



HEALTHY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

FitNSW

Helping to reduce childhood obesity rates

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FitNSW is an annual forum showcasing NSW's best endeavours in the areas of physical activity, active living and supportive built environments. The focus of this year's event was childhood obesity prevention and the role different sectors can play to address this 21st century pandemic.

Planners were well represented at this year's FitNSW, which also attracted practitioners working in government, industry and the NGO sectors, across the disciplines of health, the built environment and transport. Planning's central role in collaborative efforts to support children being active and readily accessing healthy food was central to the presentations and discussions.

Within the NSW State Plan – 'Making it Happen' – the Premier has selected 12 'Premier's Priorities' for urgent action.¹ Reducing overweight and obesity rates in children by five per cent over ten years is one of these priorities. If the target is achieved, it will result in at least 62,000 fewer children being overweight or obese – a major risk factor for chronic disease going into adulthood. A special implementation unit has been created within the Department of Premier and Cabinet to oversee the whole-of-government delivery of plans to achieve the 12 targets.

The focus on childhood obesity set the broad context for FitNSW 2016 which was opened by the NSW Minister for Health Jillian Skinner MP. She reminded the multidisciplinary audience that this is 'not just a health issue. It needs all of us'. Keynote speaker, Shellie Pfohl, Executive Director of President (Obama's) Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition² shared a message about working collaboratively on this complex issue. Her compelling mantra that 'active kids do better', not only in terms of health, but academically and socially, had considerable resonance.

The United States has had an interagency council promoting health and fitness for 60 years. President Obama expanded its terms of reference to include healthy nutrition. Throughout both terms of the Obama administration, the First Lady instigated 'Let's Move' as a further initiative to address childhood obesity. The extra high-level

attention directed towards the issue seems to be biting. Recent, large-scale US studies demonstrate encouraging reductions in obesity and overweight in very young children (0-3 years old).

Shellie Pfohl noted that no one magic bullet can 'solve' the alarming increase in childhood inactivity and poor nutrition, nor is a cookie cutter approach suitable – what works in one place does not necessarily work in another. Rather, a series of successful interagency partnerships across government and industry that carry the President's imprimatur has been the best way to proceed. Key partnerships include the US Government's Interagency Taskforce and various Let's Move collaborations across schools, childcare settings and local government areas. The NGO Partnership for a Healthier America was established to foster sustainability of the Let's Move initiative beyond the term of the Obama administration. A national campaign that focuses on disability inclusion has also been instigated.³

Following the keynote address, delegates heard from Greater Sydney Commission

(GSC) Chair Lucy Turnbull. In outlining future healthy planning opportunities for the Commission, she spoke about the critical role that transport plays in shaping a city, particularly connectivity and walkability. Commissioner Turnbull also said that she and the GSC are keen to be involved in the development of healthy planning guidelines as part of the Sydney Metro Strategy⁴ and delivering the Green Grid.⁵

Clare Gardiner Barnes, Deputy Secretary of Transport for NSW, focused on the transport theme in her address, describing various active transport initiatives. To see these come to fruition, Claire made the important point that supportive infrastructure requires shifts in behaviour and attitudes.

An innovative collaboration between the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) and a group of Western Sydney Local Health Districts that led to most WSROC council mayors signing the Walk21 International Walking Charter concluded the event.⁶

You can view all FitNSW presentations on the PCAL sites at www.pcal.nsw.gov/fitnsw ■

Endnotes

- ¹ www.nsw.gov.au/making-it-happen
- ² www.fitness.gov/
- ³ www.committoinclusion.org
- ⁴ www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-Your-Area/Sydney/A-Plan-for-Growing-Sydney
- ⁵ www.gsc.nsw.gov.au/en/District-Plans/Liveability
- ⁶ www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/walking/walk21_sydney_2014



Shellie Pfohl sharing the 'active kids' message with Premier Mike Baird and children at Crown Street Public School in Sydney.