



# The Environment and Active Living



## Active living

Emphasis has shifted from encouraging participation in bouts of vigorous physical activity to accumulating a sufficient amount of moderate physical activity through **active living**. Active living incorporates physical activity into daily lives and routines (Active living research, 2005a). Examples of active living include:

- walking or riding a bike for transport;
- exercising for enjoyment;
- playing in the park;
- walking the dog;
- taking the stairs; and
- using recreation facilities.

## Environments that support active living

It has been suggested that to achieve population changes in physical activity participation it will be necessary to look beyond the health sector, to influence the environments in which people live and work. It is these environments that can facilitate or prevent opportunities to be sufficiently active (Bauman et al., 2002).

There is a growing body of evidence in public health, transportation and urban planning literature that identifies characteristics that potentially influence physical activity.

People are more likely to be active when they live and work in environments that are **activity friendly**.

*An activity friendly environment is a place that makes it easy to make the choice to be physically active through planned exercise or routine daily activity (Active Living Research, 2005a: p1).*

Research investigating links between the physical environment and physical activity is relatively new. While the evidence has not yet indicated a causal link between the design of communities and physical activity, studies have shown a number of associations between aspects of the environment and physical activity patterns of people and communities. These studies are making an important contribution to the body of knowledge on characteristics of the environment which enable physical activity and make it more accessible to people living within a community.

## What the studies have found about the environment and physical activity

- People are more likely to walk if footpaths are available, traffic control measures in place and shops, parks and facilities are located within an easy distance.
- Aesthetically pleasing environments that include trees and greenery encourage walking.
- People walk and cycle more in areas that have mixed use (combination of residential, business and commercial), are higher density and have a high level of street connectivity.
- Perceived safety is an important determinant of people's physical activity choices.
- Better footpaths and perceptions that the footpaths are good will increase walking in a community.
- The use of a car for transport and recreation can decrease when the infrastructure to support people to walk or cycle is changed or improved.
- The destination and distance to the destination influences the travel modes that people will choose.

(Source: Gebel et al., 2005)

## References

Active Living Research. 2005. *What is Active Living?* <http://activelivingresearch.org> accessed 29 September, 2006

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