

MEDIA RELEASE

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How healthy are our cities? World-first Australian project aims to find out

A major national research project about to get under way will allow us to measure for the first time how "liveable" Australian cities are in terms of the impact they have on our health.

The National Liveability Study, outlined in today's issue of the journal *Public Health Research & Practice* (www.phrp.com.au), will develop Australia's first set of national "health liveability indicators". The results will be an important tool for federal, state and local governments, developers, public health planners and other groups working to create healthy neighbourhoods.

"We hope this project will leave a legacy to the nation," said the study's lead author, Professor Billie Giles-Corti, of the University of Melbourne.

"By developing a standard set of indicators that can be used across the country, we will be able to measure which environments work best for our health – and which don't. And we'll also be able to use them to measure differences within and between cities, and the progress being made towards improvements."

While there are existing measures used across the globe of how "liveable" cities are, no-one has yet measured "liveability" from a health perspective.

Evidence already shows that making neighbourhoods more liveable benefits health and wellbeing. A liveable neighbourhood is one that is "walkable", has access to public transport, public open space, local amenities, and social and community facilities.

The National Liveability Study project has buy-in from state and federal governments and nongovernment organisations, who will sit on a national advisory group. State-based technical working groups in the ACT, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and WA will provide advice during the project, which will run over two years.

The study's research team will kick-start the measurement process by using a Geographic Information System (GIS) to examine five domains of liveability:

- Alcohol – access to licensed and off-licence premises
- Food – access to local food outlets such as grocery stores, supermarkets and takeaway outlets
- Public open space – access to parks, open spaces and vegetation
- Transport – access to public transport and private vehicles, and household travel patterns
- Walkability – access to street connectivity, land-use mix and residential density.

The team will review relevant urban planning policies of Australian states and territories for each domain, map this against health information, and create and compare a set of indicators based on the policies.

The research is a project of The Australian Prevention Partnership Centre, a collaboration of more than 20 organisations that is investigating how to build a national system to prevent chronic disease. The Liveability Study team is made up of researchers from institutions across Victoria, NSW, WA, ACT and Queensland.

"We can use this data to compare Australian cities and look within cities for disadvantage and look at what's impacting health in terms of how cities are being planned – we can use it to help explain why health outcomes might vary in different locations," Partnership Centre Director Professor Andrew Wilson said.

"We also hope the data being created with this project will be available for use by other groups of researchers investigating important public health issues. If we are going to make a change we need this information to help align politics, policy and practice to create a healthy, liveable space for all Australians."

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