

Healthy By Design; A Rural Experience Project

Briefing note:

Healthy by Design (HbD) is a document prepared by the Heart Foundation in 2004 and is available from the [Heart Foundation's website](#). HbD was intended to help planners think about how well (or otherwise) the places we help create support people to lead healthy lives. It provides a pair of spectacles that enable planners and other professionals interested in community well-being to create places that will give the people who share that place the best possible chance of enjoying good health

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HbD does this by offering:

- A list of “design considerations” which are broadly the things that we plan and design that can influence healthy outcomes (eg streets, footpaths, parks, etc);
- A matrix which cross-references design objectives (safety, physical activity, etc) with the factors that influence these objectives (lighting, signage, maintenance etc); and,
- Some case studies illustrating how issues of health can be woven into developments and policies.

In 2012, as a result of funding made available by the Department of Health (Victoria), Swan Hill Rural City Council, Gannawarra Shire Council and Buloke Shire Council in conjunction with Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership, commissioned a study to test how well Healthy by Design worked in rural and regional communities. This study found that the guidelines, if implemented, supported *activity* but were less effective in supporting the other pillars of good health: such as access to healthy food options, recognising emotional and psychological health, and providing education/raising awareness about healthier lifestyles.

This briefing note seeks to introduce these ideas to guide planners and other local government professionals to plan for healthier communities.

How to use this briefing note

This note has been prepared to bring the issues surrounding planning and health to the forefront of planners' attention, not as restrictors to creativity or as “tick box” rules, but as things to be aware of when you are making decisions so you can do so with a greater awareness of how well a place can support people to become and/or stay healthy.

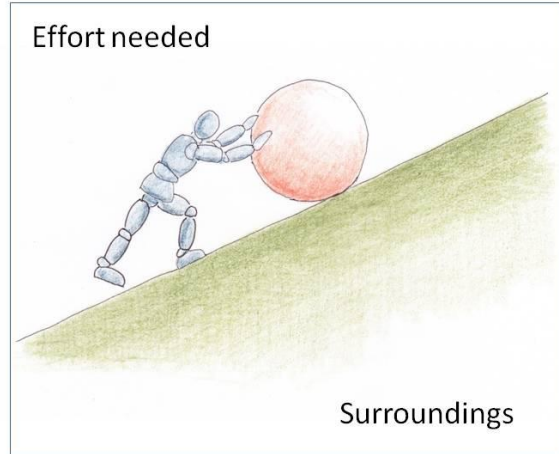


Enjoying the benefits of good health in a place that is Healthy by Design



It is easy, pleasant and convenient to stay healthy for most people

Enjoying the benefits of good health in a place that is not Healthy by Design



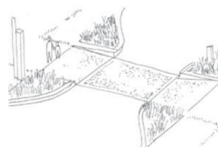
Staying healthy is a chore, requiring extra time and effort that will be prohibitive for many

Why should planners think about health?

This note takes the view of health adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO), where health isn't just an absence of illness, but is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" (WHO 1986). Therefore, supporting people to enjoy health is not just the responsibility of those we traditionally think of as being the health sector, but extends to everyone who influences the lives and well-being of others. Planners and urban designers play an important role in this as we control the built environment which provides the setting and backdrop for people's lives, and "impacts on our senses, our emotions, participation in physical activity and community life, our sense of community, and general well-being" (Butterworth 2000).

Furthermore, people's choices of behaviours (for example to go for a walk and play, or stay home and watch television) are based on their own subjective and often subconscious interpretation of the appeal and perceived benefits of these behaviours and the alternatives. This is directly influenced by the quality of the environment that these behaviours happen within and the ease of getting to the places where they can occur. If an activity is perceived as too difficult to get to and its setting is unpleasant or uncomfortable, then people are less likely to bother going there; no matter how beneficial the activity may be.

In essence, the quality of our surroundings influences what those surroundings allow us to do and what they deter us from doing. Consequently, planning for health is about supporting healthy behaviours and making them relatively more attractive than unhealthy behaviours. In other words, planning for health is about tipping the balance in favour of those influences that support healthy behaviour against those influences that deter it.



