

A new chapter for public open space: PLA and VicHealth launch the Public Open Space Handbook

Parks & Leisure Australia (PLA) and VicHealth are proud to announce the completion and launch of the Public Open Space Handbook, a major new resource for professionals across the open space industry. The handbook reinforces a shared commitment to creating healthier, more connected communities through better public spaces.

Developed through a partnership between PLA (VIC/TAS) and VicHealth, the Public Open Space Handbook has been created for the people who plan, design, manage and care for the public spaces that shape our communities.

From experienced industry professionals looking for a trusted point of reference in their day-to-day work, to graduates and emerging professionals seeking to build their knowledge, the Handbook provides practical guidance to support informed decision-making and best practice across the sector.

The Handbook is an important update to the former Open Space Planning and Design Guide, developed more than a decade ago. It responds to significant industry advancements, changing community needs and contemporary challenges, while providing current guidance to help professionals make the best possible use of public spaces.

Designed as an accessible and evolving resource, the Public Open Space Handbook brings together industry knowledge, existing reference materials and priority guidance for the sector.

VicHealth CEO Professor Anna Peeters AM said public open space is essential health infrastructure, shaping the opportunities people have to be active, connect with others and enjoy nature.

“Healthy communities need healthy places. A park where children can play, a walking path that connects people to their neighbourhood, or a natural space to enjoy can all make it easier for people to be active, connect with others and support their wellbeing.

“This handbook gives planners, councils and others who shape our public spaces practical guidance to put health and wellbeing at the heart of their decisions, helping create spaces that are inclusive, accessible, climate resilient and work for the communities who use them.”

Andrea Szymanski, PLA VIC/TAS Regional President was particularly proud of the role that PLA was able to play in developing the handbook.

“As the peak body for parks and recreation PLA was perfectly positioned to bring the expertise of the industry together in a steering committee and working group to ensure the result would be of value to local governments across Victoria.

“We are especially proud of the partnership with VicHealth that enabled this and their foresight to recognise the value of our public spaces to community health and wellbeing”, Andrea said.

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The collaboration between PLA and VicHealth reflects a genuine alignment in purpose.

Both organisations recognise the powerful role public spaces play in supporting health, wellbeing and stronger communities. By combining industry expertise with a shared commitment to positive health outcomes, the partnership has helped create a resource with practical value for the professionals behind the places Australians use every day.

PLA acknowledges VicHealth for its partnership and support in bringing the project to life, as well as the many industry professionals who contributed their knowledge and expertise throughout the development process.

Special recognition also goes to Jenn Benden from Xyst, whose expertise and contribution to the development of the Handbook have been instrumental in bringing this significant resource to completion.

The Public Open Space Handbook will be officially launched on 30 September 2026. The launch will be an opportunity for the open space industry to come together, celebrate the completion of the Handbook and hear more about the partnership, the resource and how it can be used across the sector.

The event will also include the first Public Open Space Handbook Masterclass, providing attendees with an introduction to the Handbook and its practical application.

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