Project Summary

There is growing evidence of the links between the built environment and health outcomes (physical, mental and social health). Features of the built environment such as close proximity to parks, open space, shops, services, public transport, access to healthy food, sense of safety and sense of place, community connectedness, aesthetics and suitable housing all contribute to positive health outcomes.

There is an increasing interest in researching these relationships between the built environment and health. The PIA Victoria Planning for Health and Wellbeing (PH&WB) Project, funded by VicHealth, has been promoting healthy built environments to the planning and built environment professions and enhancing their capacity to work towards better health and wellbeing outcomes. The project has also been working to enhance health professionals’ understanding of the planning system in Victoria so they can proactively utilise this as a further means of promoting good health outcomes.

Specific project strategies include:

- Professional development to enhance the skills and capacity of professional and student planners
- Advocacy and monitoring in relation to integrated planning for health and wellbeing
- Information dissemination through a range of media including Planning News and the PIA website, as well as events such as Planning Week and conferences
- Encouragement of good examples of planning for health and wellbeing
- Supporting evidence based research which illustrates linkages between planning and health
- Development of policy and guidelines
- Building partnerships with related national and international organisations

Project Highlights and Achievements

Since its initiation in 2002, VicHealth has funded the Planning for Health and Wellbeing Project to enhance the capacity of planners to create better urban environments. In 2006, the PH&WB Project changed its focus from awareness and education to advocacy. Over the last 5 years, the project has contributed greatly to having health placed on the urban planning and built environment agenda, by working with its partners who are represented on the project's steering committee, which consists of: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Human Services, Department of Infrastructure, Department of Victoria Communities, Department of Education and Training, Victorian Local Governance Association, Municipal Association of Victoria and VicRoads.

The project provides a unique opportunity for senior government and agency officers from a range of departments to meet on a regular basis and discuss programs and activities of mutual interest. The project has also contributed to significant developments and changes, including an increased profile of health considerations in planning polices and improved links with Municipal Public Health Plans.

In addition, the project has undertaken two surveys of planning professionals to determine their awareness and implementation of 'planning-in' health. The results of these surveys have indicated a significant shift in the professions awareness of the link between planning and health.

Some highlights and achievements over the 5 year period have included:

- Successfully engaging tertiary institutions in Victoria to incorporate health in their subjects and curriculum. For example, the development and introduction of a new unit “Integrating Health and Planning” at RMIT; Short course on “Healthy Cities” developed and offered by Deakin University; input into planning course curriculum at the University of Melbourne and the renaming of the Building and Planning Unit to Social Planning for Healthy Outcomes and running it annually instead of every second year.
Conducting over 40 project related professional development events for health, planning and other related professionals attracting over 2000 participants. These included events in regional Victoria as well as papers presented at health and planning conferences and the PIA National Congress.

The project has frequently received invitations to speak on healthy urban environments, including requests to speak at interstate and national conferences, such as; The National Obesity Task Force and the National Consultative Forum on Overweight and Obesity in Older Australians.

The project convened an Education Round Table which brought together over 40 senior government, community and the private sector officials to discuss walking to school.

The publication of over 45 issues of Planning for Health and Wellbeing column in Planning News and the PH&WB pages within PIA website.

PIA Victoria receiving the 2005 VicHealth Award for Outstanding Achievement in Health Promotion for the Planning for Health and Wellbeing Project.

The annual presentation of a PH&WB category award in the PIA Awards for Planning Excellence.

Project Broader Outcomes

An increased awareness of health and wellbeing issues has contributed to the following broader outcomes:

- A national PIA position statement on Planning for Healthy Communities released in 2006.
- Nationally PIA has endorsed the Planning for Health and Wellbeing project and has successfully used Victoria’s achievements as a case to seek support and funding for a national rollout of a similar program from the Commonwealth Government. This project is being principally delivered from PIA Victoria as it is recognised as the national centre for excellence in PH&WB.
- Health and wellbeing is being considered in MSS reviews, e.g. Mornington Peninsula, Hobson’s Bay, Maribyrnong, Banyule, Moreland.
- Research partnerships developed with Deakin University, Melbourne University and RMIT and planning consultants.
- The staging of a high level symposium on Healthy Cities hosted by DSE and DHS, in conjunction with Deakin University and PIA.
- Lee Choon Siauw, the Senior Project Officer, Active Communities and Healthy Eating Unit of VicHealth receiving a Honorary Fellowship of PIA in 2006 for her personal contribution to PH&WB.

Further project information is available under the Planning for Health menu item, at: http://www.planning.org.au/vic/