Healthy Cities Illawarra Submission:

Inquiry into the Australian Government's role in the development of cities

September 2017

Background – A Global Perspective

Sustainable urban development and the healthy cities approach are inextricably linked.

By 2050, 70 percent of the world's people will live in cities. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified urbanization as one of the key challenges for public health in the 21st century[i]. The importance of managing and planning urbanization in a way that advances, rather than holds back, health and health equity will only grow. We must strive to ensure that they are living in healthy and liveable cities that are: "*continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential.*"[ii]

1. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit — officially came into force. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection[iii] The SDGs define a common framework of action and language that will help organisations communicate more consistently and effectively with stakeholders about their impact and performance. The SDGs will help bring together synergistic partners to address the world's most urgent societal challenges.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places renewed emphasis on just how interconnected our social, economic and environmental ambitions are. Health promotion efforts grounded in a healthy cities approach can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including **SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**. The unique contributions of the successful WHO Healthy Cities programmes/movement have included a strong value-based commitment to innovations at the cutting edge of social determinants of health and Health in All Policies.

2.   Habitat III – the New Urban Agenda

Habitat III – the **New Urban Agenda** – followed shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which acknowledges the importance of cities in the context of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 ("Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"), and health in the context of SDG 3 ("Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all"). To achieve these and all SDGs, cooperation between different stakeholders and institutions is urgently needed – not only to make the best use of finite resources, but to capitalize on synergies and ensure policy coherence to achieve systemic change. By explicitly acknowledging health as a central component of urban planning and governance, Habitat III will be much better positioned to deliver on its vision of sustainable urban development for all.[iv]

3.   Non-Communicable Disease – Prevention and Control

The WHO have identified the rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) as an epidemic in our time and have released the "Global action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases 2013-2020"[v]. Sedentary lifestyles from increased use of motor vehicles and changes in consumption habits with increased reliance on processed food (that is typically high in salt, sugar and fat) contribute to the noncommunicable disease epidemic[vi]. The Global Action Plan highlights Healthy Cities initiatives as important for tobacco control, promoting healthy diet, physical activity & reducing the harmful use of alcohol. In Australia, non-communicable diseases contribute to 85 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury, and a large part of that burden can be attributed to obesity-related risk factors such as high blood pressure, high body mass, physical inactivity, and high blood cholesterol.

The Global Action Plan recognises that effective noncommunicable disease prevention and control require leadership, coordinated multi-stakeholder engagement for health both at government level and at the level of a wide range of actors, with such engagement and action including, as appropriate, health-in-all policies and whole-of-government approaches across sectors, including urban planning.

4.   Health Promotion and the Healthy Cities movement

In November 2016, the WHO convened the 9th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Shanghai, China. The theme of the conference, "Health Promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals", is both timely and necessary to ensure policy coherence and alignment of agendas for action. The slogan: "Health for All and All for Health" captures the commitment to leave no one behind and to involve all actors in a new global partnership to achieve this transformative Agenda[vii]

The conference identified three pillars of health promotion to support the achievement of the SDGs

1. **Good Governance** – strengthening governance and policies to make healthy choices accessible and affordable to all, and to create sustainable systems that make whole-of-society collaborations real

2. **Healthy Cities** – creating greener cities that enable people to live, work and play in harmony and good health

3. **Health Literacy** – increasing knowledge and social skills to help people make the healthiest choices and decisions for their families and themselves

Today, thousands of cities worldwide are part of the Healthy Cities Network in all WHO regions. This has become an important platform for achieving health and sustainable development in many parts of the world, as cities are often at the forefront of innovation with mayors and municipalities spearheading efforts to improve the daily conditions of urban life. A healthy cities approach which catalyzes political leadership and participatory governance can be transformational for health and health equity, as well as help mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation, climate change, ageing, migration, growing inequalities and social isolation.[viii]

5. A Glocal Approach

'Glocalisation' is the practice of conducting activities according to both local and global considerations. This submission takes a 'glocal' perspective on the sustainability of our cities, by adapting global best practice and contextualising it to meet the needs of our local towns and cities. **Importantly, a focus on health is the common factor which binds these initiatives.**

1. Sustainability transitions in existing cities

Identifying how the trajectories of existing cities can be directed towards a more sustainable urban form that enhances urban liveability and quality of life and reduces energy, water, and resource consumption

