

# BUILDING ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF COUNCIL INITIATIVES

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically, Town Planning has been concerned with protecting public health and safety. Indeed, earliest town planning legislation in the UK grew out of public health legislation. Over time planning broadened its focus and the role of planners by adding new areas within its scope of concerns. Meanwhile, public health organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) expanded their focus from extension of health services into the rural areas to also include urban areas. This has resulted in the Healthy Cities Movement in the 1990s.

More recently in Australian cities, as in many other cities across the world, there has been growing concern about the health and wellbeing of people with increasing incidence of obesity, diabetics and heart diseases reported in the media. The growing burden of such preventable diseases related to lifestyle risk factors has prompted an increased concern for promoting healthy living. This has resulted in a reconfirmation of the connection between lifestyles and the built environment and natural settings in which we live. This has, consequently, led to a renewed focus on the links between town planning and public health. As a result, there have been initiatives by different levels of government, the Heart Foundation, and professional organisations to provide guidance for promoting physical activities and healthy eating (Queensland Government and Heart Foundation, 2010; Victoria Department of Health, undated; NSW Department of Health 2009; PIA 2009; Pretorius, 2008).

In Australian cities, many councils have embarked on programs to create supportive environments for physical activities and healthy living. These focus on support for diverse sports and recreational activities to promote a 'healthy life-style' for the citizens along with the provision of infrastructure for 'active transport'. Local councils play the major role in regulating and controlling development to shape the urban environmental settings. The heightened concerns with promoting healthy lifestyles thus create added expectations from local councils to integrate lifestyle concerns into its functions. In this context, what are the local councils currently doing to address this growing concern about promoting healthy and active lifestyle? What kind of initiatives have they put in place and how effective are they? These are the questions the paper proposes to address.

The major objective of the paper is to examine the role of local government in promoting active and healthy living in Queensland. Using Gold Coast as a case study area, it sets out to assess how local councils can act as an enabler to promote active living. The paper reviews significant council initiatives such as the Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance (GCPA Alliance), Gold Coast Physical Activity Plan (GCPAP), Council's Active and Healthy Program and Active Transport. The paper also seeks to identify the challenges and issues these initiatives present and draw lessons for other local councils in Australia.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is growing literature examining the links between planning, design and health, (Frank et al. 2003; Giles-Corti and Donovan 2003; Barton, 2009; Kent et al. 2011; Thompson et al. 2011). Frank et al. (2003) discuss how the built environment can play a constraining or facilitating role on physical activities. The Planning Institute of Australia's *Healthy Places and Spaces: National Guide* identifies ten principles for designing the built environment for healthy living which includes active transport, aesthetics, connectivity, environment for all people, mixed density, mixed land use, parks and open spaces, safety and surveillance, and social inclusion (PIA 2009). The intent of these principles is to build active and healthy communities by creating environments that are supportive of active living for all members of the community. Recently, the Healthy Built Environments Program of the University of New South Wales completed a major review examining the role of the built environment in supporting human health and found that the right combination of density, mixed use and micro-design elements

can contribute to desirable levels of physical activity (Kent, Thompson and Jalaludin, 2011). The findings also revealed that people with access to good quality and safe open space are more likely to be take up physically active forms of recreation.

### **A Review of the UK's Spatial Planning & Health**

An on-going review of the UK spatial planning system assessed the extent to which health issues are addressed in local spatial planning documents. It found that most regional plans and core strategies either consider the spatial determinants of only a limited health agenda or do not explicitly consider health and well being at all. It found, however, that wherever the core strategies considered health - even partially - the area action plans featured explicit health-oriented policies, while their local transport plans reinforced "the healthy elements particularly in relation to physical activity" (Gray et al. 2010:10). This suggests that heightened concerns for health flow across various levels of plan making and local council functions.

