

# SHAPING SPACES FOR GEN-Z FORUM SUMMARY



## BACKGROUND

Urban living in the early part of the 21st century has not been good for children. The present generation are the least fit and the fattest that they have ever been. Social marginalisation, mental health problems and serious cardio-metabolic disorders have been on the rise in adolescence and early adulthood. On a more positive note, there is good international research evidence that many of these unwelcome facets of modern lifestyles for children could be eradicated through relatively small adjustments of the opportunities available to children, such as those that might be gained through active play and active travel to or from school.

These issues were the focus of discussion at the *Shaping Spaces for Gen-Z* Urban Thinkers Campus that was organised by the Urban Synergies Group and the Health Research Institute, University of Canberra on 8th March 2017. Hosted at the University of Canberra, Australia, the Campus focused on environments that foster healthy childhood development in the broadest sense of this term i.e. including mental and physical capacities, social and psychological development and connectedness to community. Child health, physical inactivity, environmental design, child empowerment and the right to play and interact were central themes.

## PREMISES

The premises going into the Forum were:

1. Current societal norms for the general physical condition of children are too low
2. Current societal norms for body weight status are too high
3. Many children today have fewer opportunities to develop social skills and psychological resilience than they would have had in the past
4. To reverse these trends will require a societal shift, with specific objectives to be agreed as the core drivers for change and the available societal resources aligned to achieve those objectives.

## CHALLENGES ADDRESSED

The societal challenges posed for discussion were:

1. All children have the right to the best opportunities we can provide for their social, psychological and physical development – how can we do this better?
2. We need to provide more opportunities for children to achieve and maintain good general levels of physical activities as a lifestyle norm – how can we achieve this?

## PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

The priorities for action that emerged from the discussion on each of the three themed areas are summarised in Figure 1. Whilst the top rated proposals should be given priority, two further proposals from each theme area also received significant support and may be worthy of implementation.



### ISSUE 1 CHILDREN AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Safe access, well-designed routes around schools – daily active transport built in

**40.4%**

Design and place 'Kids at Play' signage to promote speed reduction on streets

**30.3%**

Co-location of shops and play spaces

**29.4%**



### ISSUE 2 DESIGNS AROUND CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Play infrastructure for all ages/co-design best practice learning from overseas

**36.4%**

Co-design/engagement using school curriculum – children's input relevant to their health and physical activity

**34.2%**

Safe walking and cycling path (Map + App) QR coded check-points, social school support element

**29.4%**



### ISSUE 3 PLAY

Environmental movement/play in all schools supported with loose material equipment (funding to implement)

**36.4%**

Safer speeds (30km/h or 15km/h) near areas where children's play has priority

**34.6%**

Promote awareness of importance of play (strategy to target Gov, stakeholders, communities and schools)

**28.9%**

FIGURE 1 PRIORITY ACTIONS AND VOTING

## FORMAT

The Forum was introduced by three brief presentations to set the context for later discussions. Then, each of the three specific themes for discussion was introduced by a short presentation, followed by ten parallel round-table discussions, each led by an experienced table coordinator. Following these discussions a list of proposals was developed and carried forward to the short-listing stage in the afternoon of the Forum.

The three theme issues were:

1. CHILDREN AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT,
2. DESIGNS AROUND CHILDREN'S HEALTH,
3. PLAY.

Table suggestions were then presented in plenary before moving on to the preliminary voting stage to provide a short-list of proposals from each theme area to be carried forward to the *Reflection and Confirmation* and *Consensus* stages. The latter stages were carried out, after allowing time for reflection and further consideration, through separate sequential online surveys posted to all participants.

## BARRIERS

There was wide consensus that urgent action was needed. However, it is crucial to understand the significant barriers to be overcome in order to deliver beneficial change. Such barriers were considered as part of the round-table discussions.

### KEY BARRIERS UNDER ISSUE 1 WERE:

- Safety — mainly from cars but also 'stranger danger' and personal injury whilst using equipment,
- Time — of parents and teachers and also in-curriculum
- Timeframes, funding priorities and fiscal prudence within Government
- Lack of community and shared responsibility.

### KEY BARRIERS UNDER ISSUE 2 WERE:

- Not enough natural play space/time to use it
- Involvement of children and parents/ guardians/ schools in design of activities and spaces
- Education — do children know what is good/ bad, do their parents, do teachers?

### KEY BARRIERS UNDER ISSUE 3 WERE:

- Physical education and play not valued enough or allocated sufficient time
- Loss of well-maintained play space and lack of play equipment
- People resource to facilitate play or sporting activities.

