

## Why Walking?

# The Heart Foundation call for a Walking Strategy

### Key facts

- Only 51% of adults and 34% of children in South Australia meet the physical activity guidelines to achieve health benefits.<sup>4</sup> Physical inactivity is a risk factor for heart disease and for many other chronic diseases and contributes to overweight and obesity.
- Walking and cycling for recreation and transport contribute to our physical activity and reduce the risk of heart and other chronic diseases.<sup>1</sup>
- Promoting walking is a positive and equitable means of increasing our population levels of physical activity.<sup>2</sup>
- The built environment can either facilitate or discourage walking.<sup>2</sup>
- A whole-of-government approach is crucial in supporting and encouraging walking and in the creation of walkable communities.<sup>2</sup>



**The Heart Foundation wants SA to be a state where walking is a safe and natural choice for short trips.**

**Where people choose to walk more often and build it into their daily lives.**

The Heart Foundation advocates for the creation of healthy environments that encourage and support more people to walk more often. Walking is an activity that not only benefits the health of the population but provides gains in relation to economic vitality, climate change, traffic congestion, social cohesion and community safety.

Walking is the most fundamental form of mobility. It is inexpensive, emission-free, burns up kilojoules rather than fossil fuels, offers important heart health benefits, and is equally accessible for all regardless of income.<sup>3</sup>

### Call to action

The Heart Foundation is encouraging the state government to invest in walking to create a state that is pedestrian-friendly where walking is accessible, comfortable and safe.

The Heart Foundation is encouraging the government to develop an integrated State-Wide Walking Strategy and Action Plan that coordinates and 'joins up' existing policy, programs and entities to:

- Prioritise walkers, through collaboration with the Heart Foundation and other state peak bodies;
- Maximise the opportunities for walking and reducing car dependency;
- Build streets for people and provide pedestrian-friendly built environments, shared spaces and public spaces;
- Collaborate across strategies to improve provision for pedestrians;
- Improve the safety of walking;
- Plan and design for safe and comfortable walking environments;
- Provide opportunities to celebrate walking;
- Integrate walking with public transport
- Encourage walking through awareness and education activities;
- Conduct surveillance, research and evaluation.

The Heart Foundation encourages all levels of government and their departments to apply a "walking lens" to major infrastructure projects.

Walking works best for short trips, up to 20 minutes (2km) and is more likely to occur in locations with pleasant, cool streetscapes; good access to public transport; and a wide range of destinations nearby such as shops, schools, workplaces, recreational activities and services. At least 4/10 people regularly walk for transport purposes other than to work or study.<sup>14</sup>

## What are the benefits of walking?

There are wide-ranging benefits associated with increasing walking across health, economic and environmental dimensions.

### Health benefits

- Walking for an average of 30 minutes a day can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes by 30% to 40%.<sup>6-7</sup>
- Replacing one trip a day with walking increases the number of people meeting the recommended daily levels of physical activity and reduces their risk of mortality over a year.<sup>8</sup>

Walking also:<sup>3</sup>

- helps to maintain bone density, reducing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures
- helps to manage weight, blood pressure and blood cholesterol
- reduces the risk of heart disease and stroke
- helps to prevent and control diabetes
- reduces the risk of developing some cancers.



### Social benefits

- Walking is associated with increased social interaction, the development of social capital<sup>a</sup> and increased safety.<sup>11</sup>
- Elements such as greater land use mix, well-placed seating, greenery, features, wide pavements, active frontages, trees and shady canopies and articulated facades can all increase pedestrian social interaction.<sup>11</sup>

### Economic benefits

- It has been estimated that if more Australians were physically active for just 30 minutes a day, the Australian healthcare system could save \$1.5 billion annually.<sup>9</sup>
- A well-designed, quality street environment that promotes walking, cycling and public transport is also good for business and essential to the success of revitalisation strategies.<sup>10</sup> Streetscape enhancements add value to an area and are associated with higher retail rents and the attraction of new businesses.
- More people walking supports safety leading to fewer road casualties, injuries to pedestrians and traffic collisions.<sup>11</sup>
- Walking and cycling have been shown to have a positive impact on work performance.<sup>12</sup>

### Environmental benefits

- Walking, when incorporated into daily activities can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, noise pollution, air pollution if used to replace car trips.<sup>13-14</sup>
- Evidence shows that replacing short distance car trips – the most damaging to the environment - with walking can have a significant impact, considering that 55% of trips are five kilometres or less, of which 85% are by car.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Social capital can be defined as the networks and interactions between citizens; generally categorised by engagement with the political process, volunteering in community activities and socialising in the community.

