

Values and Benefits	
Value	Benefit
<b>Health</b>	Increased walking reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes and improves mental health. <sup>8</sup>
<b>Economic</b>	Improvements in walking infrastructure have been shown to stimulate the local economy by encouraging people to spend time outside their homes. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Environmental</b>	More people walking for short trips rather than driving reduces environmental impacts of car use and costs of traffic congestion, injuries, noise and pollution. <sup>10</sup>
<b>Social</b>	More people walking for short trips rather than driving facilitates social interaction and a sense of community connectedness.
<b>Use</b>	The project explores the multiple influences on walking and the ways council and health can work both together to facilitate walking. It can help to inform other walkability projects and council policies and practices to increase walking.

Project team	The key contacts are:
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### Footnotes

1. Katherine Webber 2018 Exploring Accessibility and Inclusion in Public Toilets, 2018 Rodney Warmington Churchill Fellow to increase accessibility and inclusion in public toilets by researching taboos, design, policy and legal barriers.
2. Hospitalisations spatially adjusted rate per 100,000 2017-18 for Diabetes as a principle diagnosis: Blacktown 155.3, NSW 143.1; for All Circulatory Diseases: Blacktown 1821.2, NSW 1630.6. Health Stats NSW <http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/>
3. Merom D (2019) *What can we learn from NSW Household Travel Survey (HTS) with data delivered at aggregated trips level: a comparison of WSLHD LGAs*. Report prepared by Professor Dafna Merom, Western Sydney University for the Health Promotion Unit, WSLHD
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5. National Heart Foundation, *Why Walking? The Heart Foundation call for a Walking Strategy*, 2019, p1
6. <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/data-and-research/passenger-travel/surveys/household-travel-survey-hts>
7. Webber, K. *Exploring Accessibility and Inclusion in Public Toilets*, 2018, p17.
8. NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group, *NSW Healthy Planning Action Resource No. 2 - Creating Walkable Neighbourhoods*, 2018.
9. Tolley R., *Good for Business: The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly - Discussion Paper*. National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2011.
10. NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group, op cit

### References

- NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group, *NSW Healthy Planning Action Resource No. 2 - Creating Walkable Neighbourhoods*, 2018.
- National Heart Foundation, *Why Walking? The Heart Foundation call for a Walking Strategy*, 2019, [https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/images/uploads/Background\\_LetsMakeWalkingGreatAgain\\_Heart\\_Foundation\\_March\\_2019-FINAL.pdf](https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/images/uploads/Background_LetsMakeWalkingGreatAgain_Heart_Foundation_March_2019-FINAL.pdf) accessed 15th November 2019.
- Tolley R., *Good for Business: The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly - Discussion Paper*. National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2011.
- Webber, K. *Exploring Accessibility and Inclusion in Public Toilets*, for the Rodney Warmington Churchill Fellowship to increase accessibility and inclusion in public toilets by researching taboos, design, policy and legal barriers. 2018



Shared Path, Bungarribee Homestead Park

### Introduction

Blacktown City is in Western Sydney, located between the 'Western Parkland City' and the 'Central River City'. Blacktown is one of the fastest growing local government areas in Australia, and offers a mix of residential, retail, commercial and industrial land uses.<sup>1</sup>

The rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are much higher in Blacktown compared to the NSW average<sup>2</sup>. Blacktown also has very low walking rates compared to Greater Metropolitan Sydney.<sup>3</sup>

Walking is one of the most broadly accessible forms of physical activity with regular walking widely recommended for improved health and reduced risk of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers.<sup>4</sup> Walking has been found to improve economic vitality, reduce the impact on the environment, lower traffic congestion, improve social cohesion and community safety.<sup>5</sup>

In 2015, Blacktown City Council and Western Sydney Local Health District formed a special partnership, to design and implement a range of strategies to improve the walking rates and the health of the community in Blacktown.



Walkers at Alwyn Linfield Reserve



Walkers at Nurragingy Reserve



Mayor of Blacktown City Council Tony Bleasdale, Deputy Mayor Julie Griffiths, Councillors Collins and Singh and members of the Walking Volunteers at the Blacktown launch of the Great West Walk 12th October 2019.

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## Partnership activities

A key first step for the partnership was to map out the major factors influencing walking rates in Blacktown in an easy to understand infographic, captured in Diagram 1 below. Within each factor, a list of activities being undertaken across Blacktown was documented and then each activity was colour coded based on the organisational ownership of the activity.

Activities undertaken by the partnership include:

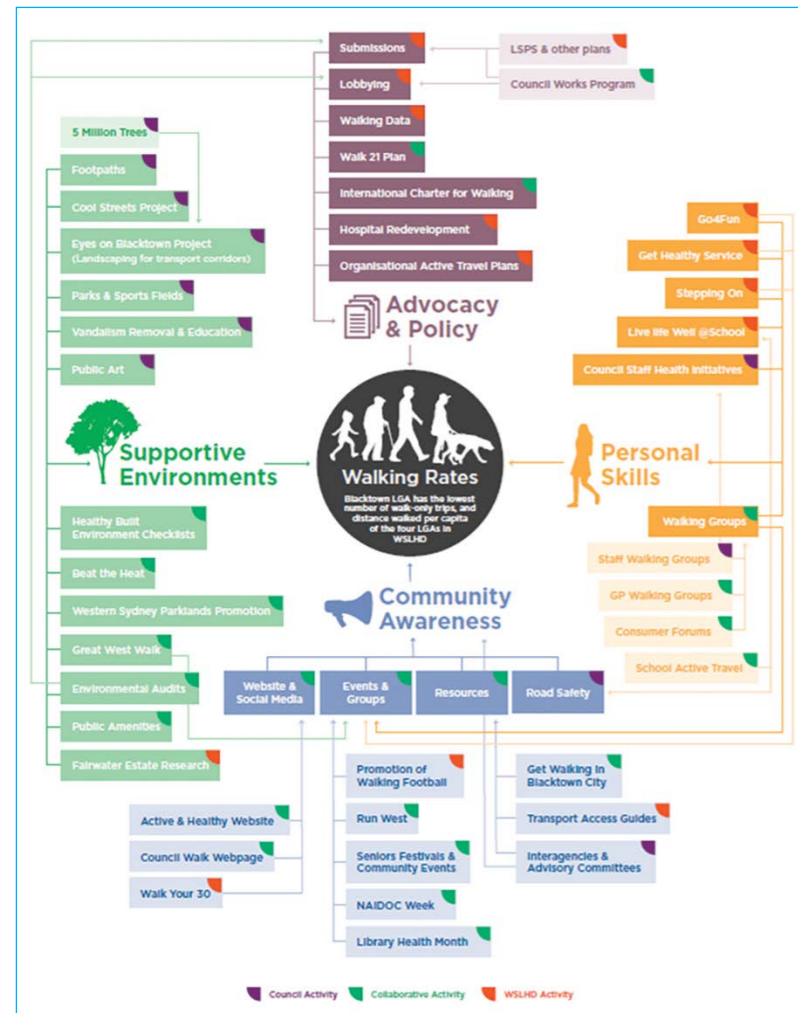
- the development of checklists for Council to ensure walkability is considered in the planning and design of built environments;
- conducting environmental audits, using the Heart Foundation's *Neighbourhood Walkability Checklist* and identifying improvements needed;
- research into amenities and infrastructure to support walking such as, public toilets and water refill stations;
- the promotion of walking events; and
- creating resources and communications, with ideas for places to walk and details of local walking groups, to encourage residents to increase their walking.

## Partnership approach

An evidence-based approach informed the partnership. Insight was gathered from community surveys, environmental audits, peer-reviewed research and NSW state-level policy and guidance documents. The Healthy Active by Design framework was also used to inform elements linked to walkability such as building design, safe and convenient movement within neighbourhoods, and a sense of community.

## Partnership implementation and process

The project has continued to evolve since it commenced in 2015. The partnership priorities are agreed at bi-annual executive meetings and activities requiring collaboration are progressed by working groups. Activities relating to the core business of each organisation are progressed internally, and consultation occurs when required. Progress of activities that relate to the partnership priorities are reported at executive meetings of the partnership.



**Diagram 1:** The poster developed by the Blacktown Council and Western Sydney Local Health District partnership



Timbertop Reserve

The purpose of the executive meetings is to guide the direction of the partnership, track progress, and provide an opportunity for information exchange and discussion on mutually relevant topics. It is typically attended by the Chief Executive Officer of Blacktown City Council, the General Manager of Blacktown Mount Druitt Hospitals and the General Manager, Integrated and Community Health, from Western Sydney Local Health District. Representatives from the Council's City Living, Environment, Community, and Recreation Planning and Design Teams, and the Western Sydney Local Health District Centre for Population Health and Western Sydney Diabetes Program also attend.

Working groups have been established to address key areas of action including walking data, healthy design of major projects, design of shared use paths and the promotion of walking. Each working group is currently active and has unique, mutually agreed deliverables, timelines and actions. These groups report to the executive meeting of the partnership.

The Western Sydney Diabetes Program is not a working group of the partnership as their program scope extends beyond Blacktown. However the program was invited to join the Executive Group in 2017 to assist in the communication of, and collaboration on, activities within Blacktown. The Western Sydney Diabetes Program, in collaboration with Council, has established General Practice walking groups and actively promotes opportunities to be active in Western Sydney.

## Evaluation

Rates of walking in Blacktown are reviewed by the Western Sydney Local Health District every three years using pooled data from the Transport for NSW *Household Travel Survey*<sup>6</sup>. In addition, changes to the local environment to support walking are also monitored.

Each working group has its own evaluation measures to determine the effectiveness of its actions and the key impacts of the work. These are assessed by analysing distribution records, audit reports, community surveys and case-studies.

## Resources

The project has been implemented to date using the existing resources of each partner organisation:

- Western Sydney Local Health District has contributed approximately 15 hours per week since 2015, towards partnership maintenance, communication and project facilitation;

- Council has provided graphic design, web-design and communications expertise; and
- Council and local health district staff are also actively engaged in the working groups and/or delivery of project outcomes.

## Key Insights and Lessons learnt

- Influencing population rates of walking is complex with many inter-related factors.
- To see sizeable improvements in population rates of walking, as part of everyday living, the provision of large-scale transport infrastructure projects would be required.
- Safety or lack of safety, actual or perceived, is a barrier to increasing walking rates. In some cases, actions designed to improve safety, or deter antisocial behaviour can contribute to perceptions that safety is an issue. For example:
  - locked toilets can contribute to the perception that an area is unsafe. Toilets are also a known barrier/enabler to participation in walking, as access to them can influence the journeys of walkers.<sup>7</sup>
  - many parks and reserves have no, or limited, lighting to deter antisocial use after dark. However, poor lighting is a barrier to physical activity, particularly for those with long commutes, for whom being active after dark is the only option.
- Strategies to promote walking require working with professionals from a range of Council departments. Executive endorsement of the strategy can encourage cross departmental collaboration towards achieving project objectives.

## Overall lessons from Health

Stakeholders may have different and competing priorities. For example, the plantation of large shade trees along the road network provide shade protection, air temperature reduction, urban heat reduction and increase walkability. However, there are often restrictions on the planting of large shade trees along the road network to protect drivers from injury. A wholistic view is needed to ensure that environments are designed for people first.