## KEY ACTORS

It was clear from discussions at the Forum that all sectors have a role to play, including some stakeholder groups not present at the discussions. That said, the following key actors can be identified because of their particular role in society or the specific expertise that they can bring to bear (see Figure 2). Local Governments have a responsibility to promote the social and cultural diversity and economy of the region and ensure that the built environment and services support the needs of residents, including infrastructure, public transport and safe and accessible public spaces. School communities have a primary role to provide education and developmental opportunities for all children. Children have the most inquisitive and resourceful minds that we have available to us and we should engage them in shaping spaces for their future. Universities and research institutions are primary innovators and problem solvers, have the resources and expertise to provide specialist training and the capacity to develop pilot projects or test proof-of-concept proposals before roll-out to the wider community. The Media can be an important vehicle for public education and awareness-raising. Businesses may bring entrepreneurial opportunity to solve particular problems or can support initiatives with more flexible workplace policy. Non-Government and Sporting Organisations have considerable existing capacity that, effectively targeted, could support many aspects of the change agenda with minimal impact on additional resource requirements.

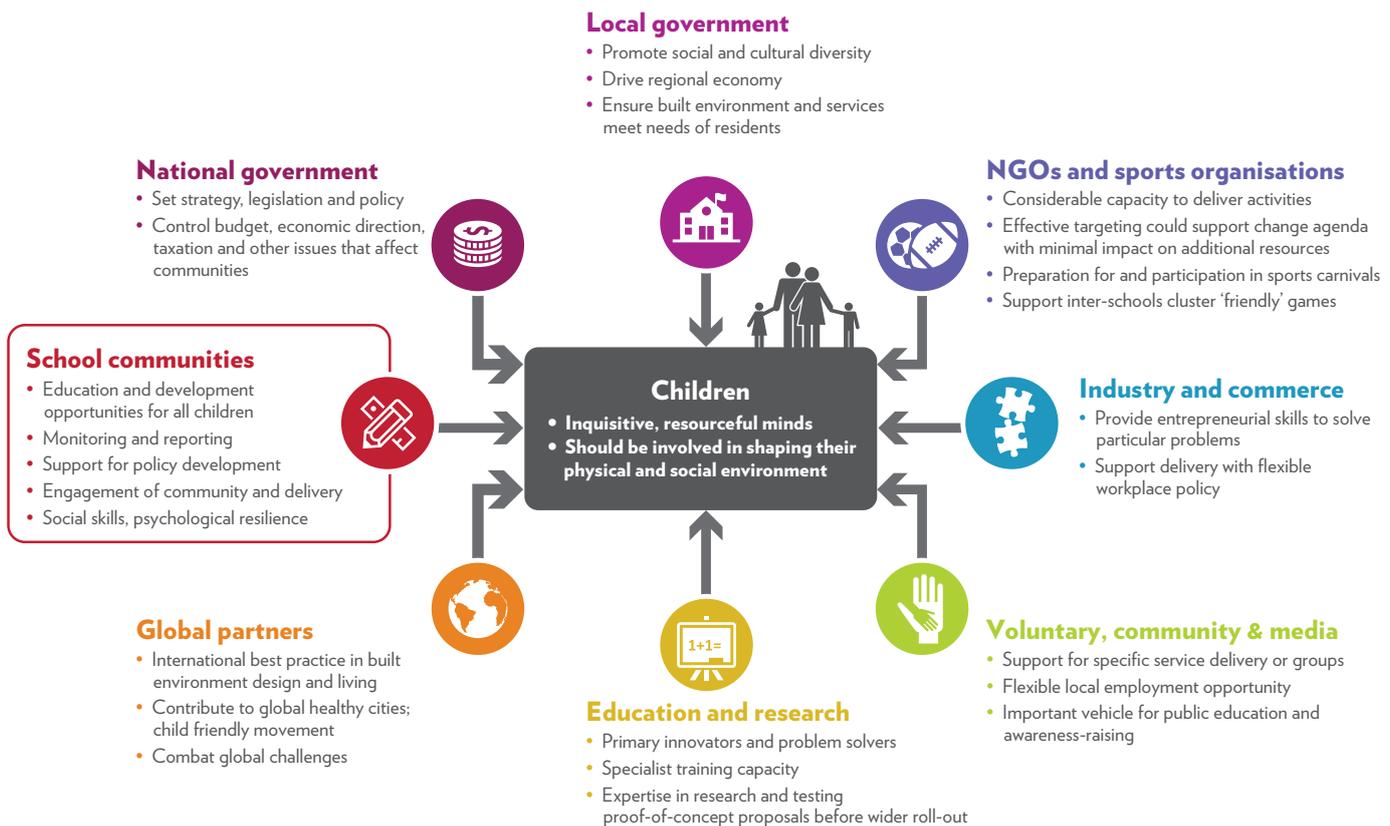


FIGURE 2 KEY ACTORS IN SHAPING SPACES FOR GEN-Z



## CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

In summary, the *Shaping Spaces for Gen-Z Urban Thinkers Campus, Canberra, Australia* on 8th March 2017 strongly endorsed three priority actions:

1. Safe access, well-designed routes around schools — daily active transport built in
2. Play infrastructure for all ages/co-design best practice learning from overseas
3. Environmental movement/play in all schools, supported with loose material/ equipment (funding to implement)

Following on from the top three proposals, we recommend an integrated system-wide approach to the challenge as this has the potential to directly impact not just the top three priority issues but many others that emerged during the discussion as well.