The framework of the Sustainable Development Goals provides a common language to guide the trajectories of existing cities towards a more sustainable form. Aside from SDG 11 ("Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable") the SDGs also directly target factors which impact urban liveability:

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation *Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*	
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy *Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*	
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production *Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*	

For the **Habitat III - New Urban Agenda** to succeed, key actors and stakeholders in urban planning, governance and finance must incorporate health as a central consideration in their decision-making processes. Expected health impacts should be assessed during the development of urban policies. Health outcomes and health equity (the attainment of the highest level of health for all people) should also become the key indicators used in monitoring the impact of those policies.

The WHO publication '*Health as the Pulse of the New Urban Agenda'* outlines seven arguments for mainstreaming health into the New Urban Agenda:

- **Developing a common vision for social cohesion and health equity** – a commitment to leave no one behind;
- **Foster commitment to healthy cities as sustainable cities** – recognizing the need for actions that involve all urban sectors;
- **Assessment** – mainstreaming health into urban policies;
- **Urban economies** – financing healthy, sustainable urban development and avoiding unintended health risks;

- **Urban planning** – designing for health;

- **Urban health resilience** – managing and adapting to risks;

- **Participatory action for change** – engaging communities and raising awareness.

Embracing the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the healthy cities philosophy will promote the intersectoral action required for the achievement of sustainable urban development.

Considering what regulation and barriers exist that the Commonwealth could influence, and opportunities to cut red tape

Financing is considered the linchpin for the success of the sustainable development agenda, which will be driven by the implementation of 17 sustainable development goals.

Australia is a signatory to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which affirms strong political commitment to address the challenge of financing and creating an enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity.

To support the delivery of sustainable urban development initiatives at a local level, enhanced direct funding from the Commonwealth to local government and community organisations is required to mobilise services that assist in the daily lives of our residents.

Examining the national benefits of being a global 'best practice' leader in sustainable urban development

Australia is already on the path to support the achievement of the SDGs. There are direct benefits to our population health and the economic benefits that ensue. This socioeconomic advantage allows the redistribution of resources into other areas.

The World Health Organization[ix] outline several national socioeconomic benefits that come from being a global 'best practice' leader in sustainable urban development:

- Healthy urban policies can significantly reduce infectious and noncommunicable diseases and enhance wellbeing;

- Sustainable design and proactive development can enhance health equity by protecting urban populations from health risks and the impacts of extreme weather events;

- Health indicators can help document how citizens benefit from urban investments in infrastructure and environmental and social protection;

- A large body of scientific evidence on the health impacts of urban policies can clarify risks and inform decision-making for sustainable development;

- Vulnerable populations can be afforded additional protection when health risks are fully considered in urban planning;

- The "right to the city" includes the right to access to spaces that promote social cohesion, support healthy lifestyles and deliver economic benefits;

- Considering health impacts promotes fuller participation in urban decision-making by various stakeholders and members of different communities.

By placing health at the centre of sustainable urban development, Australia will be well placed to realise significant socioeconomic benefits.

2. Growing new and transitioning existing sustainable regional cities and towns

Examining ways urbanisation can be re-directed to achieve more balanced regional development

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world with nearly 90% of our total population living in urban areas. This is significantly greater than the world average of 55%[x]. The Australian Government needs to make a strong commitment to achieving the SDGs through building the capacity of local communities to take action in support of the goals. Global commitments such as the Shanghai Declaration and the #whatyouneedtoknow campaign are just two examples of initiatives that can be readily deployed at a regional level.

Promoting a healthy cities philosophy is crucial to achieve more balanced regional development. Inherent in the approach is empowering and resourcing local government and NFP community sectors to lead communities and drive this change. Through positive intersectoral action, we can build on the strengths of our regions to make our regional cities better places to live and become "Healthy Cities for the Future".

Australian adopted this brave approach through the Global Financial Crisis where the Federal Government directly funded local government to build local infrastructure, and the economy of the nation remained stable when globally other nations failed. Now is the time again for the federal government to devolve funds and resources to local government and community organisations to take direct and effective action. Mayors and community leaders will drive this change, enabling citizens to participate and plan together for a strong, healthy, and sustainable regional Australia.

Regards,

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