## What's the problem? Doesn't everyone walk?

Across South Australia, half of the adult population are still not active enough to gain any health benefits<sup>4</sup> and this is coupled with an alarming rise in overweight and obesity. The reality is that many people struggle to reach healthy levels of daily physical activity.

**“The responsibility for accommodating the needs of pedestrians and walking are spread across a wide range of organisations and ministries.”<sup>3</sup>**

In South Australia (SA) walking consistently remains the most preferred recreational activity for adults and importantly is identified as the most likely activity that would be undertaken by those considering increasing their activity levels.<sup>5</sup> To increase walking across communities, multiple strategies are needed that simultaneously focus on the built environment, community education and access to walking programs. These strategies will help to create a positive social culture that values and supports walking.

The manner in which we design and build our cities and towns is important if we are to provide an environment that supports walking. We could easily be the most walkable state in Australia with our flat terrain, established trees and existing wide streets – but we need some strong leadership, innovative thinking and a willingness from our community to support the re-prioritisation of our planning and practice. The focus should shift to considering walking and cycling-friendly designs, as well as designing for car use.

Walking has the potential to contribute to the South Australian government's agenda through:

- State Strategic priorities, *Safe communities, healthy neighbourhoods* and *Creating a vibrant city*
- The State Public Health Plan 2019-2024
- SA Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024
- 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide
- Integrated Transport and Land Use Plan
- South Australia's Road Safety Strategy 2020
- Carbon Neutral Adelaide
- Keep Metro Traffic Moving Initiative
- Age-friendly South Australia.

## Why is the Heart Foundation involved in promoting walking?

The Heart Foundation is committed to improving the heart health of all Australians. Our goal is for Australians to be more active more often, particularly through walking; whether it be for recreation, social, health or transport reasons.



The Heart Foundation is involved in a number of strategies to increase physical activity that address the environmental, social and individual determinants of walking, including:

- Embedding **heart healthy design principles** into policy and practice through Health in All Policies collaborations such as the SA Active Living Coalition; working across government portfolios and with non-government organisations;
- **Healthy Active by Design** - The Heart Foundation has developed the Healthy Active by Design website of evidence-based tools and resource for those professionals developing healthy, liveable places and spaces;
- **Heart Foundation Walking** - Over the past 20 years the Heart Foundation has developed considerable experience, with running our free community walking group program. Currently there are over 46,000 active participants across Australia with 3000 in SA. This represents volunteer Walk Organisers, Area Coordinators, walkers and supporters;
- Working with organisations and councils to support the **Walk21 International Charter for Walking** and supporting the development of walking strategies.



## Towards a South Australian Walking Strategy

Only 51% of adults and 34% of children in South Australia meet the physical activity guidelines to achieve health benefits.<sup>4</sup> Physical inactivity is a risk factor for heart disease and for many other chronic diseases and contributes to overweight and obesity.

More walking for transport, and other short-trips in our local communities is not only good for physical, mental and social health, but is also good for local business, productivity, congestion and air pollution, building local jobs and social connectedness.

Our communities are often not designed to make healthy choices the easiest choice. Lack of quality footpaths, trees and shade, pedestrian friendly signals and poor public transport make it harder to walk or cycle for transport and recreation.

Our vision is one where people of all ages, both men and women, feel safe and comfortable to walk, and choose to walk for short trips, for recreation and, for their health.

But we need a coordinated approach. Walking should be everyone's business. A whole-of- government plan to get South Australians on their feet and walking more will help ensure a healthy, liveable and economically strong future.

## The solution

Invest to develop and implement a fully funded South Australian Walking Strategy and Action Plan that highlights walking as a critical mode of transport.