The study concludes that "it is not primarily the planning system which inhibits health-integrated plans, but the attitudes, resources and knowledge of the actors" (Gray et al. 2010:10). This suggests that the degree to which a local council assumes the role of the leader and enabler is crucial to the realization of integration of health concerns in the delivery of its planning and governance functions.

The four areas that the review identified as crucial to the integration of health into planning were:

- Knowledge: barriers/facilitators linked to the knowledge and conceptual understanding of health by different actors/stakeholders;
- Partnership: barriers/facilitators linked to the governance system in place and the political context;
- Management and resources: barriers/facilitators linked to the way institutions work, the responsibilities they have and their capacity and resources;
- Policy process: barriers/facilitators linked to the policy process, its effectiveness and inclusiveness.

(Gray et al. 2010:19)

A major 'knowledge' barrier was attributed to the narrow definition of 'health' among those who had not grasped the broader WHO definition that considers physical, social and mental well being in addition to the absence of illness. "Evidence suggests that those responsible for decisions on and assessments of planning proposals often view health in narrow terms, focussing on physical environment concerns such as air quality, rather than taking a broader definition of health that recognises the role of the social environment and seeks to address the wider determinants of health" (Gray et al. 2010 :37). Health professionals were similarly seen to lack the understanding of the planning system and statutory assessment processes required to make a valuable contribution (Gray et al. 2010).

An effective 'partnership' features as a major determinant in successfully integrating health concerns into planning and local government functions. The review points out that the potential partners "have very different cultures, and use different languages and terminologies" (Gray et al. 2010: 37) and that "limited time and human resources that are available to dedicate to developing effective partnerships ... This extends to conducting community engagement and participatory stakeholder workshops" (2010: 38).

The positive role of multi-disciplinary task forces and strategic alliances in promoting better partnership working is highlighted, noting the importance of institutional support provided by a dedicated body or broker organisation in facilitating partnership working. It refers to NHS London's Healthy Urban Development Unit (HUDU) "as a key facilitator in the bringing together of health and planning concerns across London" (Gray et al. 2010: 39).

Findings from the review underscore the need for local councils to assume leadership role in bridging across disciplines and working cultures and providing the institutional support required to form effective partnerships to bring about the desired changes in way things are done.

### **Australian Initiatives**

The Heart Foundation (2009) maintains that local government can play a vital role in the creation of healthy communities. It argues that healthy communities require positive environments and initiatives that support physical activity, healthy lifestyles and a sense of community connection. According to Heart Foundation

Important elements of a healthy community include:

- Opportunities for recreational and incidental physical activity.
- Safe, connected walkable catchments.
- Accessible, safe and appealing environments and facilities that encourage healthy lifestyles.
- Access to affordable healthy foods.
- Smoke-free environments.
- Opportunities for community members to lead interactive and socially connected lives.
- Appropriate, well designed and maintained infrastructure that supports recreation, social interaction and active transport options

(The Heart Foundation 2011: 1)

According to the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL), councils have an important role in shaping healthy local environments through their roles in strategic land use planning and development assessment as well as in provision and management of facilities and services. Being the lowest level of government closer to the community, councils can provide local leadership for coordinating the activities of various government agencies and non-governmental organisations in promoting active living. PCAL has developed a number of guidelines to help councils contribute to the health and wellbeing of their staff and communities (Lette and Wiggins, 2010, Wiggins 2010).

While councils have been in the business of creating environments that support physical activity, there is now an expectation for them to also create supportive environments for various aspects of healthy lifestyle. A recently emerging focus, for example, is on eating with a growing realisation that local environments influence food choices and healthy eating behaviours (e.g. Pretorius, 2008; Queensland Government and Heart Foundation, 2010). These initiatives suggest that healthy eating considerations should inform the council's strategic and operational activities. The emergence of such new foci and the added dimensions to its responsibilities and considerations underscore the need for effective coordination within various departments within the council itself. Optimising the outcomes of council plans and programs in the shape of health benefits to the community requires all departments and services to coordinate their efforts to create supportive environments.

