Guiding West Australians’ future
Introduction

I am honoured to be Patron of the Centre for the Built Environment and Health, which operates within the School of Population Health at UWA.

The Centre was the first of its kind internationally, and works in areas of national and international significance. Its focus is on solving complex 21st century problems related to housing people in healthy, sustainable communities.

The Centre’s mission is to undertake policy-relevant research that influences planning and urban design policy and practice. Its research aims to prevent major chronic diseases such as heart disease, mental health, diabetes and some cancers. Its findings are relevant to a number of industry sectors including health, planning, transportation planning, property development, housing and environmental protection.

Since its inception, the Centre has attracted research grants exceeding $8 million for research evaluating the impact of government policies aimed at creating pedestrian and age-friendly environments to meet the needs of children through to our ageing population, and the economic impact of creating more walkable neighbourhoods.

An Advisory Board of key external and internal stakeholders provides advice to the Centre’s Director, Professor Billie Giles-Corti. To ensure its research is relevant, the Centre works also in partnership with a range of industry partners.

I invite you to explore the opportunities to work with the Centre for the Built Environment and Health, and by doing so, use its findings to help create a healthy and sustainable future for all Western Australians.

Dr Ken Michael AC
GOVERNOR
How does the urban environment influence our health?

Where and how we live can have a big impact on our wellbeing, and our physical and mental health. Many lifestyle factors influence our health including how much physical activity or sitting we do, the amount and type of food we eat, whether we belong to recreational groups and have supportive social networks.

The built environment – urban and streetscape design, access to public open space, public transport and local shops, the types of housing we live in - can affect all of these lifestyle factors.

The Centre for the Built Environment and Health researches these and other factors to study their impact on the health, behaviour and wellbeing of Western Australians.

This research informs the design of communities to meet the needs of multiple population groups from young children and adolescents through to older adults.
Towards a sustainable urban environment

The Centre for the Built Environment and Health was established within The University of Western Australia in 2007. Its mission is to undertake policy relevant research that builds capacity and influences planning and urban design policy and practice to create healthy and sustainable communities.

The Centre for the Built Environment and Health’s award-winning work is of national and international significance, addressing areas of growing concern, including:

- How to house a rapidly growing population in healthy, environmentally and socially sustainable communities;
- The economic impact of major chronic preventable diseases;
- The social sustainability of communities including social capital and sense of community;
- Meeting the needs of children and an ageing population;
- Overweight and obesity;
- Sustainable transport; and
- Climate change, particularly in relation to transport and land use policy.

Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) members have agreed to report on criteria for future planning of capital cities by 2012, including health, liveability, wellbeing, social inclusion and world class urban design. The Centre for the Built Environment and Health can play a vital role in the formulation of Western Australian State Government policy in these areas.
Relevant Research Disciplines

- Urban planning
- Urban design
- Transportation planning
- Architecture
- Landscape architecture
- Population health
- Engineering
- Recreation planning

Influenced Policy Areas

- Planning
- Transport
- Preventative health
- Health promotion
- Health economics
- Education
- Housing
- Sustainable development

Research focus

The Centre for the Built Environment and Health's focus is on researching methods that promote healthy and sustainable communities for people of all ages.

In keeping with its vision of being policy relevant, multidisciplinary and collaborative, the Centre involves collaborations across four schools and centres from three faculties within UWA, one independent research institute and two research centres at Curtin University, and has active collaborations with four government departments and three NGOs, as well as sponsorship arrangements with one government department and one private sector organisation.
Advisory Board and Sponsors

The Advisory Board includes:

- Director Planning, Multiplex Brookfield, Mr Evan Jones (Chair)
- Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts, UWA, Professor Simon Anderson
- Chief Executive Officer, WALGA, Ms Ricky Burges
- Health Promotion Director, Healthway, Dr Jo Clarkson
- General Manager, Business Development & Marketing, LandCorp, Ms Kerry Fijac
- Deputy Head of School of Population Health, UWA, Professor Elizabeth Geelhoed
- Director, Centre for the Built Environment and Health, UWA, Professor Billie Giles-Corti
- Department of Planning
- Director, Hames Sharley, Mr Warren Kerr
- Manager, Population Health Policy Branch, Department of Health, Ms Sue Leivers
- Chairman, WA Planning Commission, Mr Gary Prattley
- National Physical Activity Manager, National Heart Foundation, Mr Trevor Shilton
- Partner, Minter Ellison, Ms Margie Tannock

The Centre receives valuable support from its Foundation Corporate Sponsor Minter Ellison, and Land Development Agency Partner LandCorp.
Play is a vital part of children’s physical, social and emotional development. However, busy modern lifestyles, smaller backyards, ‘stranger danger’ concerns, and shifting patterns of housing, work, school and leisure have altered traditional notions of childhood freedom and often encroach on children’s play time and play space.

