

2018

# ACTIVE TRAVEL

## Pathways to a Healthy Future

*Getting almost three million children and young people more physically active and healthier*

*Active School Travel: Pathways to a Healthy Future presents an implementation proposal for one of ten national policy priorities developed by leading Australian population health experts to improve the health of all Australians.*



AUSTRALIAN  
HEALTH POLICY  
COLLABORATION



## CONSENSUS STATEMENT

Enabling Australia's children to commute actively and safely to and from school should lead a national effort to increase physical activity and improve health for all generations, communities and individual abilities.

### The facts:

- Over 70% of children and 91.5% of young people do not meet physical activity recommendations [1].
- Declining rates of physical activity are contributing to accelerating rates of childhood overweight and obesity. Over one-quarter of Australian children are overweight or obese [2].
- 9.7% of school children have been measured as vulnerable in their physical health and wellbeing domain in the Australian Early development Census, a three yearly survey of children entering their first year of school [3].
- Regular physical activity is recognised as improving academic performance [4].
- Active travel is one of the easiest ways to incorporate physical activity into everyday life.

### The problem:

- Whilst the Australian government has produced physical activity guidelines for all age groups, nationally there has been little improvement in population-wide levels of physical activity. The physical, emotional and economic well-being of the majority of children and young people is being compromised by poor levels of physical activity.

### The policy solution:

The Australian Health Policy Collaboration and National Heart Foundation have partnered to support and facilitate a national collaboration of experts to develop a national policy framework and implementation strategy that will address the urgent need to improve physical activity engagement of Australian children and young people. Representatives from the health, education, transport, public health, academia and policy sectors have worked together to agree on the essential components for a national active school travel agenda that will enable 3.7 million Australian children to safely walk, scoot or cycle all, or part way to school.

A national active school travel strategy will deliver benefits to children, families and communities by:

1. Reducing sedentary behaviours, increasing physical activity and its associated health benefits.
2. Helping to create more vibrant, social and environmentally sustainable communities.
3. Contributing to pedestrian and road-user safety and reduce congestion around school communities.

The recommended national policy framework recognises the importance of participation by all levels of government – national, state and local – to enable the physical environments around all schools to be safe walking and riding spaces that enable all school students to actively travel some distance to school whether from their home or from a drop off point for vehicles.

Informed by the World Health Organization's Action Plan on Physical Activity, the expert collaboration recommended the following components for the national policy framework:

- Establishment of active environments adjacent to all schools that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists
- Adoption of a national target for physical activity



- Establishment of a virtual knowledge hub for schools, communities and local governments to provide evidence and implementation information for active school travel initiatives

The following organisations and experts support the framework:





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Levels of physical activity in the Australian population have declined dramatically in the last 30 years. Approximately 70% of children and 91.5% of young people and 44.5% of adults do not meet Australian health guidelines for physical activity. As physical activity levels have declined over the past three decades, there has also been a significant increase in the rates and impact of chronic diseases in the population.

Public health leaders and organisations in Australia support a funded National Physical Activity Action Plan to promote and facilitate opportunities for increasing physical activity in all aspects of daily life, including active travel. This is consistent with global evidence and international policy discourse on physical activity.

The forthcoming National Sport Plan, in development by the Australian government, provides the opportunity to achieve population-wide engagement in organised and community sports to directly improve the overall health of Australians. Robust commitment to promoting active school travel would help Australia to increase children and young people's physical activity levels immediately and would influence and encourage families and communities to be more active.

Active travel part or all of the way to school for all children is one of 10 priority policy actions for Australia that have been proposed by a national collaboration of 70 leading chronic disease experts. The 10 policy actions, presented in *Getting Australia's Health on Track* [1] identify what governments and others can implement in proven initiatives that will directly reduce risk factors for chronic diseases in the Australian population, consistent with the World Health Organization's (WHO) global agenda to prevent and reduce chronic diseases worldwide by 2025.

This paper builds on the policy proposal to *Increase Physical Activity* in Australia and provides a summary of evidence-based implementation strategies that will enable active school travel across the nation.

Drawing on the latest research and WHO leadership, a number of Australia's leading public health experts have worked together to develop a three-part policy framework for national active school travel:

1. Establishment of active environments adjacent to all schools that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists
2. Adoption of a national target for physical activity
3. Establishment of a virtual knowledge hub for schools, communities and local governments to provide evidence and implementation information for active school travel initiatives

Fully implemented, this framework will begin to shift active school travel from the margins to the mainstream with direct benefits to the 3.7 million primary and high school-aged children in Australia as well as to their families, schools and communities.

Rain, hail or shine, children should be encouraged, supported and able to safely walk, cycle or scoot to and from school.



## **ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Enabling Australia's children to commute actively and safely is an essential component of a national effort to increase physical activity and improve health for all generations, communities and individual abilities. Leading national population health and physical activity experts commend the adoption of a three-part policy framework by national, state and local governments to achieve active travel to school throughout the nation.

The policy framework proposes that:

- Physical environments adjacent to schools be reoriented to safe travel environments enabling all able children to walk, ride, scoot into and from school for a portion of their journey to school.
- Shared government and community investment strategies be implemented to facilitate the necessary physical environment and social and cultural changes to support safe active travel part or all of the way to and from schools.
- All levels of government are essential to a national active travel to school strategy and the strategy should have collaborative national leadership that is both multi-lateral and non-partisan
- There should be public accountability for implementation effectiveness and outcomes through establishment of a national target and evaluation of progress and best practice.



## ACTIVE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

### **Safer school zones, healthier communities.**

“Australian children are twice as likely to be killed as a car passenger than a pedestrian and more than four times as likely to be killed as a car passenger than as a cyclist” [5] (p. 4).

