

WALKING MATTERS



KEY EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT COUNCIL PLANNING

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Communities across Australia are facing many major challenges such as physical inactivity, social isolation and climate change, which can be lessened with targeted investment in walking and walkable neighbourhoods.

This report provides quick facts that can be used to illustrate the importance of walking and the need for more investment in walkable communities.



Transport and Recreation

Walking is the most popular form of physical activity across Australia. It is also an important means of transport, both on its own and in combination with public transport.

Key facts

Walking makes up 21% of trips in Melbourne (2016-21), making it the second most common way of getting around after driving a car (48%) and more common than all forms of public transport combined (6%).

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2023\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne](#)

Walking is the main way people access public transport:

- 94% of trips from home to bus stops are walked, with a median walking distance of 390m.
- 94% of trips from home to tram stops are walked; median distance 360m.
- 48% of trips from home to train stations are walked; median distance 721m.
- When trips to train stations from all locations (including from workplaces) are considered, two thirds (66%) are walked.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2019\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne suburbs](#)

Walking is the most common mode of transport for short trips, representing three in four (75%) trips less than 1km

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2023\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne](#)

In a 2020 survey, 42% of people were walking in local streets most days. By comparison, no other type of public space (e.g. parks or similar) was used by more than 10% of people on a daily basis.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2021\) Victorian Walking Survey](#)

In Australia, **44.4%** of the population participates in walking for recreation.

➤ [Clearing House for Sport \(2023\) AusPlay](#)



Health

Walking is important for physical and mental health, including social connections. Australians do not get enough physical activity which contributes to higher-levels of obesity, depression and mortality (amongst many other things). Walking is the most popular form of exercise and an accessible and cost-effective way to increase activity in the population.



Key facts

The total annual economic cost of inactivity in Australia was estimated to be \$805 million in 2016.

- [VicHealth \(2019\) Physical Activity](#)
- [Ding et al \(2016\) The economic burden of physical inactivity](#)

“Physical inactivity is the fourth-leading risk factor for mortality globally. If Australians walked for 15 minutes per day, 5 days a week, the disease burden from physical inactivity would be reduced by approximately 13%. If we all walked for 30 minutes per day, the burden would be reduced by 26%.”

- [AIHW \(2017\) Risk factors to health](#)

If physical inactivity was reduced by 10% through more walking, 2,000 fewer Australians would die each year and \$96 million would be saved in healthcare costs.

- [Victoria Walks \(2018\) The economic case for investment in walking](#)

Increasing daily activity by:

- 500 steps reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease by 7%
- 1,000 steps reduces the risk of all-cause mortality by 15%.

- [Banach et al \(2023\) The association between daily step count and all-cause and cardiovascular mortality](#)

Living in a walkable neighbourhood has been found to reduce the risk of obesity-related cancers in women. This effect was particularly strong for women living in poorer neighbourhoods.

- [India-Aldana S et al \(2023\) Long-Term Exposure to Walkable Residential Neighborhoods and Risk of Obesity-Related Cancer in the New York University Women's Health Study](#)

A 2019 survey of six regional council areas showed that footpaths were used more than any other physical activity infrastructure, with 86.5% of people using them.

- [Loddon Campaspe Survey \(2019\)](#)

The risk of depression among adults who got the recommended amount of physical activity per week – about 2.5 hours of brisk walking – was lowered by 25%.

- [American Psychology Association \(2022\) Want to boost your mental health? Take a walk](#)

Women and Girls

Walking is especially important for women, who walk more frequently than men, despite being less likely to get enough exercise overall. Women are also more likely to feel unsafe and their trips are shorter and more varied overall, partly due to a greater role as carers.



Key facts

39% of Australian women aged 18-64 are insufficiently physically active, compared to 32% of men. More than half (53%) of women aged 65 or over do not get enough exercise.

➤ [AIHW \(2023\) Physical activity](#)

Women are much more likely to walk for exercise than men, with participation rates of 62% and 38% respectively.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2022\) Investing in Walking](#)

Walking is the most common recreational physical activity for women who speak a non-European language at home, although their 41.3% participation rate is lower than the 56.5% for women who speak English or other European languages.

