

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Organisation: City Access Unit City of Sydney

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The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC
Chair
NSW Parliament Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Madam,

Submission: NSW Inquiry into childhood overweight and obesity

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this inquiry. It is indeed a significant, growing, and costly problem and we applaud the Premier in making it one of his twelve key priorities.

As a local government authority we have had some success in increasing children's physical activity as a result of work delivering *Sustainable Sydney 2030*, specifically *Strategic Direction 4: A City for Walking and Cycling*. The City regularly shares experience to encourage similar initiatives to achieve a healthier population in other local government areas.

Much good work has been done by NSW Government agencies and on behalf of the NSW Government, seeking to address the issue of childhood obesity. For example, the *NSW Active Travel Charter for Children (2014)*¹ and associated resources², *NSW Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy (2013-2018)*³, *NSW Government Plan for Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Children, Young People and their Families 2009-2011*⁴ and in 2007 there was an academic paper, "Analysing NSW state policy for child obesity prevention: strategic policy versus practical action"⁵ which critiqued the previous *NSW Prevention of Obesity in Children and Young People: NSW Government Action Plan 2003-2007*. We hope the Inquiry will investigate the previous strategies, the barriers to their implementation and how those barriers can be better overcome.

Historically, public health became important during the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century when city populations grew rapidly and overcrowding led to epidemics of communicable diseases. Radical action was necessary and the streets were dug up for public health infrastructure – water and sewage pipelines. In the mid-twentieth century increasing car use led to urban sprawl and increased sedentary behaviour, and our modern day epidemics of obesity and inactive lifestyle related illnesses. Today urban planners around the world recognise our streets must be

¹ www.preventivehealth.net.au/uploads/2/3/5/3/23537344/nsw_active_travel_charter_for_children_2.pdf

² www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au/campaigns-programs/childrens-active-travel.aspx

³ www.health.nsw.gov.au/heal/Publications/nsw-healthy-eating-strategy.pdf

⁴ www.eatmovelive.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/obesity_action_plan1.pdf

⁵ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2104535/

reshaped with modern public health infrastructure. Footpaths, open spaces and cycleways are integral to public health of our communities.

Below is a list of some of the actions, both infrastructure and social programs, which have contributed to an increase in children's physical activity and health in the City of Sydney.

1. Safety improvements around schools

The City of Sydney has improved pedestrian safety and amenity around schools to support walking and riding to school. This has included new and upgraded pedestrian and children's crossings, traffic calming works and a new shared zone beside a school. Such works are expensive and beyond the budget of many councils. NSW Government funding would allow councils to bring forward safety works around schools.

The RMS system of "warrants" constrain provision of safe crossing facilities, particularly in urban renewal or growth areas, where pedestrian and traffic volumes are increasing.

The City of Sydney has adopted the Safe System approach to road safety as part of the local government road safety program. This approach takes a holistic view of the road transport system and the interactions among the road user, roads and roadsides, vehicles and travel speeds. It recognises that all components of the system have a role to play in helping to keep road users safe.

School zones provide a time-limited safer speed environment directly outside schools, but in order for children to walk or ride to school from their home, more of their journey should be in a low speed traffic environment. The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012-2021 refers to "Improve[ing] the safety of pedestrians and bicycle riders through the utilisation of lower speed limit schemes".

Recommendations:

1. Provide additional funding to enable councils to bring forward safety works around schools;
2. Review the RMS warrant system for crossings and other pedestrian safety improvements to be more flexible and responsive, particularly for growth areas; and
3. Make RMS approvals easier for lower speed limits in neighbourhood streets to provide safe travel conditions for children and families.

2. Bike parking

The NSW Bike Plan (2010) includes Action 3.5, the provision of bike racks in schools. However, this has not been implemented and many schools have no bike racks. To plug this gap, councillors resolved to provide bike rack funding for public schools in our council area. To date the following schools have installed bike racks with City of Sydney funding: Erskineville, Blackwattle Bay, Bourke Street, Paddington, Crown Street, Ultimo, Forest Lodge, Newtown North, Newtown Performing Arts High, Newtown, Alexandria Park, and Gardeners Road.

Recommendation:

4. NSW Department of Education proactively provide funding for bike racks and cages for all new and existing schools, sufficient for current and future demand.