Amending Healthy by Design to Rural and Regional Communities

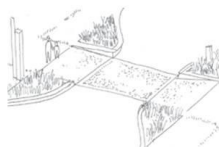
Design Priorities

Healthy by Design represents an excellent starting point to identify the issues surrounding planning for health. However, the study mentioned above found that in order to ensure that these tools can best be nuanced to the circumstances of rural and regional communities, planners and other allied professionals should consider these tools in conjunction with the following recommended changes:

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Healthy by Design provides advice in the form of a list of design considerations and a matrix of like design considerations to assist planners support healthy outcomes. The objectives of these considerations are not made explicit. Making them explicit and transparent will help planners connect their actions to desired outcomes. In rural and regional communities, we found the following priorities particularly relevant:

Design Priority	Explanation
Think about how the <i>process</i> as well as <i>product</i> of planning and design can support peoples well-being	Getting people involved and empowering them in the design process can give them a sense of relevance and control over their future. This can support their well-being and allow them to set and meet challenges that can contribute to their emotional health and sense of self worth.
Facilitate greater sustainability	This will help ensure places can continue to support people's well-being in the long term.
Support the viability of local communities	Economic vitality and the reassurance it brings, can contribute to greater emotional health and encourages people to invest in their surroundings, in financial and emotional terms. This suggests that protecting local businesses and industry (typically farming) has a role in supporting health.
Support better access to food	Activity is not the only factor affecting healthy outcomes. The food people can access also affects their health. Of course planners cannot control what gets sold in shops but supporting community gardens, farmers' markets, co-locating community facilities where people have a choice of food outlets or collaborating with community health programs are amongst the ways that planners can help make it easier to access fresh, nutritious, affordable, tasty, culturally appropriate food. More advice about how you can reconcile this with the other objectives of planning and design can be found in Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design, produced by the Heart Foundation (2010)
Build social capital from physical capital	A lot of our health and well-being comes from the emotional connections we have with one another and what those connections enable us to do (exchange ideas, offer support/help, form families, belong to a team etc).



Designing social infrastructure such as community buildings, parks, squares, playing fields etc can support and nurture these connections.



Dareton Settlers Square: An abandoned car park turned into a town square to provide people with a place to meet, celebrate local history and provide a focus for community pride (J Donovan for Wentworth Shire Council (NSW)).

Cultivate optimism

Fostering resilience amongst people and communities to future threats, reassuring people that their community is important through appropriate investments in health and wellbeing can represent a 'vote of confidence' that may help foster a sense that it's not worth giving up and help people maintain a sense of purpose. This is important in increasingly marginal rural communities that are facing emerging challenges of climate change and a resource constrained future.

Facilitate greater access for all

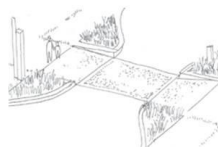
Not everyone has the physical or emotional ability to access all the opportunities their community may offer. People who have limited mobility or are psychologically fragile may find their choices constrained by surroundings that make them feel unwelcome. In order to assist everyone to enjoy the benefits of their community – and enable them to contribute to their community - requires careful thought of the physical characteristics that encourage or discourage people from enjoying a place.

Foster social inclusion

People who live in rural and regional towns are inherently community minded. However for many who fall outside the conventional spectrum ("footy or netball, beer or coffee") there may be little to engage them in their community. Identifying and including these often disenfranchised people and providing a diversity of opportunities to gather and express themselves can help them from falling through the cracks.