➤ [Clearing House for Sport \(2023\) AusPlay](#)

Due to many women's multiple responsibilities, their journeys are typically more varied and complex than men's.

- Women make more trips per day (3.7 each on average) than men (3.4)
- Women's trips are shorter (median distance of 3.9 km compared to men's 4.8 km)
- Women are more likely to travel to:
 - pick-up or drop-off someone (17.4% of trips compared to 10.8% of men's)
 - buy something (19.7% compared to 15.4%)
- And considerably less likely to travel to, or for, work (20.9% compared to 32.8%).

➤ [Victoria Walks analysis of VISTA data](#)

50% of Australian women feel unsafe walking alone at night compared to only 20% of men. In 2018, this discrepancy was greater in Australia than any other OECD country.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2021\) Lighting in public space](#) ➤ [OECD Better Life Index: Safety](#)

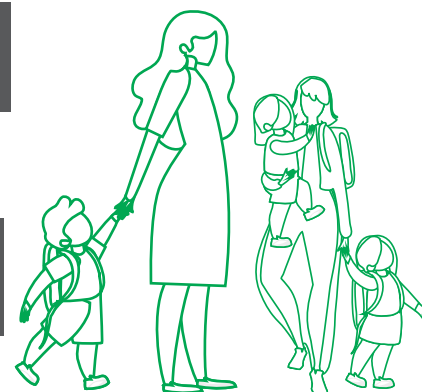
"52% of Victorian women worry about being judged while exercising, and for 41% this fear stopped them from getting active."

➤ [VicHealth \(2019\) Physical Activity](#)

Women spend more time caring for others (young and old), so have more need for accessible toilets, baby change facilities and seating when using public space.

- **29.5% of women spend time looking after a child compared to 23.0% of men.**
- **14.0% of women provide unpaid care, help or assistance to family members or others, compared to 9.7% of men.**

➤ [Victoria Walks analysis of 2021 Census data](#)



Older People

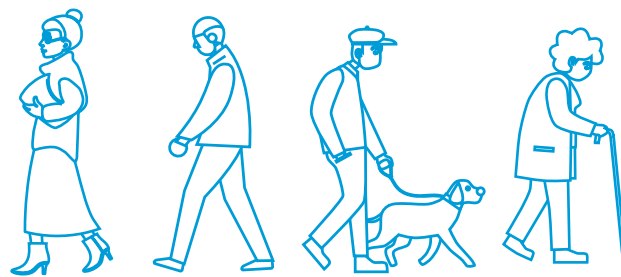
On average, older people get less physical activity and are less likely to drive. Walking is an important way for older people to get around, remain active and stay independent. Older people are more likely to have disability or other needs that require better-quality infrastructure to be able to walk safely.



Key facts

People over 65 are the most likely age group to walk for exercise, with **63%** participating.

➤ [Clearing House for Sport \(2023\) AusPlay](#)



About 30% of Australians aged over 75 do not have a licence.

➤ [BITRE \(2017\) Drivers Licenses in Australia](#)

Falls in the street affect all age groups, but older people are more likely to be hospitalised as a result of their increased frailty.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2016\) Fall-Related Injuries while Walking in Victoria](#)

Between 25% and 40% of older people who fracture a hip will die within a year.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2016\) Fall-Related Injuries while Walking in Victoria](#)

58% of older Victorians do not achieve recommended levels of physical activity.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2013\) Senior Victorians and Walking](#)

In a survey of 1,128 Victorians aged 60 or over, “Bicycle riders on shared walking and cycling paths” was rated a moderate or major constraint to walking by 39% of respondents.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2015\) Shared paths – the issues](#)

Crashes on footpaths, at driveways or entrances to car parks comprise at least 16% of crashes for people aged 65 or older when walking, and 23% for people aged 85 or older.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2016\) Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians](#)

Children and Young People

Children and young people generally cannot drive, so are dependent on other methods of transport to get around independently. Walking is a low-cost transport solution and is also a popular recreational activity for this group. It can help to address increasing rates of inactivity and deteriorating mental health.