Despite this, high levels of parent concern about the safety of children travelling to and from school are recognised as a significant barrier to children actively travelling to and from school when that is possible.

All schools should be provided with safe and connected walking and cycling footpaths for all. Roads with high accident frequencies or are identified with particular traffic risks and hazards should be targeted to improve the safe around school areas.

Improvements to the built environment and infrastructure adjacent to all schools is a crucial component to get more people moving and influences their decisions to participate in daily exercise through active travel.

A national active school travel infrastructure grants program is needed to support and enable all schools, communities and local governments to address the barriers to active travel to school.

Guidelines for urban planners, transport authorities and road management should prioritise active travel in neighbourhoods adjacent to all schools.

Neighbourhood infrastructure that reduces traffic speed and volume, has good street connectivity to schools, limits parking availability during school pick-up and drop-off, and includes tree shade within the immediate school precinct promotes healthy behaviours for everyone living in the community. There are domestic programs to provide guidance.

Although active travel part of the way to and from schools may be more prevalent in regional and remote communities, all schools should be included the national infrastructure program to ensure that all school environments, including car parks, crossings, bus routes and paths encourage active travel . The provision of safe, well-designed and aesthetically pleasing pathways wherever feasible increases active school travel and contribute to various aspects of regional and remote community life.

Aside from the health benefits of active travel there are numerous other benefits: improved air quality and reduced noise, less motor vehicle congestion, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, better social cohesion and – particularly for children – improved academic performance.

#### **Policy Recommendation:**

A national active school travel infrastructure grants program should be established under the National Infrastructure Investment Fund to foster and/or build active environments adjacent to all schools to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists through a targeted needs based infrastructure investment strategy



## STRATEGIC NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Active travel is the one of the easiest ways to gain or accrue extra minutes of daily physical activity to meet the nationally recommended physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily for children aged 5 to 12.

Over 70% of children and 91.5% of young people in Australia are not meeting daily physical activity guidelines [2].

Australia needs better accountability for physical activity to track progress of policies and priorities such as active travel. We recommend a national target of:

*A 10% relative reduction in prevalence of insufficient physical activity by 2025.*

Achieving this target will increase physical activity to healthy levels for 30% more children and 10% young people nationally.

Leadership at all levels is required. National and state government departments of Health, Environment and Energy, Education and Infrastructure and Regional Development and local governments are key contributors to policy and management. Existing intergovernmental groups such as the Committee of Australian Sport and Recreation Officials (CASRO), Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should be utilised to progress the active travel agenda and be the nexus for school and community agencies.

Leadership through adoption of targets and indicators for physical activity is a necessary first step at all levels of government to monitor progress of active travel to and from school for Australian children.

### **Policy Recommendation:**

All Australian Governments should adopt a national target to reduce physical inactivity in children and young people by 10% by 2025.



## SCHOOL SUPPORT

Whilst there is evidence of extensive efforts taking place across the nation to promote active school travel and some notable examples of excellent outcomes for children and communities, there is currently no effective mechanism for sharing the learning and building on scale what is already working.

Infrastructure and environmental initiatives need to be supported by evidence-based information and practical resources for schools and their communities.

Establishing a centralised virtual knowledge hub and clearinghouse is low cost and high impact. This website (housed by an appropriate agency) should form part of the national policy framework to support schools and teachers in all jurisdictions to encourage active travel to and from school.

An online knowledge hub should facilitate networking, scan current or recent programs, catalogue what is working and where, and include implementation toolkits. Data collection and evaluation is central for learning, promoting best practice and showcasing innovation. The website should enable evaluation data to be collected across systems, localities and states. There are a number of Australian government websites which could be used as models for implementation.

The principles, lessons and impact of existing active travel initiatives should substantially inform the national policy framework of active travel for all school-aged children. Lessons can be learnt from tools such as the Health Promoting Schools framework and several state and territory-based initiatives.

### **Policy Recommendation:**

A national active school travel strategy should include and support a national virtual knowledge hub and clearinghouse for best practice active school travel initiatives.





## IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the national framework can be achieved with a national investment of \$90 million over three years. This would provide:

- A national needs based infrastructure grants program for all schools, within the national Infrastructure Investment Fund, to support schools, their relevant local governments and local communities to collaborate in the development of active environments adjacent to all schools that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists

**COST:** \$85 million over three years.

- Adoption of a national target for reduced physical inactivity among children and young people as part of a national leadership strategy
- A national virtual knowledge hub providing all schools, local communities and local governments with access to and support with the evidence of what works, resources for schools and communities to lead and support active travel by and within their communities, together with a national evaluation of the progress against the national target over the life of the program.

**COST:** \$5 million over three years.



## CONCLUSION

This policy paper is the result of a national collaboration of leading Australian experts to provide evidence based options to government and to communities to address the worryingly low rates of physical activity in children and young people. Active travel is one of the 10 priority policy actions the experts recommended.

Physical activity is a key building block for good health and development. The future economic prosperity, productivity and health of the nation depends on the current generation of young Australians.

Active travel can contribute significantly to both children and adults' daily levels of physical activity, providing physical, mental and social benefits, and help to shape the health and wealth of the nation.

Australia needs a coordinated approach to active school travel. A scan of active travel to school activities suggests good work is occurring, but this is not enough for a population-wide shift in levels of physical activity.

This three-part national policy framework for action requires urgent national policy leadership. A lack of attention to physical inactivity places Australia's social and economic future at significant risk. Now is the time to get more Australians moving.

Implementation of the national framework can be achieved with a targeted investment program of \$90 million over three years from within the National Infrastructure Investment Fund.

Active school travel is easy, effective, affordable and economically sound.



## REFERENCES

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