Resonate with community values

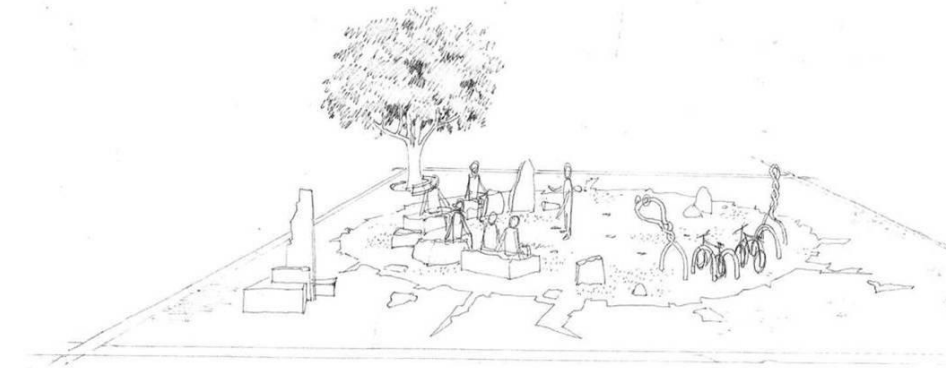
Rural communities are different, different to each other and different to urban communities. To this end it is important that a designer or planner consider this in their work and avoids assuming "cookie cutter solutions" to



Support incidental

ensure interventions are seen as affirming that community's distinctiveness.

In rural communities diverse people, with diverse needs and priorities have to share the same spaces, facilities and areas. Designing things so they can meet multiple needs and be looked on by many different pairs of eyes as relevant to them will be an important consideration in making places that are seen as welcoming and that invite people to be active and interact.



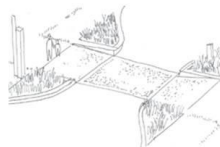
The cyclosaurus is an example of a place that was designed to be a place where people could sit and stay, rest, chat, as well as being a cycle rack, public art feature and minor landmark. One intervention resonating with many people for many reasons (J Donovan for Southern Grampians Shire Council)

Look on every intervention as an opportunity to learn and share

Every change we make changes its surroundings and influences the wealth of stories a place is accruing. This provides opportunities to help people learn about and celebrate an area's past and present and the people who had lived there. By recording these stories and honouring them we allow people to connect more with their surroundings and their community. Furthermore, by getting local people involved in producing the interventions, whether they be landscape or signage or something else, local business is supported and the opportunity exists to "skill up" local people and cultivate a sense of satisfaction in their work



Well designed interpretive and directional can tell the stories of the town and open peoples eyes up to the opportunities of their surroundings as well as being an attractive addition to the townscape in its own right (J. Donovan for Colac-Otway Shire)



Design Considerations

The study found that the design considerations listed within HbD might be even more useful with the following variations:

Fostering Community Spirit

Unlike the other considerations which are all tangible things that get built (parks, footpaths etc.) or are operated (transport) fostering community spirit is really a design *objective* that is influenced by the way we design these tangible things. Consequently it should be removed from the “design considerations” section and its very important provisions recognised as design objectives, as described above, with the physical and management measures needed to support community spirit distributed amongst the relevant design consideration.

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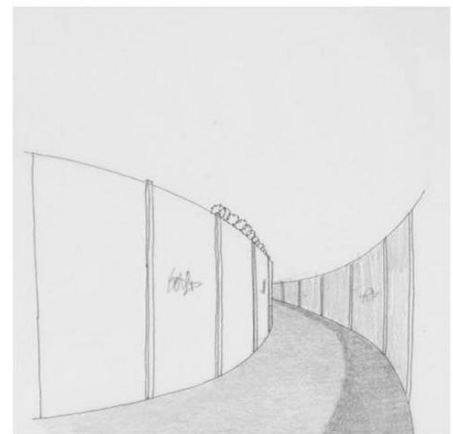
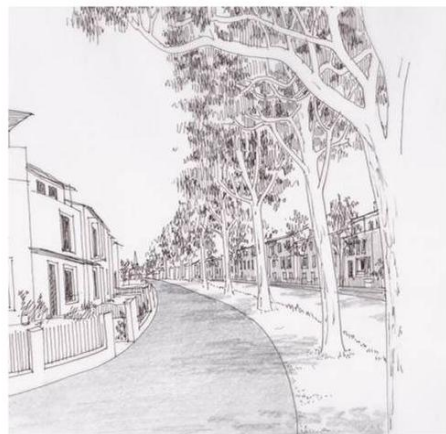
Changes to existing HbD design considerations

