

Healthy Built Environments –

Adding up the Numbers: Health and Wellbeing Data for Planners

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What an exciting time it's been since June! We now have an explicit health promotion objective in the draft NSW planning legislation. This is a significant step in acknowledging the role that the built environment plays in supporting people's health and wellbeing as part of everyday life. It is also a great opportunity for planners and health professionals to work together across a range of policy and practice initiatives. Part of this collaboration is finding the right data that is relevant for different planning purposes. These include policy formulation to underpin practice, assessing the health impacts of development proposals (using different impact assessment tools), and presenting evidence in the Land and Environment Court. Establishing appropriate indicators of wellbeing and measuring their effectiveness is another important use of health data.

Reliable statistics are vital in painting a picture of the health and wellbeing of a population. There are some excellent data sources to help NSW planners argue the case for supportive environments for health.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is the national statistical agency. It conducts various social and economic surveys, such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the Australian Health Survey. Importantly, every five years the ABS undertakes the Australian Census of Population and Housing. This provides both accurate and precise information on people, families and dwellings at different geographical levels (<http://www.abs.gov.au>).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians by providing high quality data and analysis of the health, housing, and community services sectors. Statistics are collated nationally and the AIHW conducts research on a wide range of health and welfare topics (<http://www.aihw.gov.au>).

The NSW Ministry of Health (MoH) is an important source of state based health data. Since 1996, the Ministry has released

an annual summary of the health of the people of NSW through the Report of the Chief Health Officer. In addition, this Report includes current health topics of concern (for example, in 2010 there was a chapter on urbanisation and health).

NSW health data is also available through a dynamic and interactive website that allows users to access a wide range of statistical information. Called 'Health Statistics NSW', the site provides access to data on population health status, health inequalities and the determinants of health, the burden of disease and current health challenges and trends. Further, the site offers comparisons between age groups and geographic locations and allows users to customise reports. Importantly for planners, it includes the NSW Adult Population Health Survey. This is a survey of self-reported health behaviours, community health status and factors that influence health. Currently statistics are only available at the Local Health District level, but in time, reliable data may be offered at the local government level (<http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au>).

The Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU) based at the University of Adelaide, collects national data on social indicators, measures of health status and information on health service utilisation. This provides information on a broad range of health determinants across the life course. The PHIDU provides profiles of socioeconomic characteristics, health status and health service use of populations through a series of colour maps in a Social Health Atlas. This is an interactive web based mapping application that illustrates linkages between socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, poorer health status and greater use of health related services. The PHIDU also provides health statistics at

a small area level, such as statistical local area (SLA) and LGA. However, these are synthetic estimates based on modelled survey data and known characteristics of the area. Accordingly, these data should be interpreted as the likely value for a 'typical' area with those characteristics (<http://www.publichealth.gov.au>).

Other data sources for useful health and wellbeing statistics and measures include the following:

- NSW Bureau of Crime statistics (<http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au>)
- NSW Bureau of Transport Statistics (<http://www.bts.nsw.gov.au>)
- NSW Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing (<http://www.olgr.nsw.gov.au>)

And as always, don't forget to contact personnel at your Local Health District (<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/lhd/pages/default.aspx>) for assistance about relevant data sources, local health knowledge and how you can better work together in creating healthy built environments for all!

Afterword: Many thanks to Dr Roy Byun, epidemiologist at the South Western Sydney Local Health District, for co-authoring the September column. Tony Capon has left his position at the University of Canberra to take up the prestigious role of Head, Global Health at the United Nations University in KL, Malaysia. We look forward to hearing from Tony about the international situation and how Australia, especially NSW, measures up to what's happening across the globe. ■

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Good data begins with rigorous research – including auditing the environment for its health supportive qualities