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Review, Reframe, Renew Lands Planning
Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics
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Dear Members of the Planning Board,

Heart Foundation, Northern Territory Division, welcomes the opportunity to provide comments with respect to the current **Building Confidence through Better Planning for the Northern Territory; Review, reframe, renew** initiative to deliver a better planning system to meet the needs of Territorians. The Heart Foundation is committed to making it easier for Australians to lead heart-healthy lives and for more than 20 years we have worked to support the creation of healthy built environments and help planners, developers and communities work towards creating healthier streets, towns and cities.

Health in relation to design and planning of the built environment needs to be a primary consideration. A recent comprehensive review by NSW Health, *Healthy Built Environment program* examined three domains for influencing how environments can affect health;

- Getting people active
- Connecting and strengthening communities; and
- Providing healthy food options

Physical Inactivity

It is well documented that the built environment is directly associated with physical activity levels of the community; it can either facilitate or discourage being active. Currently, physical inactivity contributes to almost one quarter (24%) of the burden of cardiovascular disease in Australia and physical inactivity is a significant factor in the epidemic of overweight and obesity.

Physical activity levels of Australian adults and children are well below recommendations and since the early 2000's, this number has continued to increase. Low levels of physical activity can be attributed to increased rates of chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, which places a significant financial burden on the community through medical costs and loss of productivity. In 2008, the cost of physical inactivity in Australia was \$13.8 billion with an estimated 16 000 premature deaths related to inactivity.

1. **Blueprint for an Active Australia:** <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Blueprint-for-an-active-Australia-second-edition.pdf>
2. **Healthy Active by Design:** www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au

Of particular concern is socioeconomic disadvantage, remoteness and individuals of Indigenous descent are more likely to have low physical activity participation rates. This further increases the risk of and rates of chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes in Territorians.

Poor Nutrition, Food Access and Availability

Poor nutrition has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, society and the environment. Poor diet makes a significant contribution to Australia's most prevalent chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and some cancers. Risk factors such as obesity, high cholesterol and hypertension are increased by high intakes of total kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugar and salt and low intakes of fruit and vegetables. In Australia, less than 7% of adults consume recommended intakes of fruit and vegetables for optimal health. Intake of ultra-processed, nutrient poor foods ('discretionary' foods), that are high in saturated fat, salt, sugar and total kilojoules make up 36% of adults total dietary energy intake and 38% of children's.

What we eat and drink is influenced by the entire food system with multiple interplaying factors including availability, accessibility, price, promotion and individual circumstances. However, the accessibility and availability of healthy food choices (or unhealthy food choices) where people live, work and play can have a direct impact on dietary behaviours.

Problems in today's food system that directly affect the diets of Australian's include the:

- Increasing trend to eat meals prepared outside the home which are of poorer nutritional quality.
- Social exclusion and food insecurity – lack of regular access to safe, nutritionally adequate, culturally acceptable food from non-emergency sources, is a key issue confounded by the link between food insecurity and obesity.
- Disparities in income, transport, physical access to retail outlets and varying levels of retail outlet exposure may make it difficult for some people to easily access food and stay healthy due to:
 - Low density urban expansion
 - High density of fast food outlets in some areas leading to greater consumption in lower socioeconomic status areas.

Planning for healthy food is an interplay between numerous planning decisions. Therefore, an overarching planning mechanism and objective to increase access to fresh, nutritious and affordable foods, and to reduce access to unhealthy food is required. Considerations regarding a healthy and accessible food supply should be apparent in the planning reform.

Planning decisions have a significant impact on our food system. Decisions are made about how land is used, where activity centres are located, how shops and services are distributed and where housing is sited. These decisions influence how easy it is to shop for fresh food, how accessible perishable vegetables are to the regions and how much horticultural businesses contribute to local economies.

Active Living

Blueprint for an Active Australia¹ identifies that government leadership and investment, including urban planning codes and policies, as vital to increase physical activity levels of Australians. This

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2. Healthy Active by Design: www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au

document outlines 13 Action Areas to improve physical activity levels and the health of Australians. Of note for this submission are Action Area 1 – Built Environments and Action Area 4 – Active Travel.

Action Area 1 – Built Environments

The built environment is one of three factors that appear to be associated with physical activity (the other two are individual and social environmental factors). Land use systems, transportation systems and urban design combine to create an environment that impacts people's decisions to be active thus mixed-use planning, population density and street connectivity must all be considered to create communities and neighbourhoods to support active living.