Key facts

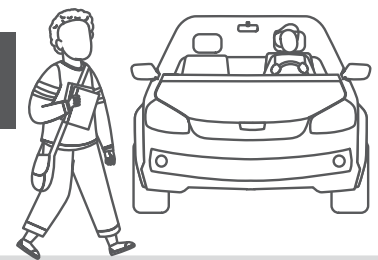
Young people between 10 and 19 years old are the most reliant on walking. Nearly half (44%) of this age group walk as part of their daily travel, including to and from public transport.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2019\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne suburbs](#)

In 1970, nearly half (48.9%) of Victorian students walked to school. Today, 20% of children walk to primary school and 18% to secondary schools. Most of the remainder — nearly 75% — are driven by car.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2023\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne](#)
➤ [Garrard and Crawford \(2010\) Evaluation of the Victorian Ride2School program](#)

One in four vehicle trips in metropolitan Melbourne beginning between 8 and 9 am are to a primary or secondary school. Further school related vehicle trips occur when many of these drivers then return home.



➤ [Victoria Walks \(2023\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne](#)

Public transport (usually associated with walking) is increasingly important for young people as they become independent. One in ten people use public transport to get to high school and more than half (54.4%) to tertiary education and technical schools.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2023\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne](#)

Injury is a leading cause of child deaths in Australia, with 29% of all injury deaths caused by land transport, particularly car crashes.

➤ [AIHW \(2022\) Australia's Children](#)

Walking for transport comprises nearly half (48%) of the total time per week spent on physical activity for people aged 18 to 24. The remaining 52% is spent on vigorous and moderate physical activity, and walking for fitness.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2017\) Young People and Walking](#)

Equity

Walking is a form of physical activity and mode of transport that is accessible to nearly everyone, wherever they are, at no cost. Walking is one of the more popular forms of exercise in disadvantaged populations that often have higher rates of inactivity and disease. Promoting walking can be used to mitigate health inequalities.



Key facts

Nearly 30% of Victorians don't have a driver licence, including 9% of adults. Many others do not drive or do not have access to a car.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2022\) Investing in Walking](#)

People on low incomes are less likely to exercise than wealthier people. However, people on low incomes are more likely to walk than people with higher incomes – 50.1% of people in households with income less than \$40,000 a year participate in walking for recreation (not including bushwalking). There is a gradual decline in participation as household income increases, with 44.0% of people with household income of \$200,000 or more participating.

➤ [Clearing House for Sport \(2023\) AusPlay](#)

Walking for transport is also a socially inclusive form of physical activity. Walking for transport is fairly evenly distributed across the socioeconomic spectrum.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2013\) Senior Victorians and Walking](#)

First Nations people are less likely than non-indigenous people to participate in sport and physical activity at least once a week. However, recreational walking is the most popular sport or physical activity for First Nations people, with 38.5% participating.

➤ [Clearinghouse for Sport \(2023\) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders](#)

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of people aged 15 and over with disability do not get enough physical activity, compared with half (52%) of those without disability.

➤ [AIHW \(2024\) People with disability in Australia](#)

Walking is especially popular for Australians with disability, who participate in recreational walking at a higher rate (49.0%) than the total population (44.4%.) The next most popular physical activity for people with disability is gym/fitness at 28%.

➤ [Clearing House for Sport \(2023\) AusPlay](#)



Economics

Increasing the share of people using walking for transport has the potential to significantly reduce economic costs for governments and individuals. Converting travel trips to walking from expensive modes such as driving can lessen infrastructure, maintenance and trauma costs, while increasing activity reduces the economic burden of physical inactivity. Additionally, recreational walking can stimulate tourism economies in regional areas.



Key facts

2.4 million vehicle trips each week would be saved if half of short (less than 1km) private vehicle trips were walked instead. If the trips averaged 0.5km this would equate to \$165 million in savings each year.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2018\) The economic case for investment in walking](#)

Walking infrastructure investment provides a return of \$13 for every \$1 spent, higher than most road and rail projects.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2018\) The economic case for investment in walking](#)

There are \$2.68 of savings to the economy for every 1km walked instead of driven.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2018\) The economic case for investment in walking](#)

Households in outer Melbourne spend \$23,655 a year on transport (parking, car ownership, fuel and public transport), nearly three times the \$8,310 spent by households in the more walkable inner suburbs.

