

Walk it out: Urban design plays key role in creating healthy cities

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Melbourne skyline.

Residents of new housing developments increased their exercise and their wellbeing when they had more access to shops and parks, a new University of Melbourne study reveals.

The ten year study found that the overall health of residents of new housing developments in Western Australia, improved when their daily walking increased as a result of more access to parks, public transport, shops and services.

Lead researcher Professor Billie Giles-Corti, Director of the McCaughey VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing at the University of

Melbourne said the study provided long-term evidence that residents' walking increased with greater availability and diversity of local transport and recreational destinations.

"The study demonstrates the potential of local infrastructure to support health-enhancing behaviours," she said.

The study examined the impact of [urban planning](#) on active living in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia. More than 1,400 participants building homes in new housing developments were surveyed before relocation to new homes and approximately 12 months later.

The study found that for every local shop, residents' physical activity increased an extra 5-6 minutes of walking per week. For every recreational facility available such as a park or beach, residents' physical activity increased by an extra 21 minutes per week.

"This means that where there is an environment that supports walking with access to multiple facilities residents walked much more," Professor Giles-Corti said.

These findings could inform public health and [urban design](#) policy demonstrating that people respond to an environment that is supportive of [physical activity](#).

"Given that being physically active reduces the [risk of heart disease](#) and diabetes, which are both huge costs to the [health system](#), these results could have huge implications for [government policy](#) such as the Victorian State Government's new Metropolitan Planning Strategy," Professor Giles-Corti said.

The study was published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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