



**UNSW**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

# Research Implementation Strategy

September 2012

Never Stand Still

Faculty of Built Environment

Healthy Built Environments Program



THE HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS PROGRAM

## **What is the Healthy Built Environments Program?**

The Healthy Built Environments Program is an innovative collaboration that brings the built environment and health together. The Program is situated in the City Futures Research Centre, Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of NSW (UNSW). Core funding of \$1.5 million for the Program comes from NSW Health (2009-2014).

As Australia faces increasing health costs from rising rates of obesity, diabetes and other lifestyle diseases, health workers are seeking to influence the design of cities to make them more supportive of healthy ways of living. Recent research has demonstrated links between modern epidemics and the way of life in cities. Car-dominated transport, reduced opportunities for exercise, increased fast food availability and lack of social connection are all implicated. Increasingly the health sector is focusing on prevention and to be effective, health professionals need to work in collaboration with other professional groups, especially those from the built environment.

The Healthy Built Environments Program is contributing to revitalising the relationship between the built environment and health professions so that together we can create built environments that support people being healthy in their everyday lives.

The Healthy Built Environments Program vision is that built environments will be planned, designed, developed and managed to promote and protect health for all people.

## **Healthy Built Environments Program Personnel**

The Healthy Built Environments Program is led by Director Associate Professor Susan Thompson (urban planning) with strategic input from Professor Tony Capon (public health). A Senior Research Officer supports the Director and all activities of the HBEP. At various times research assistants contribute to the Program's work, as do postgraduate and undergraduate students at UNSW.

A consortium of partners from built environment and health disciplines across the public and private sectors contributes to the work of the Healthy Built Environments Program. The Consortium Partners bring a multitude of skills in research, management and education, together with a breadth of knowledge across the built environment and health disciplines.

## **Healthy Built Environments Program Contact**

Further information on the Healthy Built Environments Program can be obtained by visiting the Program's website: <http://www.be.unsw.edu.au/programmes/healthy-built-environments-program/about> or contacting the Healthy Built Environments Program by email: [hbep@unsw.edu.au](mailto:hbep@unsw.edu.au)

## **Background to the Research Implementation Strategy**

The Healthy Built Environments Program aims to support the development in NSW of current and future communities in which the built environment promotes good health for all. This is being achieved through the Healthy Built Environments Program's three identified core strategies:

- Research
- Education and Workforce Development
- Leadership and Advocacy.

The Healthy Built Environments Program's Research Implementation Strategy (RIS) is a direct outcome of the HBEP Research Strategy 2012-2014 which was adopted by the Advisory Board on 23 February 2012. The RIS proposes key research questions emanating from the Research Strategy in relation to healthy built environments that NSW Health wants to answer. NSW Health has identified two specific research projects as addressing current gaps in understanding and knowledge. Both projects have high policy and practice relevance and are scheduled to be undertaken in the 2012-2013 HBEP Business Plan using existing funding. The projects are outlined below.

## **Research Priority Project One**

### **Mapping of Healthy Built Environment Activities in NSW**

This research project aims to map the activities currently being delivered in NSW to support a healthy built environment (HBE). The mapping of current HBE activities will facilitate the preparation of an inclusive and meaningful inventory of HBEs work currently being undertaken in NSW. The activities to be mapped will be policy and program work. It is proposed that the three domains in the HBEP Literature Review will be used to define the main categories of HBE activities.

The specific objectives of the project include:

- Improving the knowledge of HBE activities currently being undertaken in NSW
- Facilitating information sharing across LHDs and NGOs
- Identifying gaps in HBE activity
- Providing a link to the work being undertaken through the HBEP
- Facilitating the development of a preferred format /process for ongoing recording of HBE activities

HBE activities carried out by the following agencies will be mapped:

- Ministry of Health – Division of Population Health, Statewide Services Development
- LHDs - Public Health and Health Promotion Units
- NGOs - Heart Foundation, Cancer Council

- Premier's Council for Active Living, Local Government and Shires Association
- HBEP and other academic centres undertaking HBE work
- Key Commonwealth policies/programs related to population health.

Other agencies undertaking HBE activities may also be investigated. This will be determined as the project evolves.

A scoping paper for the mapping project will be prepared to ensure that the work is focused appropriately and achievable as scheduled for delivery in the 2012-13 HBEP Business Plan. A report of key findings and a scholarly paper reporting the results of the research will be the main project deliverables. This project will be undertaken by the HBEP using existing funding available in 2012-13.