This brief review of literature provides a useful context for the case study of Gold Coast to examine its key initiatives on active and healthy living.

## **CASE STUDY: GOLD COAST**

### **The Settings**

The Gold Coast is one of the best known tourism destination in Australia. With extensive coastline offering kilometres of beach front, hills and nature parks in the hinterland and a sub-tropical climate, it provides a great outdoors life-style. It is also one of the largest local councils in Australia in terms of population. It has a coastal spine with reasonably high population densities, public transport and opportunities for an active lifestyle.

The attractive settings, however, may not translate into a healthy lifestyle, especially inland from the coast where the urban form comprises relatively large car dependent suburbs with poor permeability. The natural waterways, canal estates and golf courses that often separate the suburbs may superficially appear to offer an attractive outdoor active lifestyle but are effectively unusable as public open spaces by the residents of the suburbs. The canals front private property and usually remain inactive while the privately operated golf courses cater exclusively to golfers. The inland areas of Gold Coast have limited route choices and a public transport network restricted by the urban structure. Green spaces and parks, although extensive, are often the left over spaces from residential developments. The physical activity and recreational use potential of these parks is low but they are expensive for the council to maintain.

## **Active and Healthy Lifestyle Initiatives in Gold Coast**

Gold Coast city council has undertaken the following key initiatives related to active and healthy living:

1. Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance
2. Gold Coast Physical Activity Plan 2010-2020
3. Gold Coast City Council's Healthy and Active Program
4. Active Travel – Gold Coast City Council

### **1. Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance**

Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance was set up in 2004 as a coalition of stakeholders for advancement of physical activity initiatives within various sectors, levels and communities in Gold Coast. With strong focus on collaborative partnerships, it was believed that the alliance will be stronger working together than working as individual agencies. The major aim of the alliance was to 'to provide co-ordination, integration and strategic focus to physical activity efforts on the Gold Coast'. (Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance, 2010). The alliance includes federal, state and local governments, Universities, non-governmental community organisations and professional bodies.

Formerly comprised of members from the Gold Coast City Council (GCCC), Department of Communities, and Queensland Health, the Alliance was significantly expanded in 2008 with State funding through the Primary Care Partnership Council. It currently comprises of around forty key partners, including State government departments, GCCC departments, two universities (Bond and Griffith), and organisations such as the General Practice Gold Coast, Bicycle Gold Coast and Cancer Council Queensland.

The Alliance has Project Management Team (PMT) of four members: two staff from the Queensland Department of Communities (which looks after sports and recreation), one staff from Gold Coast City Council and one staff from Queensland Health. This team coordinates the activities of the alliance members and act as liaison for other stakeholders.

#### *The Challenges and issues of the Alliance*

While there are a number of government departments as well as private businesses forming the Alliance, there are only a couple of local community groups (for example, the local surf life saving clubs which are integral part of Gold Coast are not part of this alliance). The community visibility of the Alliance itself is thought to be low amongst the general public.

A major challenge for the Alliance will be to keep up the interest and momentum for change and renewal amongst its diverse members while operating with minimal financial and human resources. This may have the effect of tiring the Alliance members as well causing burn out among council staff directly involved in its management. The Alliance may also be vulnerable to shifting priorities amongst Alliance members from political and structural changes in member organisations.

The alliance acknowledges the difficulty of integration of the different levels of government, the multiple departments involved and the wide range of stakeholders to ensure a consistent message from all tiers of government. Additionally, the size of the Alliance membership could hinder the visibility of the program due to the large number of organisations involved. Building the capacity of the council to effectively liaise with and coordinate a group with so many members and effectively engage with the community would require substantial additional resources.

