



# The year in review

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What a tumultuous year 2016 has been for planning! We are seeing unprecedented levels of development, particularly in Sydney, as we witness the gradual transformation of our largely suburban landscape to an urban one. Densification is here and it's happening fast. So too is concern about community health and wellbeing, climate change impact, and our ability to be resilient in the face of rapid and unbridled change.

**O**ur final column for 2016 focuses on several key events that have implications for the ongoing evolution of healthy built environments in NSW. One of the most significant initiatives for PIA planners is the release of the Institute's 'Planning for Healthy Communities' national policy position statement.<sup>1</sup> This is an important acknowledgement of the pivotal role that planning plays in supporting people being healthy, particularly in combatting sedentary lifestyles. The policy reaffirms the growing body of evidence for healthy planning, proposing a set of principles for new development and the retrofitting of established areas - ranging from leadership in advocating for healthy planning to multi-disciplinary and collaborative practices. The embodied principles are supported by a diversity of actions. These include the provision of accessible, high quality, green open space, opportunities for active transport and measures to connect communities, all of which are needed to address the key risk factors for chronic disease - obesity, inactivity and social isolation. The importance of geographic and demographic context for the implementation of appropriate and timely health supportive initiatives is emphasised, as is the role of good design, education and links with environmentally sustainable outcomes.

2016 also saw the establishment of the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC), now well on its way to the release of six draft District Plans connecting local planning with the longer term strategies in Sydney's Metropolitan Strategy. There are some encouraging signs that healthy planning will be part and parcel of these Plans. Social Commissioner and well known planner,

Heather Nesbitt, called for 'cycling and walking to become a routine part of the transport network' at the Bike Futures 2016 Conference.<sup>2</sup> As well, an advisory paper is being prepared to inform the District Plans about the social, cultural and health issues needed to create a 'vibrant, inclusive, healthy and prosperous Sydney'.<sup>3</sup> Healthy living is being canvassed as an important planning objective - housing, transport, community facilities and public spaces are central to this in terms of how they facilitate and encourage healthier lives for all people. We are also heartened by the way in which the NSW Healthy Planning Expert Working Group has contributed to the district planning process. Enshrined under Direction 3.3 of the most recent Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney,<sup>4</sup> this group has submitted a set of key healthy planning principles to the GSC, recommending that they be embodied in the District Plans. By year's end we will see how the process has played out when the draft Plans are released for comment. Make sure you have your say!

Unfortunately, 2016 has had its disappointing moments for healthy planning, and without a doubt, the axing of the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living is the most noteworthy. Many readers will know PCAL well, having benefited from the Council's excellent resources and training over the last decade. Deemed to be no longer necessary, PCAL will not exist beyond this year. Its acumen in strategically bringing together diverse stakeholders from health and built environment disciplines working in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors has been pivotal in advancing healthy planning in the state. It's still needed. RIP PCAL - you will be sorely missed.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1: Sydney's rapid densification has implications for health and wellbeing

So it's been quite a year, one way and another. If you are pondering your summer reading, you cannot go past the recently published book by Hoyne Architects, 'The Place Economy'. It provides some great inspiration for place making from around the world!<sup>6</sup> For those in need of a bit more intellectual stimulation, have a look at the latest 'Lancet Commission' on urban design, transport and health.<sup>7</sup> More compelling arguments for compact cities, ditching the car and embracing active transport now! ■

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Planning Institute of Australia (PIA), 2016, 'Planning for health communities position statement', PIA, 11th May 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> See: [www.greatersydneycommission.nsw.gov.au/News/2016/A-network-for-cyclists-linking-parks-and-developments?page&itemsPerPage&keyword&from&to](http://www.greatersydneycommission.nsw.gov.au/News/2016/A-network-for-cyclists-linking-parks-and-developments?page&itemsPerPage&keyword&from&to)
- <sup>3</sup> See: [www.greater.sydney/](http://www.greater.sydney/)
- <sup>4</sup> Department of Planning and Environment 2014, *A Plan for Growing Sydney*, Sydney, Australia.
- <sup>5</sup> See: [www.thefifthestate.com.au/urbanism/planning/nsw-government-axes-highly-valued-premiers-council-for-active-living/85285](http://www.thefifthestate.com.au/urbanism/planning/nsw-government-axes-highly-valued-premiers-council-for-active-living/85285)
- <sup>6</sup> See: [www.hoyne.com.au/placeconomy/?mc\\_cid=5ead46db11&mc\\_eid=36783bfe82#home\\_text](http://www.hoyne.com.au/placeconomy/?mc_cid=5ead46db11&mc_eid=36783bfe82#home_text)
- <sup>7</sup> See: [www.thelancet.com/series/urban-design](http://www.thelancet.com/series/urban-design)