Design Consideration(s)
Walking and Cycling Routes Open Space Local Destinations
Local destinations Open Spaces Walking and Cycling Routes

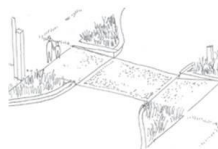
Suggested adaption to Rural and Regional areas

Consider installing distance markers of a known and consistent distance apart along key routes. Such recognisable markers will assist people to set challenges for themselves (e.g. “today I will run an extra kilometre” because they will know how far a kilometre is or “I will try and run a km in a personal best time”).

How far people will walk will depend not just on distance but also the quality of the journey and the quality of the destination. The guidelines adopted by Baw Baw Shire “Active by Design” provide some insights into the characteristics that make walking and cycling not just possible but preferable. They do this by diminishing the physical and psychological barriers that may reduce the distance people are willing to walk whilst increasing the characteristics that invite people to walk further than they may otherwise do.



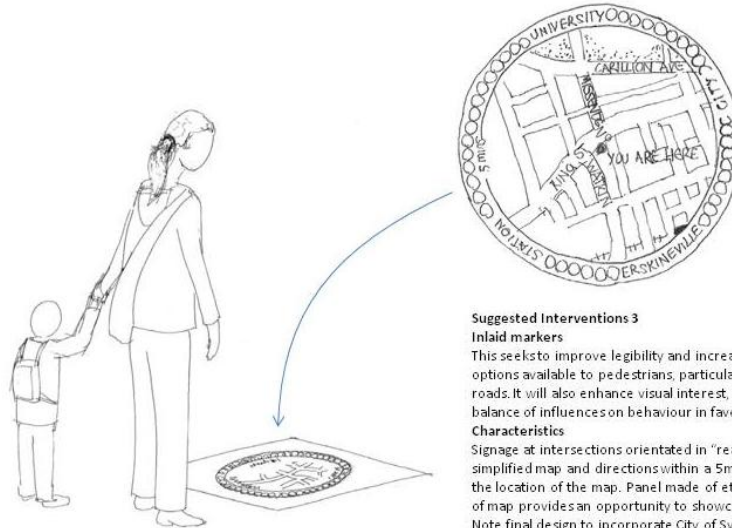
The footpath on the left is the same width, alignment and gradient as the one on the right, but for most people the distance they are willing to walk will be much further if their surroundings are like those on the left: pleasant, safe, attractive and offer us interesting things to distract us .



Seating, signage,
lighting, fencing and
walls

These can be seen as the support infrastructure for activity, and should be identified as such, making explicit their impact on walking. This design consideration might also include the phrase “and other street furniture” in its title as this explicitly includes public art, bubblers, interpretive material etc that can all support good health outcomes.

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Suggested Interventions 3

Inlaid markers

This seeks to improve legibility and increase understanding of the options available to pedestrians, particularly the alternatives to RTA roads. It will also enhance visual interest, which can help change the balance of influences on behaviour in favour of walking.

Characteristics

Signage at intersections orientated in “real world” alignment with simplified map and directions within a 5 minute isochrone centred on the location of the map. Panel made of etched/laser cut steel. Design of map provides an opportunity to showcase local artists. Note final design to incorporate City of Sydney logo.

Example of inlaid marker that can reassure people how easy and convenient walking is (J. Donovan for Sydney City Council)

Further Reading

Butterworth, I. 2000, *The Relationship Between the Built Environment and Well-being: a Literature Review* Victorian Health Promotion Foundation February 2000 Melbourne, Australia

Heart Foundation, *Healthy by Design* 2004

(<http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/Healthy-by-Design.pdf>)

Heart Foundation, *Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design*, 2010

<http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/Food-sensitive-planning-urban-design-full-report.pdf>

Baw Baw Shire, *Active by Design* 2009

http://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/files/376958db-8d43-4fe4-9b5e-9fbb00d6ea97/BawBaw_ABD_FINAL20090526.pdf