There is very little Australian research or documented consultation relating to children and young people’s perspectives on playgrounds and outdoor play spaces. Community consultation is used in community planning, but is primarily undertaken with adults or key stakeholder groups.

This study seeks to address the shortage of literature and understanding of opportunities for Australian children to play from the perspective of parents, children and those involved in the design and provision of parks and playgrounds. Issues relating to policy and practice are embedded in the way in which the research questions and methods are framed.

Project funding: UWA: Research Development Award; Healthway. Industry Partner Funding: Kings Park Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority
CBEH Research: Connected Communities

Substantial evidence confirms that many of the underlying causes of poor health derive from social, environmental, economic and cultural factors that occur in the areas where people live, work and play. Community centres potentially provide a natural but under-utilised partner and existing infrastructure for health promotion practitioners and activities.

The overall aim of the Connected Communities project was to assess the appropriateness of a community centre as a setting for community-based health promotion activities and reducing socially determined barriers to health within a disadvantaged community. The project encompassed three stages: a community survey of South Lake residents; a survey of participants at South Lake’s Ottey Community Centre; and interviews with the community centre’s staff and stakeholders.

The project found evidence to support the value of community centres in providing a hub for the community both physically and through the provision of various programs, activities and information; and facilitating social contact including the development of friendships and social support networks.

Project funding: Healthway: Social Determinants of Health Research Grant.
Industry partner: South Lakes Ottey Community Centre.
CBEH Research: TRansport, Environment and Kids (TREK)

There are growing concerns about children’s levels of physical activity and increasing levels of overweight and obesity. Encouraging active transport among children, particularly walking to school, has been identified as one strategy to increase physical activity.

Given the design of contemporary neighbourhoods, the real potential for children to walk to school is unknown. In addition, there is no objective data on the extent to which the urban design surrounding schools hinders or facilitates walking to school.

The overall aim of this study was to examine the effect of the urban design of local neighbourhoods on Years 5 to 7 primary school children using active modes of travel to school and other local destinations, taking into account other individual and social environmental factors.

The study team used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to select schools located in high and low ‘walkable’ neighbourhoods and surveyed nearly 1,500 children attending those schools. The study found that children attending schools located in neighbourhoods with well connected street networks but with roads with more traffic were less likely to walk or cycle. The study highlights the importance of the siting of schools to minimise exposure to traffic, and for planning policies to have a greater focus on the needs of children.

Project funding: National Health and Medical Research Council
Project Collaborator and Industry Partner: WA Department of Transport
CBEH Research: RESIDential Environment Study (RESIDE)

RESIDE began as a five year study evaluating the impact of urban design on health; particularly the impact of urban design on walking, cycling, public transport usage and sense of community. With additional funding from Healthway, it is now a 10-year study.

RESIDE is unique internationally. It is designed to evaluate the impact of the Department of Planning’s Liveable Neighbourhood Guidelines, with approximately 1,800 people building homes in new neighbourhoods agreeing to participate. These people will be asked to complete four surveys over 8 years about their current lifestyles and perceptions about their neighbourhood. The study team will use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to measure the built environment around their homes (e.g., the number and types of parks, access to shops and services, footpaths, cycle paths).

By surveying participants before they moved into their new homes, the study team can distinguish whether people select neighbourhoods that cater for their current lifestyles and health behaviours, or whether the built environment actually shapes lifestyles and health behaviours.

Eco-RESIDE is a complementary project, designed to add an economic analysis to the RESIDE project. It will investigate the economic efficiency of urban design as a means of increasing physical activity and promoting health.

Project funding: Healthway (RESIDE I and II); ARC (RESIDE I); NHMRC (EcoRESIDE).

Project Collaborators and Industry Partners: WA Department of Planning, National Heart Foundation, Water Corporation, Petcare Information and Advisory Service Australia
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