➤ [Great Southern Bank \(2023\) Making informed housing choices](#)

In the inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne, 30-40% of people walk to get to their local shops.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2019\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne suburbs](#)

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2022\) Investing in Walking](#)

A survey of people at Fairfield Village found the estimated monthly spend was significantly higher for walkers (\$405) than drivers (\$232).

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2019\) Walking and Transport in Melbourne suburbs](#)

It is estimated that development of the Peninsula Trail in Mornington would support 267 full-time jobs in construction and 109 full time jobs once completed.

➤ [Mornington Peninsula Shire \(2024\) Peninsula Trail](#)

There is strong community support for government investment to make it easier to walk to schools (72% agree or strongly agree), tram/bus stops (67%) and railway stations (64%). In total, 89% of respondents wanted a combination of actions to help them walk more in their local area.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2021\) Victorian Walking Survey](#)



The United Nations recommends that governments spend 20% of their transport budget on active transport, significantly more than the 2% spent in Australia.

➤ [Capacity4dev \(2016\) Global Outlook on Walking and Cycling](#)

➤ [Climate Council \(2022\) Three Sustainable Transport Wins for Australian States and Territories](#)

Road Safety

Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable road users. Providing safe walking environments and protection from vehicles is an important step in increasing rates of walking and ensuring that all people feel safe when walking.



Key facts

In the 5 years to September 2023, 190 people died on the roads while walking in Victoria, of which 90 (47.4%) were aged 60 or older. In the same period there were 3,154 pedestrian hospitalisations, including 1068 (33.9%) aged 60 and over.

➤ [TAC \(2024\) Searchable road trauma statistics](#)

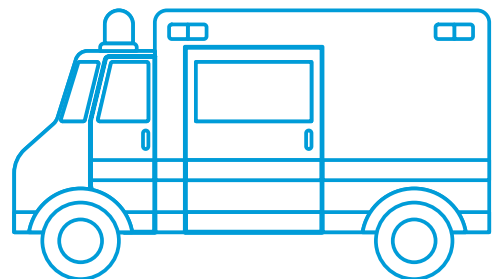


Trips and falls in the street send over 5,000 people to hospital each year – more than twice the number of pedestrians admitted or presenting at hospital after a road crash.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2016\) Fall-Related Injuries while Walking in Victoria](#)

In the 5 years to 3 April 2024, nearly one quarter (23.6%) of the traffic fatalities in metro Melbourne were people walking (130 out of 550).

➤ [TAC \(2024\) Searchable road trauma statistics](#)



Roads in metropolitan Melbourne with a speed limit of 60 km/h or higher account for 77% of pedestrian deaths.

➤ [Victoria Walks \(2021\) Safer Urban Speed Limits](#)

Environment and Climate Change

Transport is a large contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Walking (in conjunction with public transport) is a big part of the solution. A hotter climate requires more trees, shaded walkways, seating and drinking fountains for walking to remain a viable and attractive option.



Key facts

Walking is the most sustainable form of transport, producing no carbon emissions compared to 243.8g of CO₂ per person per km for the average Victorian petrol car.

➤ [City of Melbourne \(2018\) Transport Strategy Refresh](#)

An estimated 11,105 Australian adults die prematurely every year due to vehicle emissions. Children are also vulnerable, with 66,000 affected by asthma as a direct result of vehicle emissions.

➤ [Melbourne Climate Futures \(2023\) Health impacts associated with traffic emissions in Australia](#)

Air pollution costs Australia at least \$6.2 billion every year.

➤ [Hanigan et al \(2021\) Avoidable Mortality Attributable to Anthropogenic Fine Particulate Matter in Australia](#)

Increased temperatures cause hotter surfaces, which can result in people being hospitalised for serious burns if they fall, particularly older people, people with disability and those who are homeless.

➤ [Kowal-Vern et al \(2019\) "Streets of Fire" revisited: contact burns](#)

Trees can reduce the temperatures of the surfaces they shade by as much as 10-25°C.

➤ [Heart Foundation \(2013\) Making the case for investment in street trees and landscaping in urban environments](#)

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