3. Bike network

The City is building a safe and connected bike network, focusing on ten regional routes which connect major destinations within and beyond our council area. This network closely aligns with the strategic bicycle routes in the NSW Government's *Sydney's*

Cycling Future. Most schools are on, or within a block of, a regional bike route. There has been a significant increase in children riding to these schools, especially to Crown Street, Bourke Street, Erskineville and Alexandria Park Public Schools.

Beyond our own council area, The City has led the Inner Sydney Regional Bike Network, which covers fifteen (now fewer) council areas to plan a region-wide network, again aligned with *Sydney's Cycling Future*. This project is on the National Infrastructure Priority List and with support from Transport for NSW and Infrastructure NSW, may qualify for funding from the federal government, enabling all Inner Sydney councils to build safe bike networks too. As documented in *Sydney's Cycling Future*, 70 per cent of Sydney residents want to ride a bicycle or ride more, but are lacking safe infrastructure. Regional areas are likely to have a similar proportion finding lack of safe infrastructure to be the main barrier. More investment in public health infrastructure is necessary to tackle the modern day epidemic of obesity.

Recommendations:

5. Increase the total budget for active transport in NSW;
6. Prioritise, encourage and fund safe bike routes that connect schools; and
7. Confirm NSW Government support for the Inner Sydney Regional Bike Network funding application to Infrastructure Australia.

4. Children's bike track and Sydney Park Cycling Centre

The City of Sydney has constructed an additional children's bike track at Sydney Park Cycling Centre⁶. Both the new and old tracks are heavily used by children and families from across Sydney, showing the appeal and unmet demand for such facilities where children can learn and practice their skills.



Recommendation:

8. Make funding available and encourage councils to build children's bike tracks and learning facilities.

5. School Cycling Courses

The City of Sydney funds and runs free, high standard, school cycling classes for schools in the inner Sydney area at the Sydney Park Cycling Centre. Around a thousand children a year have done the course.

Recommendation:

9. Develop and fund a school bike education program that can teach all primary school students safe riding and road rules.

⁶ www.sydneycycleways.net/projects/sydney-park-bike-track/

6. Balance Bike Clinics

Around 3000 young children a year attend a free learn-to-ride clinic where their parents are instructed how to teach their child to ride on a balance bike (without pedals). Children then graduate to a pedal bike and are rewarded with a certificate. Parents from all around Sydney and beyond come to Sydney Park Cycling Centre to attend.

Recommendation:

10. Consider funding this popular education program which has succeeded at dramatically increasing participation in cycling among under ten year olds.

7. Promotion events and programs

The City actively promotes walking and riding to school, and riding with children generally, through digital communication⁷, events such as Walk Safely to School Day and Ride to School Day. Our community grants have provided funding for several school related projects, including a ride to school program at Bourke Street public school and the development of a Ride to School Toolkit⁸.

Recommendations:

11. The Department of Education proactively promotes active travel to school; and
12. NSW Health set active transport targets for school travel, to support the Premier's key priority of reducing childhood obesity.

8. Childcare Centre planning approvals, management plans and accreditation

For the planning and development of child care centres, Councils can require a plan of management⁹ and/or attach conditions to their consent in approving the development. Such plans/conditions traditionally include "traffic management" although this is confined to car parking, and safety around picking-up and dropping-off of children. These provisions can also encourage active travel by children (and their carer), to reduce the reliance on sedentary travel and reduce safety risks at the centre.

The operation of child care facilities are also governed by Australian quality standards¹⁰ and the framework for 'early years learning'¹¹. These arrangements require the centre to build relationships and engage with the local community' adaptable to the local street and neighbourhood; and value 'connectedness with the wider world'. Centres are subject to accreditation and review which could provide incentive for developing and strengthening active travel programs so that children and carers walk or ride more.

Recommendations:

13. The Department of Education work with NSW Health to develop model conditions for councils' development consent conditions for childcare plans of management, to encourage active transport;
14. Work with Department of Planning and Department of Local Government to operationalise active travel as part of plans of management/conditions of consent for child care centres; and
15. Work with Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to develop specific reference to active travel in their standards and educational

⁷ www.sydneycycleways.net/resources/riding-with-kids/

⁸ <http://pinkjunket.com/staging/empire/>

⁹ Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, UTS (2014) *Guidelines for the Planning and Development of Child Care Facilities*. (funded by the Australian Department of Education)

¹⁰ The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, e.g. National Quality Standard 6.3: www.acecqa.gov.au

¹¹ The *Early Years Learning Framework* is a key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. <http://education.gov.au/earlyyears-learning-framework>

framework (encouragement of programs, levels of participation - to benefit health, environment, and traffic demand management).