### **2. The Gold Coast Physical Activity Plan 2010-2020**

The Gold Coast City Council Physical Activity Plan is a ten-year strategic plan for the city comprising of an action and an implementation plan. The plan serves as the guiding document to plan, promote, market and encourage active lifestyle changes amongst Gold Coast Residents. It adopts the *Healthy Spaces and Places Design Principles* produced by the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) under the auspices of the Heart Foundation and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGO). The plan

also refers to the social marketing and education programs of federal government's National Preventative Healthy Strategy.

The GCPAP was developed as an initiative of the Alliance to deliberately align the proposed actions of Alliance members. It aims to integrate local initiatives with National and State ones to avoid duplication. The plan seeks to identify local leaders to champion physical activity within their communities and assist local sporting and recreation clubs to improve their service delivery. By expanding and enhancing capacities of physical activity agencies and providers it hopes to create and increase opportunities for residents of the Gold Coast to adopt an active lifestyle.

The GCPAP is based on a comprehensive background report and community consultation findings and concentrates on the promotion, marketing and creation of physical activity opportunities. The scope of the plan, however, needs to directly address the geographic and physical peculiarities of Gold Coast's urban environment and its changing demographic profile.

#### *The Strengths of the GCPAP*

The Alliance has produced an impressive coordinated program of physical activities by building on the existing network of providers and the high quality open spaces of the Gold Coast along the beachfronts. It has engaged in raising the awareness of the physical activity opportunities in the city by cataloguing them which in turn will also help identify the gaps that exist. By using diverse channels of communication for the promotion of the 'Get Active' initiative, the Alliance seeks to raise community interest in health related matters and physical activity levels amongst Gold Coasters.

Acknowledging the contribution of car dependent cities to sedentary lifestyles low patronage of public transport, the initiative advocates for the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure and the development of pedestrian and bicycle friendly communities throughout the Gold Coast. It promotes urban design guidelines for urban forms that support and enable active lifestyles. It emphasises the role of natural environment and the need to develop open spaces and parks that meet the activity needs of GC residents. The Alliance also encourages a rolling review of planning schemes, documents and policies.

#### *The Challenges and issues of the GCPAP*

Although the plan recognises problems in high population growth areas, amongst vulnerable groups and car dependent inland suburbs, the Get Active program is not delivered in these places. Social and spatial equity considerations would divert the plan's current focus from the coastal strip which could potentially not suit some of the Alliance members, especially those from the private sector. On the other hand, the areas that are the least suited to GCPAP implementation are perhaps the suburbs most poorly served by public transport and those that have the highest percentages of vulnerable populations. Planning and design standards and activities that work along the coast may not be able to deal with locationally disadvantaged spaces. The current plan may require extensive revisions to adapt it for use away from the coastal strip.

The GCPAP implicitly relies on the untested assumption that promotion, marketing and education will by itself increase community awareness of the benefits of physical activity sufficiently to bring about significant improvements in health outcomes. This requires careful monitoring of the implementation of the plan and its impacts over the years.

### **3. Gold Coast City Council's Active and Healthy Program**

- Gold Coast City Council has established the 'Active & Healthy program' with comprehensive physical activity programs designed to suit all ages and fitness levels. These comprise of the following types of programs:
  - Citywide Program : that offers activities for everyone including children, seniors, youth and people with a disability.
  - School Holiday Program : that run for children during school holidays
  - Vibe Youth Program: consisting of a range of activities such as skating, teen yoga, art, zumba, and music for Youth.

The Gold Coast city council has developed a range of fitness circuits and equipments such as cross-trainers, steppers, push-up and sit-up boards in council parks in 15 different locations in the city. The Citywide Program includes physical activities such as tai chi, yoga, pilates, sports personal training, nutrition, outdoor adventures and group fitness. Many of these programs are held in outdoor venues such as sporting grounds, beaches and parks by service providers. The council publishes a document called 'Get Active' listing all the programmed activities offered by the council, sporting and recreational clubs and other organisations such as Heart Foundation. The document contains information on Gold Coast parks and activities as well. The information is also available in council website (GCParks).

