



PARKS & LEISURE
AUSTRALIA

A group of five people are running on a sandy beach towards the ocean at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The people are in various stages of their run, with some splashing water. The scene is captured from a low angle, emphasizing the movement and the beauty of the setting sun.

10 GREAT IDEAS FOR AN ACTIVE AUSTRALIA

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Parks and Leisure Australia is the industry peak body for parks, sport and recreation. We have a network of professionals and academics which help the organisation develop research objectives and advocacy positions. As “the people behind the places” our members and our industry, recognise the importance of investing in the future health of Australians by not only encouraging them to be active, but ensuring the urban environment is one which enables activity.

We believe this is an argument of economics, investment brings returns and nowhere is the need greater than investment to reduce future costs of health. If health budgets are only considered in the context of treating illness and injury then they will continue to grow unsustainably. Parks and Leisure Australia believes new thinking is needed and all urban policy, infrastructure spending and other investment should be considered in the context of the health dividend that is returned.

The following summary of ideas for change support the goal of an active Australia. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas or their practical implementation.

1 Active and Healthy Economy - Jobs investment

No debate about driving economic growth and jobs is complete without hearing the mantra that we need to “build more roads”. When the primary reason for building a road is to stimulate the economy it may not be the best investment we can make for the future. A recent study in Baltimore, USA, found investments in walking and cycling infrastructure generated between 11 and 14 jobs per \$1 million, whereas road infrastructure only generated around 7 jobs per \$1 million.

Investing in active living is good for the economy, good for the environment (reduced greenhouse gases by encouraging people to walk/ cycle not drive) and good for health (reduced incidence of chronic diseases resulting in reduced direct/ indirect cost to the economy). Active transport also encourages more people to spend longer in streets, this supports local economies and strengthens local business.

2 Focus more on physical activity and less on the weight loss industry

There is ample evidence that indicates fit, overweight people have better health outcomes than unfit, normal weight individuals. Obesity should continue to be targeted, but public health messages should focus more on enabling people to lead healthier, more active lives. Local government

has a critical role to play in this, from ensuring that urban design enables people to walk/ cycle to work or leisure destinations (not force them into cars) to providing the facilities and open spaces that enable people to lead active lives (eg pools, parks, paths, leisure centres).

3 Health Investment Dividend

Health costs are repeatedly singled out as a major financial concern for the country. Yet most policy discussion is about what to do when people get sick.

Similar to “health in all policy” initiatives- we need to start linking public space development, sport and recreation funding, infrastructure investment and other funding programs to Health Investment Dividends. Eligible projects should be able to demonstrate how the investment will return savings in future health costs. This approach could expand as there is a lot of research (especially in Canada and the UK) about how investment in parks, sport and recreation reduces health costs through decreased incidence of morbidity and chronic disease as well as faster recovery times when people do become unwell.

Local Government partnerships are the most obvious focus for this approach as they are the main providers of the infrastructure, programs and the key supporters of community level sport. Sport England has developed sophisticated modelling that values investment in sporting facilities in terms of economic, social, health and other outcomes. This modelling is being used by local governments to secure investment from the national government. In Scotland, the Health Department invests directly in green spaces and outdoor recreation programs because it saves money in the health budget.

4 The Little Green Pill

A focus on prescription exercise and outdoor activity. Incorporate preventative health costs into the mainstream health system so that wellness is funded and Departments of Health move away from the Departments of Sickness paradigm. Consider the following:

- Scotland's Green-exercise partnership model is successful and could be applied here.

- People in Parks Foundation has a GP Green Referrals program operating in Victoria (Active in Parks).
- Medicare rebates should be considered for green exercise/ physical activity program participation costs.
- Support programs to assist those with mobility, weight and mental health issues (acting as barriers) to re-integrate incidental exercise and physical activity into their lives.

5 Be Innovative with old Infrastructure.

There are fantastic untapped opportunities to retrofit old, decommissioned rail (or road) corridors into walking/cycling tracks. Built at a gradient that facilitates walking and cycling, many of these disused old rail lines go through some of the most scenic parts of Australia's hinterland. Their conversion to active trails will not just help to get more people more active, they will spawn economic activity as

art, craft, accommodation and old country pubs emerge to service the growing market of cashed up baby boomers and other generations who want more active, short stay, experiential breaks. Government leadership and assistance with planning and building and operating can help overcome many perceived barriers around "who manages and who maintains" these assets.

6 Move Well

Don't just fund roads - fund "Moving Well" outcomes- fund bikeways and pathways and bike parking not car parking. Surveys for local government sport and recreation plans consistently identify demands for more, better connected, better lit walk and cycle paths.

Smart programs should only fund roads that have active transport / cycling/ walking infrastructure built in - all new

funding should meet this criteria. It is far more expensive to retrofit active transport networks rather than incorporating them in the first place. Funding a Moving Well project could also focus on the low cost elements that make active transport possible and enjoyable such as: safe crossing points; signage and wayfinding; lighting; and place making.

7 Black to Green

Take back space for people and fund projects that decommission roads and "car corridors" and turn them into "people" corridors supporting public space, active transport and vibrant linear parklands.

8 Invest in Place Making Projects

Making public spaces, parks, malls, riversides, pathways and open spaces more vibrant, more attractive and more appealing will get more people walking and spending time outdoors. Place Making initiatives can be very low cost,

temporary and highly responsive to local communities- they always result in more people using spaces and walking. More people means the local shops and business around these spaces benefit as well.

9 Technology- Bring it inside

We know there is lots of screen watching that's stopping children and adults from being active. But there is also a lot technology can do to encourage activity.

- Facebook for exercise (e.g. "Team Up" the Vic Health program).
- Get health funds investing - Health funds should be encouraged to invest in technology and mobile apps that encourage physical activity and even reward activity by tracking steps/ activity metrics and reducing premiums or offering reward points or similar.
- Support "Screen to Green" - apps and software that lock out ipads and laptops until some activity is recorded. Include physical activity goals in games. Augmented reality programs that encourage outdoor activity and movement can be developed.

- Free phone charging- put pedal powered phone chargers in public places, airports, stations, malls etc. Encourage hotels and businesses and schools to put in pedal charger equipment.
- Fund Innovation and Incubators- for social media, apps and other technology initiatives that get people active or make it easier for people to exercise. Maybe, have a national competition.
- Mobile phone based research- using apps linked to data bases- to track activity and sedentary times. These could be associated with free apps like Strava or Google maps etc. and collect anonymous meta data. This is a great way to quickly build data sets and test the success or otherwise of programs and projects.

10 Urban Trails Project

A dedicated program to support the development and promotion of diverse urban trails throughout all cities. This could link to initiatives such as "urban rogaining" and could develop multiple "products" appealing to different market sectors.

This is not an infrastructure program - rather low cost opportunities such as mapping, signage, path documentation and

marketing (packaging the opportunity), would be leveraged to add value and enable or encourage the use of urban trails.

A number of possible linkages exist with this program, such as: integration with mobile apps and urban explorer type apps; linkage with GeoCaching; social media networks; local businesses "sponsoring" trails or specific routes.



Photo Credit: Brisbane City Council

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