9. Green Square – a walkable community

Green Square is a 278 hectare urban renewal area which will be home to 61,000 people. Development planning provides for a walkable neighbourhood with access to services and facilities within walking distance. The City of Sydney believes a local school is necessary for a sense of community and to ensure that primary and secondary school can walk or ride to school.

In urban renewal and growth areas where pedestrian and vehicle volumes are increasing, the RMS “warrant” system needs to be more flexible (recommendation 2).

Recommendation:

16. The City's request for a school in Green Square is progressed within the next two years by purchase of an appropriate site by the Department of Education.

10. Mode share targets for active transport

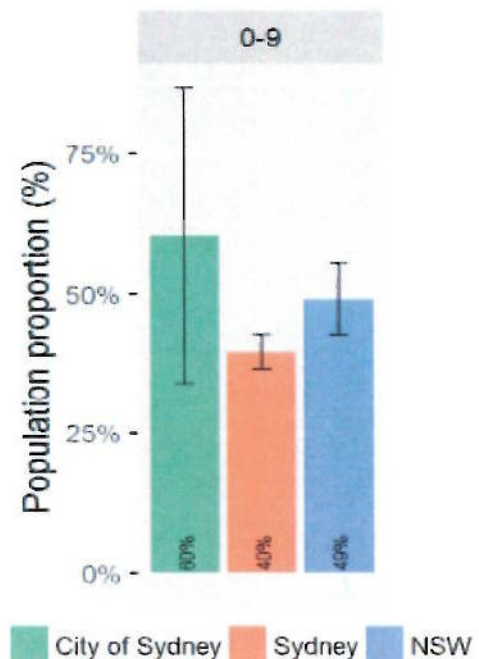
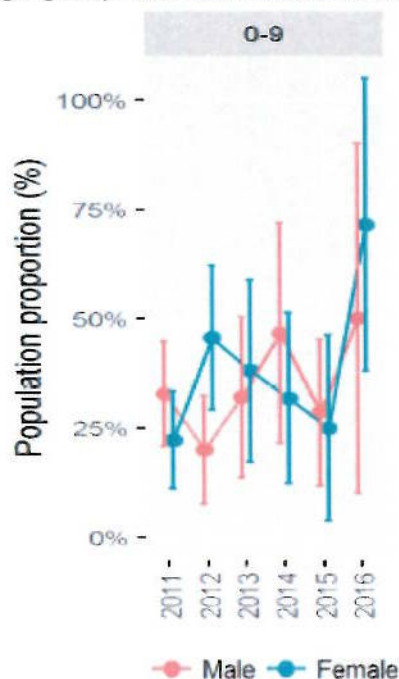
Incidental activity such as active transport, is more sustainable over time, compared with participation in formal or informal sport. To ensure there is sufficient infrastructure and programs, mode share targets should be set and monitored for walking and cycling, both to school, and population wide.

Recommendations:

17. NSW Health should set active transport targets for school travel, to support the Premier's key priority of reducing childhood obesity; and
18. The Long Term Transport Masterplan review should strengthen the walking and cycling mode share targets for the population.

The City of Sydney's results, from active support for walking and cycling

The National Cycling Participation Survey for the City of Sydney area reported, “The dramatic increase in cycling participation among children aged under 10 is evident among both boys and girls” (see graphs below). It is now higher than in the rest of Sydney or NSW, a surprise in a busy city setting. Nationally, the proportion of the under 10 age group who rode a bike in the last week has remained steady.



Most of the primary schools in the City of Sydney have seen an increased number of children walking to school, and a resurgence of riding to school which had been a rare practice only six years ago. At Bourke Street Public School, for example, about a quarter of the children ride on any day, others scooter and walk, and few parents drive their children to school.

To successfully achieve an increase in cycling and walking levels, strong investment and action is needed. The City of Sydney's results show that significant gains can be made.

For enquiries regarding this submission, please contact Fiona Campbell, Manager Cycling Strategy, on _____ or _____

_Yours sincerely

Monica Barone
Chief Executive Officer