Creating Healthy Built Environments: Challenges and Opportunities in the NSW Planning System

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Health and Town Planning

• Planning and public health - common origins
• Modern town planning has its roots in improving health
• Early British planning - Garden Cities and creation of Green Belts - importance of green open space and cultural facilities (Ebenezer Howard)
• Long been an implicit goal of planning practitioners

From Sir Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities of To-morrow (1902)
Health and Town Planning

- Origins of modern town planning underpinned by public health concerns
- Abercrombie’s New Towns (Harlow and Crawley)
- Post-war programs of ‘slum clearance’ and urban renewal – drive for new public housing
- 20th century dominance of the private car changed travel behaviours.
- Contributed to rise in obesity and rates of avoidable diseases like diabetes and heart disease
Health and Planning in NSW

- NSW planning system followed the UK system
- Zoning separated out ‘bad neighbour’ uses and provided for low density suburban areas
- Land plentiful and cheap
- Cities sprawled – travelling by car the norm
- Connections between work, home, school and other facilities ‘stretched’ to become unwalkable
- Planning system did not respond promptly to effects on health
Health and Planning in NSW

1990s

- 1990s growing Government concern - obesity and inactivity - Premier Carr established Physical Activity Taskforce
- Establishment of PCAL in 2004 to promote *interagency collaboration to improve health through activity and healthy eating*
- PCAL was a great success:
  - Active travel plans
  - Active living statement
  - IP&R reforms
  - Guidelines

*Development and Active Living – Development Assessment Resource and Developer’s Checklist*

- Active Living NSW established April 2017 continues key pieces of work previously undertaken by PCAL
Health and Planning in NSW

Metro and Regional Strategies (2000s)

• Health referenced in new wave of Strategic planning - 2005 Metro Strategy ‘fair access-healthier environments’
• Encouraging physical activity to gain health benefits
• Promotion of active transport in first Regional Strategies for healthier communities
• Health ‘arrived’ as a specific objective of strategic planning
Health and Planning- PIA National and NSWHealth 2009 -2013

• PIA – Healthy Spaces and Places Collaboration between ALGA, National Heart Foundation and PIA
• Design principles that included
  – active transport
  – mixed land use with parks and open space
  – safety and surveillance
• Recently launched website - Heart Foundation Healthy Active by Design
• NSW Healthy Urban Design Checklist
• NSW Health  - *Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy 2013-2018* – 7 Targets
Healthy Built Environment Program at UNSW 2010

• Funded by the Department of Health and located in City Futures Research Centre, UNSW (Prof Thompson)
• Brought together health and built environment professionals to advocate for stronger awareness of the vital link between health and the built environment

• Focussed on the three domains of activity, strong communities and healthy food options to address the problems of lack of movement, poor social connections and growing obesity.
• Core strategies of research, education and workforce development, leadership and advocacy
Health and Planning in NSW

Healthy Planning Expert Working Group

The NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group (HPEWG) formed in 2012.

Priorities:

1. Provide advice and guidance on strategic opportunities to utilise the NSW planning and transport planning systems to promote human health across the State.

2. Provide advice and guidance on the dissemination, application and utilisation of ‘healthy planning research’.

3. Initiate and build sustainable partnerships across NSW Government, industry, the community sector and academic healthy planning stakeholders to advocate about NSW healthy planning issues.
Deliverables of the Group:

1. Advocacy to improve healthy built environments in NSW
2. Constructive input into the development of Healthy Planning/design Guidelines
3. Support for active transport objectives and targets
Achievements of the Group:


2. Succeeded in **health object** in Planning Bill - not enacted- ‘caught in crossfire’.

3. In 2014, advocated for inclusion of Action 3.3.1 in A *Plan for Growing Sydney* (precursor to the Greater Sydney Region Plan) calling for **healthy planning guidelines** and Group identified to help deliver.
Collaboration with DP&E and GANSW

- **New Planning Act** – Object re good design and amenity in the built environment to incorporate health
- **Better Placed (GANSW)** - the delivery tool. Identifies health as one of its key challenges in improving design in NSW (pg 14):
  “The design of the built environment can incorporate health priorities to create healthier places for NSW”
- **Greener Places (GANSW)**
  “Green infrastructure....means our cities are healthier, more liveable and sustainable”
- **Better Methods (GANSW) - Good Urban Design Guide**
Health and Planning in NSW

Healthy Planning Expert Working Group

Collaboration with GSC
Strategic plans (GSC)- success!

• **GSC’s Greater Sydney Region Plan**
  Successfully advocated for Objective 7: “Communities are healthy, resilient and socially connected”
  This translates down into all **District Plans** as a Planning Priority
  For example, in the **North District Plan**, Priority 4: :Fostering healthy, creative, culturally rich and socially connected communities”

• **Regional Plans**
  **Hunter Region Plan**, **Direction 17** – “Create healthy built environments through good design
  Partly by: Developing best-practice guidelines for planning, designing and developing healthy built environments.

• **Indicators** to measure success relate to increased walkability and increased access to open space.
Health and Planning in NSW

Healthy Planning Expert Working Group

• Group continues to engage with the Department of Planning and Environment, the Greater Sydney Commission, GANSW and Transport for NSW around implementation of healthy planning in policy and guidelines.
• Role is one of advocacy and expert advice.
• Active Living NSW coordinates and provides the secretariat for the HPEWG.
Challenges and Opportunities in NSW

**CHALLENGES**

- Ensuring health is reinforced as a key consideration in strategic planning as District and Regional Plans are implemented and given statutory weight
- Carried through into LSPS and LEP
- Also reinforced in DA assessment
- Not overlooked or an add-on
- Continuing commitment from State and local government to support
- Capturing data to build evidence of demonstrable improvements
Challenges and Opportunities in NSW

OPPORTUNITIES

• Build on supportive legislation and strong direction in Regional and Metropolitan Plans

• Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPS) integrate Council activity to implement strategy
  – 20-year vision for land-use and how change managed
  – implement actions in the regional and district plans and council priorities in the community strategic plan
  – shape how the development controls in the local environmental plan (LEP) evolve over time to meet the community's needs
Opportunities in NSW

• Local government IP&R framework and processes e.g. CSP, Delivery Program and annual budgets
• Eighty councils in regional NSW are now members of the 13 joint regional organisations and consider health of the community during the preparation of the Statement of Regional Priorities
• **Volumes** of international, national and local examples and guidance ready to consider and apply
• Urgency of need now much better recognised
• Community support for and awareness of the important role of built environments in health.
Strategic-Led Planning Framework

Source: Local Strategic Planning Statements Guideline for Councils, DP&E, 2018
Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework

Source: NSW Office of Local Government
The Future is Bright

• Health in planning has come a long way in last 20 years from a ‘fringe’ idea at best to a mainstream consideration
• Still a long way to go
• Up to all of us working in planning and the built environment to continue to promote it to create well planned places for a healthier future

“Urban planning and public health share common missions and perspectives. Both aim to improve human well-being, emphasize needs assessment and service delivery, manage complex social systems, focus at the population level, and rely on community-based participatory methods.”
(Urban Planning and Public Health at CDC, 2006)