## MONITORING

### 1. Safe access, well-designed routes around schools — daily active transport built in

#### *Methods for data collection*

- Applying Heart Foundation's Active Living Impact Checklist
- Direct observation/measurement and photography
- Residents' feedback session on safety perception
- Official statistics — active transport infrastructure built after the Urban Thinkers Campus

#### *Indicators*

- Number of schools with well-designed routes
- % of residents that give positive feedback on issues
- Number of places (schools) with new active travel infrastructure
- Proportion of children using active transport to and from school

### 2. Play infrastructure for all ages/ co-design government and community-based initiatives

#### *Methods for data collection*

- Interview with community-based initiatives
- Official statistics: health, social services, social incivilities, crime
- Direct observation/measurement
- Indicators
- Number of activities promoted by the government in conjunction with community-based initiatives
- Percentage of residents involved in co-design opportunities.



### 3. Environmental movement/play in all schools supported with loose material equipment (promotion and awareness-raising of importance of play)

#### *Methods for data collection*

- Survey — children, parents, schools
- Interview school heads
- Official statistics: health, mental health, absence from school, social problems

#### *Indicators*

- Residents can list at least two health and well-being related reasons why play spaces are important
- Number/proportion of schools that approach this subject in their curriculum/daily activities with children
- Designated funding to support this action
- Number/proportion of schools that provide loose material equipment for kids to play



## PARTICIPANTS

One hundred and twenty delegates attended. There was good representation from the key stakeholder groups: Parents, General Public, Government, Non-Government Organisations, Health, Academia and Community Services. Education other than tertiary, commercial organisations and sports organisations were not well represented.

## LIST OF COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, Ireland, Taiwan, USA

## FACILITATOR

**Dr. Anthony Burton** ACT Heart Foundation/  
CURF, University of Canberra

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Prof. Tom Cochrane** University of Canberra,  
Australia

**Meegan Fitzharris** MLA Minister for Transport and  
City Services, Minister for Higher Education, Training  
and Research and Minister for Health

**Dr. Paul Kelly** Chief Health Officer, ACT  
Government, Australia

**Prof. Tong Liu** Yale University, USA & China

**Mr Gregor H. Mews** Founding Director, Urban  
Synergies Group, Germany & Australia

**Dr. Lisa Scharoun** Co-Founder, Cross Culture  
Design Lab, University of Canberra, Australia

**Associate Prof. Paul Tranter** UNSW Canberra,  
Australia

## TABLE COORDINATORS

**Mr Leon Arundell** Chair, Living Streets Canberra,  
Australia

**Dr. Kate Auty** Commissioner for the Environment  
and Sustainability, Australia

**Prof. Rachel Davey** Director, Health Research  
Institute, University of Canberra, Australia

**Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook** Public Advocate and  
Children and Young People Commissioner- ACT  
Human Rights Commission, Australia

**Ms Annie Kentwell** Active Living Coordinator,  
Heart Foundation ACT, Australia

**Mr Gregor H. Mews on behalf of Ms Karen  
Wright** President of Planning Institute of Australia  
ACT, Australia

**Ms Michelle Narracott** Executive Director, ACT  
Government, Australia

**Ms Aline Peres dos Santos** Urban Synergies Group,  
Australia & Brasil

**Ms Edwina Robinson** Communication Manager,  
Office of the Commissioner for the Environment and  
Sustainability, Australia

## ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED

ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association

ACT Greens MLA office

Active Learning

Australian Capital Territory Government

Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

Australian National University

Australian Primary Principal's Association

Belconnen Community Centre

Blueearth Foundation

Capital Health Network ACT

Chung Yuan University

Commissioner for the Environment and  
Sustainability, Australia

Community Services

Coordinare

Cross Culture Design Lab

Deakin University

Education ACT

Families ACT

Health Care Compliance Association

Heart Foundation ACT

ISG Projects

Kitchengarden Foundation

Living Streets Canberra

Members of the public

National Capital Authority

Physical Activity Foundation

Planning Institute of Australia

Public Advocate and Commissioner for Children and  
Young People

SAP — Institute for Digital Government

SEE-change Youth Parliament

South Australia Government

TED\*Canberra

University of Canberra

UNSW Canberra

Urban Synergies Group

Woden Community Service

Woodlandswetlands

Yale University

YMCA

## CONTACT

### Professor Rachel Davey

Director, Health Research Institute  
University of Canberra  
P +61 (0)2 6201 5359  
E rachel.davey@canberra.edu.au

### Greg Mews

Foundation Director,  
Urban Synergies Group  
P +61 04 22 183 747  
E gregor@urbansynergiesgroup.org