Specific recommendations include:

- Integrate urban, transport and infrastructure planning to achieve compact, liveable neighbourhoods serviced by public transport, walking and cycling and other social infrastructure.
- Prioritise infrastructure investment in walking, cycling and public transport projects.
- Integrate healthy planning principles and active living design codes in urban planning design and development policies and regulations.
- Develop open-space policies, standards and planning codes that ensure residents have access to a range of open space for both active and passive recreation within walking distance, accessible by pedestrian-friendly routes.

The following features are also recommended to be included in planning for and retrofitting neighbourhoods:

- Mixed land use.
- Higher densities to support access to local infrastructure and public transport.
- Transportation systems that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport.
- Urban design with high levels of street connectivity, diverse lot sizes and dwelling types and access to amenities.
- Careful siting of key facilities such as schools and retirement housing within street networks with low traffic volumes to encourage active travel.
- High quality public open space suitable for multiple user groups across the life span, including access to amenities.

Action Area 4 – Active Travel

Walking and cycling for recreation and transport, and increased use of public transport is good for health, the environment and the economy, and there is strong evidence that the way we build cities, communities and neighbourhoods impacts the travel behaviour choices of adults and children alike. Combinations of interventions are needed to effectively promote increased activity levels, which require action from all levels of government.

Recommended interventions include:

- Improved integration of land use, transport and infrastructure planning to achieve compact, liveable neighbourhoods served by public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure and other social infrastructure.
- Including walking and cycling infrastructure as part of all government funded urban transport projects.
- Integrate health planning principles and active living design codes in urban planning, design and development policies and regulations.

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To assist with the latter recommendation, Heart Foundation have implemented the Healthy Active by Design² program which focusses on eight design features and was developed to assist urban planners and developers to include these in their projects.

Action Area 4 – Active Travel also recommends the following features are included in planning, developing and retrofitting the built environment to support active living:

- Provide supportive active transport infrastructure such as suitable footpaths and cycle paths, bicycle parking facilities, shade and way-finding signage.
- Increase accessibility to public transport by improving pedestrian and bicycle access and networks around public transport stations.
- Integrate cycling and public transport by increasing storage options for cyclists at public transport stations.
- Increase the segregation of cyclists from motor vehicles on separate bicycle paths or on separate bicycle lanes, except in very low speed environments.
- Provide end of trip infrastructure such as safe bicycle parking facilities and lockers at workplaces, public transport hubs and public spaces such as libraries and community centres.

User Hierarchy

When planning for active living, it is prudent to note the user hierarchy for priority of consideration for each use in a street:

- Pedestrians – a fundamental human activity. It promotes health, well being and social interaction, increases vibrancy for places and communities and is an environmentally friendly way to travel.
- Cyclists – cyclists must be made to feel safe and comfortable, access needs must be met, and vehicular and non-vehicular interactions must be able to be managed.
- Public transport users – encourage pedestrian and access to public transport and integration of cycling and public transport.
- Motorists – provide capacity for anticipated use, without compromising other users, including designing streets to passively control the speed of traffic and design intersections to tolerate congestions, ensuring pedestrian, bicycle and public transport are a priority.

Parking Myths

Car parking is often raised as a need for a vibrant environment and economic needs. However, evidence suggests this is not the case.

High parking rates achieve:

- Convenience.
- Poor aesthetics.
- Low pedestrian activity.
- High traffic volumes.
- Short visits.

Whereas low parking rates achieve:

- More mode diversity.
- Uncertainty for drivers.
- Pedestrian activity.

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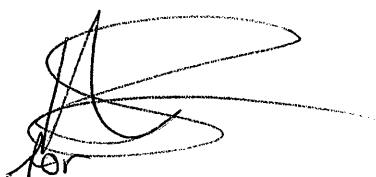
- Longer stays.
- More aesthetic form.

Combining the user hierarchy and current knowledge with respect to car parking, integrating policies and developments that support physical activity and health are more beneficial on numerous levels, including economically, environmentally and with respect to health, including mental health.

Healthy Active by Design

There is potential for the role of the built and natural environments in influencing health and wellbeing to be acknowledged further. The Heart Foundation recommends including some of the strategies in the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) award winning Healthy Active by Design² resource within the planning reform. This ground breaking design guidance promotes healthy environments and active communities. This is principally by creating the conditions, environments and opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating through the design of communities, streets, schools, public open space, recreation facilities and the use of active travel modes. This web based tool provides practical guidance on eight key design features, checklists, local case-studies, examples of projects from around Australia and the world, and links to evidence.

Heart Foundation, Northern Territory Division, thanks the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics for this opportunity to provide comment on the current **Building Confidence through Better Planning for the Northern Territory; Review, reframe, renew** initiative and looks forward to strengthening ties in the future.



Simon Dixon
CEO Heart Foundation, Northern Territory
8th December 2017

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