up to date information.

If you would like to receive a CD version of the resource package, please complete the form below and fax it to the Heart Foundation: (07) 3252 9697 or mail to: *Active, healthy communities*: Resource package, Heart Foundation, PO Box 442, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006.

Name of Organisation/Business (if applicable)

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Title

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First name

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Surname

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Address

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Suburb/Town

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State

Postcode

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Contact phone number

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Email

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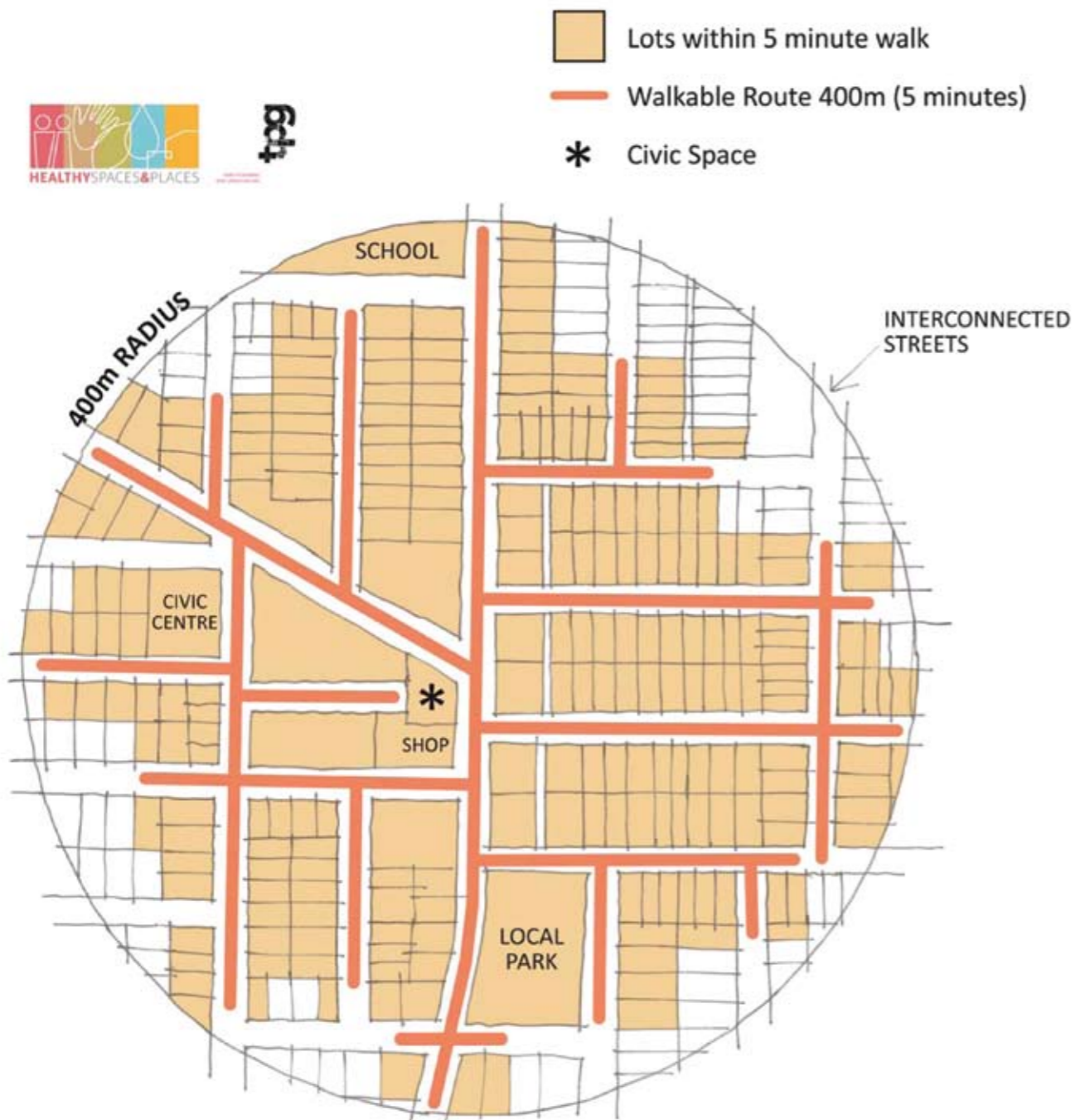
PLEASE NOTE:

Your contact details will only be used for the purpose of sending you the CD.

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a resource package for local government to create supportive environments for physical activity and healthy eating

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## PED-SHED (WALKABLE CATCHMENT):

Diagram for a well connected neighbourhood.

Walkable catchments, sometimes referred to as “pedsheds”, are maps showing the actual area within a five minute walking distance from any centre, or ten minutes from any major transport stop such as a railway station. The centre could be a neighbourhood or town centre.

Walkable catchment calculations are expressed as the actual area within a five-minute walking distance as a percentages

of the theoretical area within a five -minute walking distance. The theoretical five-minute walking distances shown as a circle with a radius of about 400m drawn around any particular centre. This is an area of 50ha. When calculating a ten-minute walking distance, the radius used is about 800m, resulting in a circle area of 200ha.

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