## Research Priority Project Two

### Indicators for a Healthy Built Environment

This research project will determine a set of indicators for a healthy built environment that are of relevance to policy makers and practitioners in public health and urban planning. The project will also examine how such indicators can be evaluated for success in supporting people being healthy as part of everyday life. It is proposed that the three domains in the HBEP Literature Review will be used to initially scope the main categories of HBE indicators. The indicators will embrace both urban planning and health related measures, necessitating public health and urban planning professionals bringing their own disciplinary expertise to evaluate the HBE indicators. The use of HBE indicators for cost benefit analyses of policies and programs will be a key outcome.

The specific objectives of the project include:

- Reviewing the literature on HBE indicators
- Defining a robust list of indicators for a HBE that are of relevance to policy makers and practitioners in public health and urban planning
- Proposing achievable ways of evaluating the success of the identified HBE indicators in short, medium and longer terms
- Identifying how public health and urban planning professionals can work effectively together to evaluate the success of HBE indicators for a locality
- Identifying potential use of HBE indicators in cost-benefit analyses of HBE policies and programs

There is interest at the National level from both health and urban planning related agencies in determining HBE indicators. The HBEP will investigate possible research synergies in undertaking and delivering the HBE indicators research project.

A scoping paper for the HBE indicators research project will be prepared to ensure that the work is focused appropriately and achievable as scheduled for delivery in the 2012-13 HBEP Business Plan. Existing work on indicators will be of particular use in the project (e.g. Liveability Indicators Victoria; AURIN Walkability Indices; Green Star Communities). A report of key findings and a scholarly paper reporting the results of the research will be the main project deliverables. This project will be undertaken by the HBEP using existing funding available in 2012-13.

## Other Research Priority Projects

The HBEP 2012-13 Business Plan includes the following research projects which will deliver new knowledge and understanding about healthy built environments:

- ARC Linkage Project Planning and Building Healthy Communities - Market Basket Survey
- ARC Linkage Project Planning and Building Healthy Communities - Farmers' Markets Survey
- Low Carbon Living CRC scoping project on health co-benefits from action on climate change
- Low Carbon Living CRC Living Laboratories ongoing development
- Low Carbon Living CRC research project on impact and mitigation of Urban Heat Islands
- ARC Linkage research project on an evaluation framework to assess transport, health and economic impacts of new urban cycling infrastructure

These projects will assist in addressing key research gaps identified in the HBEP Research Strategy 2012-2014 to support healthy built environments policy and practice development. As stated in the HBEP 2012-13 Business Plan, dependent on opportunity, funding applications will be made to undertake further research projects that address key gaps for healthy built environments as identified in the HBEP Research Strategy 2012-2014.

## Appendix - The Research Strategy – Key Research Gaps

The Research Strategy is structured according to the results of the Literature Review and Stakeholder Research projects. The table below outlines this structure which identifies the key research gaps to support healthy built environments policy development.

Literature-driven Research Priorities		Stakeholder-driven Research Priorities	
<i>Focus Area</i>	<i>Opportunity for Future Research</i>	<i>Focus Area</i>	<i>Opportunity for Future Research</i>
All domains including physical inactivity	Research on ways to work together	Evidence Informing Policy	Consensus on starting point for information gathering
	Evidence required to justify policy change		Practical guidelines and indices (walkability, liveability)
	Opportunities to monitor interventions		Information sharing and dissemination
Obesity	Detailed, contextual research on the impact of healthy food accessibility on health in the Australian context	Research Gaps	Research methods to measure the health outcomes of built environment interventions
	The impact of lost urban agricultural land		Quantification of financial costs and health benefits for communities of public investments in infrastructure and programs
	The co-location of food advertising and food outlets		Measures that weigh the positive or negative health impacts of built environment design factors
Social Isolation	Social capital and residential self selection	Facilitating Research	Specific health and built environment research initiatives
	Interaction through active transport		Research in and between all government portfolios
	The relationship between participation, empowerment and social capital in healthy built environments		Purposeful engagement by governments, universities, industry and other related organisations
			Leveraging funding for healthy built environments from the <i>Low Carbon Living CRC</i>





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CRICOS Provider Code: 00098G

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