



Increasing participation in physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour

Local government action guide

Councils can influence the quality and distribution of conditions needed for good health, that is, the natural, built and social environments in which we live, learn, work and play.¹ They have a major role in supporting the objectives of the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* by protecting, improving and promoting public health.²

Councils can make it easier for all residents to be physically active by:

- adopting policy and planning approaches that can equitably enable all of the community to engage in active recreation and active travel through transport plans, parks, street amenities, paths, trails and open spaces
- supporting increased participation in sport and leisure activities for all residents through promotions, programs and the provision of safe, affordable, clean and accessible sport and recreation facilities
- encouraging less sitting and more movement every day within sedentary workplaces.

This guide is one of six providing evidence-informed actions that councils may consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and other local strategies. The proposed strategies are consistent with state health promotion and prevention priorities including the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019* (the Plan).³

The Plan builds on a 'systems thinking' perspective that recognises the complexity of health issues and the underlying causes of poor health and wellbeing. It also identifies place-based approaches as a key platform for change, recognising that the places where people spend their time – communities, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and more – play an important role in shaping their health and wellbeing. The aim is to maximise value by leveraging multiple networks, investments and activities to deliver outcomes for communities.

Links to other guides and further resources and available at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/localgovernmentguides.

Links to the Victorian Population Health Survey 2014 findings are available at www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey/victorian-population-health-survey-2014.

For more detailed information on your area go to www.exploreyourdata.com.au.

Why is increasing participation in physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour a public health and wellbeing priority?

- Increasing participation in physical activity has health, social and economic benefits.^{4,5} The health benefits of regular physical activity include improved physical health, reduced risk of developing major chronic diseases, managing body weight, developing social connections and helping to prevent and manage mental health problems.⁴
- In addition to the health benefits of physical activity, there are environmental, economic and social benefits.
 - Active travel such as walking, cycling and public transport use reduces greenhouse gas emissions, pollution (noise and air) and energy use.⁶
 - Economic benefits include reduced costs associated with passenger transport, road infrastructure and traffic congestion.
 - Social benefits include increased social connections, improved neighbourhood trust and safety, and reduced crime.⁷
- Trends in participation of physical activity and sport demonstrate a growth in non-organised participation compared to traditional club-based or organised sport.^{8,9} VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015 data shows that 70.5% of Victorians participate in non-organised physical activity, but only 28.7% in organised.¹⁰
- Walking continues to be the most popular form of physical activity in Victoria. Walking is suitable for all ages and fitness levels, is inexpensive and can be done almost anywhere. According to the VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015, 51.2% of Victorians regularly walk.¹⁰
- Prolonged sitting is a risk factor for poor health and premature death, even for those who meet or exceed Australia's physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines.¹¹
- A growing body of evidence indicates that extensive sitting is consistently associated with premature mortality, risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, a higher overall energy intake and being overweight or obese.^{12,13,14,15}
- Reducing physical inactivity in Australia by 10% would reduce costs to the Australian health sector by an estimated \$96 million per year, and increase leisure, home and workforce productivity by \$162 million.⁵

Understanding equity

Health equity is the notion that everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential if it can be avoided.

Inequities are the observed differences between population groups (e.g. a subpopulation group and the Victorian population) that stem from socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers of social position.

Equitable approaches are those aimed at closing the gap in outcomes for different population groups. This may mean providing additional support for people experiencing disadvantage in order to achieve equal outcomes.

- In relation to Victorian adults, the VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015¹⁰ found that:
 - only two in five Victorian adults engage in physical activity for at least half an hour on four or more days per week, while one in five Victorians does not engage in any physical activity during the week
 - while seven in 10 Victorians (70.5%) engage in some form of non-organised physical activity, only one in four (28.7%) does physical activity organised through a club or association
 - physical activity levels for women are still below that of men across all ages and for all major types of activities except walking
 - adults in full-time employment who are university educated, earn over \$100K or live in the inner and middle metropolitan areas are the most sedentary at work, spending an average of 5 hours or more sitting per day
 - adults living in areas of greatest disadvantage are less likely to be physically active; 25% reported zero days of physical activity of more than half an hour compared with 13% of those in areas of most advantage.

Strategies to increase participation in physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour

Strategic goal

Council is committed to taking action to get more people physically active, including participating in sport and walking. They will promote reductions in sitting throughout the day, especially in work places.³

Objectives and actions

Increase active living and active transport

- Plan, design and establish urban environments that equitably encourage active travel and active recreation. With a focus on the development of walking and cycling infrastructure connected to public transport, local amenities and recreation areas, and prioritise infrastructure aimed at engaging disadvantaged groups.^{6,16}
- Promote the location of, access to and use of local natural environments (e.g. beaches, forests) and public spaces (e.g. parks, playgrounds) that all residents can use for active recreation.¹⁷
- Increase the community's perception of safety by increasing the 'walkability' of neighbourhoods.
- Use planning processes to assess and improve walkability (such as residential density, street connectivity and land mix) through new processes that are triggered when a new development application is proposed.
- Encourage the highest quality urban design to create open spaces with good surveillance, safe pedestrian access, walking paths, trees for shade and accessible public amenities to support active recreation.
- Use tools such as Victoria Walk's walking audit tool and Bicycle Network's planning checklist for cycling to review and improve street connections to shops, sports centres and parks. (See useful links.)
- Execute the standards of and promote the Victorian Achievement Program (www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au) as a tool to encourage physical activity in settings such as schools, childcare facilities, sports clubs and recreational facilities, workplaces and hospitals.¹⁸
- Encourage less sitting and more movement every day within workplaces, e.g. walking meetings, organised lunchtime activities, shower and change facilities, taking the stairs and standing work stations.^{4,19}

Increase participation in active recreation and sporting activities

- Ensure all new and refurbished sport and recreation facilities adhere to universal design principles in addition to meeting sport-specific standards to support access for all people.²⁰
- Increase accessibility of new or existing sport and recreation facilities for all residents by locating them near public transport and schools, and connecting them to walking or cycling paths and other infrastructure.^{6,16}
- Encourage more people in the community to participate in sport through enabling the provision of welcoming, inclusive and flexible sport options.^{8,21,22}
- Identify and consider target audiences, in particular under-represented groups or those more likely to experience the effects of sedentary lifestyles, in the design and delivery of sport and active recreation opportunities (existing and new). Engage target audiences to address local needs, barriers and enablers of participation.^{6,8,21,22}
- Provide accessible information and promote local sport and active recreation opportunities to all community members.^{8,21,22}
- Consider key partnerships to provide active recreation and sport opportunities for under-represented groups, such as existing State Sporting Associations' programs developed for women and girls, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples.²³
- Support and facilitate sport clubs and recreation facilities to reduce costs of participation in organised and social sport, including equipment and uniforms, in particular for socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.^{9,24}
- Set explicit goals and objectives in relation to reducing inequities in physical activity participation rates, and evaluate impacts and outcomes of local policies and programs for different social groups.^{25,26} VicHealth's *About Fair Foundations and promoting health equity* resource provides further information about how this can be achieved – www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/fairfoundations.

Useful links

Heart Foundation Healthy by Design guidelines

<https://heartfoundation.org.au/programs/healthy-by-design-victoria>

Victoria Walks Walking Audit Tool

www.victoriawalks.org.au/Walking_audit/

Bicycle Network's Planning Checklist for Cycling

www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/general/for-government-and-business/3372/

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