The Council also provides information on programs offered by other organisations on their website. For example Obesity Prevention Australia provides a program called *Kick Start 4 Health*, a personal health and lifestyle development workshop which is a free program for the community. It also provides information on community health centres providing multidisciplinary services such as chronic disease wellness program, cardiac rehabilitation program, multiple sclerosis fitness program for people with chronic disease such as heart and pulmonary problems.

A number of activities relating to health and fitness are subsidized by Council subsidises . There are over 150 free or low cost activities running weekly across the city. For example, activities such as group fitness training, tai chi, yoga and pilates, held in the Council's parks or community centres are free to join. The Council also provides venue for other private sector health and fitness service providers in the parks such as mediation workshops. Activities for seniors subsidised by the council include promoting healthy exercise habits, group exercise training as well as sporting activities such as snooker, low impact water-based aqua classes.

Gold Coast city council has also recently initiated the 'Active Inclusion' program with financial support from the Queensland state government to encourage people with disability to engage in sports and recreational activities. Some of the activities include wheelchair basketball, aerobics, self defence programs, and wheelchair yoga. Many of these activities are free while others are offered at low cost, being subsidised by the Council.

#### *Stretched Resources*

For a council with small population size, Gold Coast has an impressive list of physical activities and programs for diverse group of people including children, seniors and people with disability. It is worth noting that while the geographic area of Gold Coast is comparable to that of neighbouring Brisbane, its population is less than half that of Brisbane. With a small rate base and a relatively large geographic area, maintaining council parks and natural areas such as beaches and trails may prove to be a challenge. Gold Coast region is said to have 57 kilometers of beaches, 25,000 hectares of natural areas and parks and 2,800 hectares of open space designated for sporting, recreation and other community purposes all of which requires significant financial and human resources to manage.

Currently, the council has only a small staff (primarily comprising of two full time staff members) to manage its Active and Healthy Program and has to depend on support from private sector providers and other government departments to fund its activities. Moving beyond the initial tasks of the program such as marketing, promotion and coordination,, the greater challenge for the council will be to initiate change in the urban design of the public spaces to produce a supportive environment for physical activity. This will require a much larger effort and commitment than its current resources would allow.

#### **4. Active Travel – Gold Coast City Council**

The Gold Coast City Council has initiated an 'Active Travel' program to improve the proportion of residents, businesses and visitors utilising alternate transport modes. The objective of the program is to promote active and healthy living through building a network of walking, cycling and public transport routes linking people to places such as schools, shopping areas and employment centres.

There are plans for cycling facilities and services to encourage connection choices for cyclists to use the GCRT service. How this is to be achieved has not been clearly articulated in the initial planning. The GCRT has planned for secure storage for bicycles and the GCCC has investigated the provision of cycle hire at stops as occurs in other cities.

### *Walking*

As walking is a simple and easy way for people of all age groups to be physically active, the Gold Coast city council has undertaken a number of initiatives to encourage walking. Gold Coast City Council in partnership with the Heart Foundation has established community based walking groups in different suburbs led by local volunteers. There are currently about 13 walking groups in Gold Coast, spread in both coastal and inland suburbs. Another initiative jointly promoted by Gold Coast City Council and the Heart Foundation is the '1000 Steps' program aiming to increase physical activity levels among local residents. Participants can obtain pedometers from the council libraries. There are also many clubs such as the Southport Triathlon Club, Surfers Paradise Clubs that are oriented towards training for long distance running. Gold Coast City also hosts the annual Gold Coast Airport marathon event which is the largest marathon in Australia. Gold Coast's extensive network of beaches, parks, nature reserves provide a good setting for walking.

Although the council has developed number of initiatives for walking, there is still a need for better network of walkways in Gold Coast. Many neighbourhoods lack safe footpaths for pedestrians. There is also an unresolved issue regarding the sharing of paths between cyclists and pedestrians. The Council also needs to be mindful of the fact that many walking groups are located in relatively affluent areas. Within the Varsity Lakes area, for example, there are two walking groups.