Include actions for:

- Prioritising walkers, through collaboration with Heart Foundation and other state peak bodies;

- Maximising the opportunities for walking and reducing car dependency;

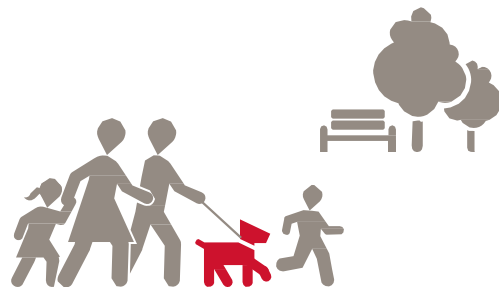
- Building streets for people and pedestrian-friendly public realm;

- Planning and designing for safe and comfortable walking environments using the Heart Foundation's [Healthy Active by Design online portal](#);

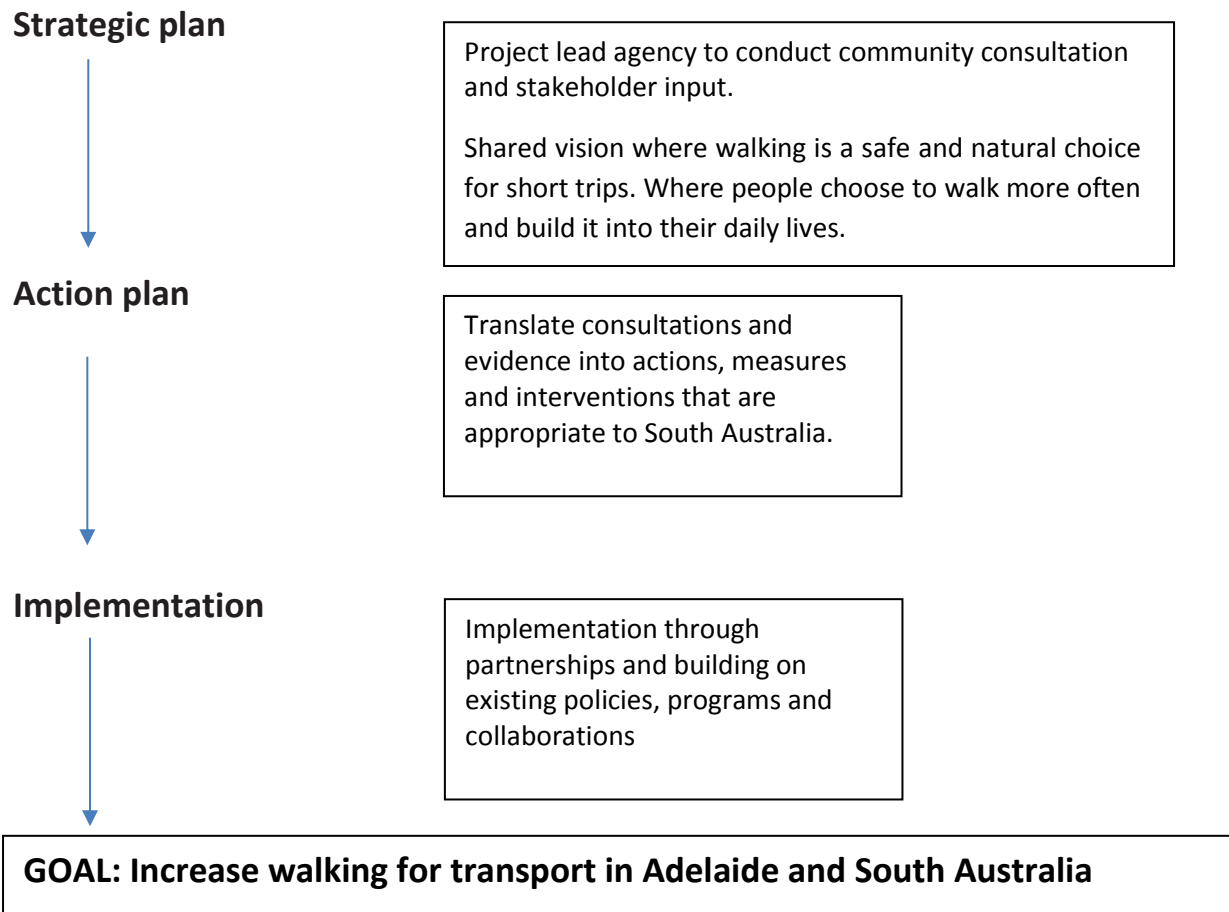
- Integration of best practice walking infrastructure into new neighbourhood developments;

- Education and culture change; and

- Surveillance, research and evaluation.



## Recommended approach



## Estimated costs

Invest \$2.5M + 1 x FTE for consultation and development of a State-Wide Walking Strategy and Action plan.

## References

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For heart health information and support,  
call the Helpline on 13 11 12 or visit [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au)

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