

Position Snapshot

Why Walking?

The Heart Foundation case for investment in walking

Key facts

- Walking and cycling for recreation and transport are important in reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases and have a wide range of benefits for physical and mental health, as well as social and community health.¹
- Promoting walking is a positive and equitable means of increasing our population levels of physical activity.²
- The built environment can either facilitate or discourage walking.²
- A whole-of-government approach is crucial in supporting and encouraging walking and in the creation of walkable communities.²



The Heart Foundation wants South Australia to be a state where everyone is a walker. Where streets, parks, public spaces and suburbs are accessible, secure, lively and enjoyable so that people choose to walk more often and build it into their daily lives.

The Heart Foundation works towards creating 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.³

CALL TO ACTION

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

The Heart Foundation is encouraging local governments to develop integrated walking strategies that coordinate and 'join up' existing work, as well as:

- Encourage walking through awareness and education activities;
- Collaborate across strategies to improve provision for pedestrians;
- Provide pedestrian-friendly built environments, streets for people, shared spaces and public spaces;
- Improve the safety of walking;
- Increase inclusive mobility for all ages;
- Reduce road danger;
- Reduce crime and the fear of crime;
- Provide opportunities to celebrate and enjoy walking;
- Integrate walking with public transport

The Heart Foundation encourages all levels of government and their departments to apply a "walking lens" to infrastructure projects such as roads and residential developments.

The Heart Foundation wants all South Australians to think about how they can walk more as part of their day.

The vitality of all cities is closely linked to people occupying the urban space, not only for trip purposes. Walking is at the heart of urban life and contributes to liveable, attractive, prosperous and sustainable cities.³

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

Across the South Australian population, physical activity levels are increasing, but still half of the adults are still not active enough to gain any health benefits⁴ 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.

For many South Australians walking is a great source of pleasure and social wellbeing.

“Responsibility for accommodating the needs of pedestrians and accommodating walking are spread across a wide range of organisations and ministries.”

Source: OECD, International Transport Forum 2011

In South Australia (SA) walking consistently remains the most preferred activity for adults and importantly is identified as the most likely activity that would be undertaken by those considering increasing their activity levels.⁵ 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 and existing wide streets – all we need is some innovative thinking and a willingness from our community to support the reprioritisation 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 local government agenda for community wellbeing and with the new Public Health Act, contribute to reducing chronic disease. A focus on increasing walking in our community will support councils' walking strategies, the *Eat Well Be Active Strategy for South Australia 2011-2016*⁶, and the Government's priority agenda on safe communities and healthy neighbourhoods.

Why is the Heart Foundation involved in walking?

The Heart Foundation is committed to improving the health of Australians. As part of our work the Heart Foundation is focused on encouraging Australians to increase the amount they walk, whether it be for recreation, social, health or transport reasons.



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

- **Creating walking and cycling friendly environments** through collaborations such as the South Australian Active Living Coalition and by working with governments
- **Heart Foundation Walking** - Over the past 17 years the Heart Foundation has developed considerable experience, a growing evidence base and corporate knowledge around walking group programs. Currently there are over 20,000 active participants across Australia with over 3000 in SA. This represents volunteer walk organisers, Area Coordinators, walkers and supporters.
- **Heart Foundation Walking@Work** – Workers who are physically active are likely to experience higher satisfaction and motivation, increased productivity and reduced absenteeism. The program encourages employees to walk at any time of the day, whether it is individually or with others. Employees can walk: as part of a structured walking group, to and from work, at lunchtime, to meetings, or hold walking meetings.
- Working with local governments to support the **Walk21 International Charter for Walking** and supporting the development of walking strategies.

The Heart Foundation is encouraging more South Australians to think about how they can walk more often as part of their day.

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 30 minutes a day or more can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by up to 30%.⁷
- Fact: Travelling by public transport contributes an average of 41 minutes/day of cycling or walking, whereas travel to work by car, taxi or motorbike contributes an average of only 8 minutes/day of activity.⁸

Walking also:³

- 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 and increased safety.¹¹
- Fact: 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.¹¹

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.⁹
- 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹
- Walking and cycling have been shown to have a positive impact on work performance.¹²

Environmental benefits

- Walking, when incorporated into daily activities can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, noise pollution, air pollution if used to replace car trips.¹³
- Evidence shows that replacing short distance car trips – the most damaging to the environment - with walking can have a significant impact, considering that 40% of all car trips are less than 3km.¹⁴

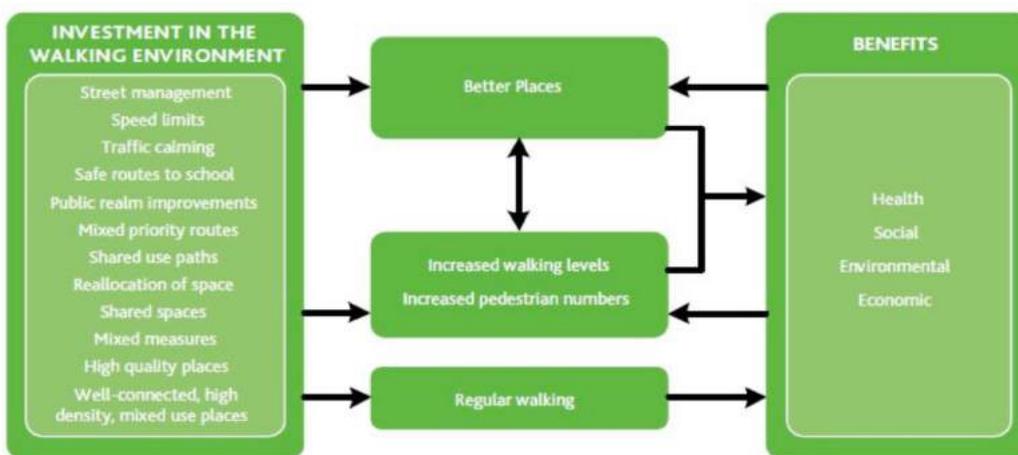


“Travelling by public transport contributes an average of 41 minutes/day of cycling or walking, whereas travel to work by car, taxi or motorbike contributes an average of only 8 minutes/day of activity.”

Why invest in walking?

Investments in the walking environment can take a number of forms (see Figure 1). These investments are aimed at creating better places for people. These enhancements lead to more walking which can generate benefits to physical and mental health and wellbeing, social interaction and safety, economic benefits (to businesses and property owners), and environmental improvements. These benefits and the relationships between them are multi-faceted and complex, but evidence continues to add to the knowledge about the best environments to encourage walking.

Figure 1



Source¹¹

Further resources

[Healthy by Design SA: A guide to planning, designing and developing healthy urban environments in South Australia \(2013\)](#)

A resource to assist planners and related professionals to design healthy urban environments that enable healthy lifestyles.

[Streets for People Compendium for South Australia Practice \(2012\)](#)

A resource to provide guidance on design principles for creating walking and cycling friendly streets.

[Position Statement on the Built Environment and Walking \(2009\)](#)

[Good for Business: the benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly \(2011\)](#)

This discussion paper asserts that a well-designed quality street environment that promotes walking, cycling and public transport is good for business and the local economy.

The Heart Foundation promotes the [Walk21 International Charter for Walking](#) which shows how to create a culture where people choose to walk.

[Heart Foundation's Walkability Checklist \(2011\)](#)

The walkability checklist is a consumer advocacy tool designed to help individuals and groups audit their local walking environment.

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