### *Cycling*

Gold Coast city council promotes cycling, highlighting its health, economic and environmental benefit on its website. It wants to promote cycling as a popular transit option to get to work, school, move around and for recreation. It has incorporated bikeways in the town planning guidelines and invested in expanding the bike network in the city.

Gold Coast Bicycle Network Strategy (GCBNS) was first adopted by the GCCC in 1996. It was the city's first bicycle plan which recommended a range of actions for the co-ordinated provision of cycling infrastructure and programs. This strategy was subsequently reviewed in the Bikeway Network Operational Plan 2001.

Some of the major aims and objectives discussed in the GCBNS include the following:

- A city wide network of on road and off road bikeways.
- Provision of bikeways as a requirement for development approval.
- Inclusion of bikeways through existing and proposed parks
- To actively pursue the creation of "veloways" and links to the Gold Coast Rail Line
- Improving touring and training routes in the City and Hinterland
- Establishment of Regional bikeway with adjoining councils
- Program of advertising, educational and safety awareness to schools and the community
- Develop Greenways and Greenbridges over water to improve route choice
- A continuous bikeway to be known as the Oceanway along the coast

(GCBNS 1996)<sup>1</sup>

Despite the lapse of fourteen years after the development of bikeways in Gold Coast, the lack of connectivity of the urban structure is still evident. The barriers to cycling and walking exist in the form of the road network structure, natural and artificial waterways. Cyclists are required to share the route with very high volumes of vehicular traffic in major roads such as Gold Coast Highway and Bermuda Street. The parks and open spaces are not integrated and do not form any real part of a bike network.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/attachment/communityconsultation/bnop-report\\_section3.pdf](http://www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/attachment/communityconsultation/bnop-report_section3.pdf)

Cycle ways that exist are hardly used in the suburbs of the Gold Coast. There are good reasons why residents have difficulty in cycling as active transport. The critical route environments along major arterial roads are often unpleasant and unsafe. Route choice between adjacent suburbs and within suburbs is often poor and indirect. Destinations are too far apart for reasonable journeys. This is hardly surprising given that the suburbs were primarily designed around the motor car.

### *Public Transport*

The quality of public transport is generally poor in the Gold Coast. The majority of the suburbs and the hinterland are disconnected and heavily car dependent. There are plans to increase the bus services to the suburbs but these will still be along routes that are through disconnected adjacent low-density suburbs with poor route choices.

The city is currently building a Gold Coast Rapid Transit (GCRT) from Griffith University to Broadbeach (the service is expected to be running by 2014). It is anticipated that the further sections will be constructed that will run from Helensvale to Coolangatta and the Gold Coast Airport but there is no current funding for that eventuality at present (Translink et.al 2008).

The GCRT project was built as part of a response to relieve congestion, move away from a road building philosophy and place more consideration for public transport, pedestrians and cyclists. However, the GCRT system directly serves a small slice of the Gold Coast population that shows little appetite for public transport with only 4% of trips as compared to Brisbane's 8%, both of which are very low by some international comparisons. It will serve a route already served by a frequent service but connectivity to the suburbs is still a questionable choice for many Gold Coasters living outside of the coastal spine. Many locals see it as a tourist service and not meeting their public transport needs.

The physical activity programs the Council offers need to be evaluated to gauge the extent they cater to the needs of the disadvantaged groups such as those belonging to the Aboriginal community and low income groups in the city. With the aging of the population, physical activity of the elderly within these groups assumes greater importance. Many such groups are found in the more inland suburbs of Gold Coast. This underscores the importance of looking into the health and active life needs of people living away from the coast and therefore located far from where much of the healthy and active program activities are being convened. An equitable and affordable public transport system that connects the hinterland to the coastal areas in general and to the health activities' locations in particular.

The Active and Healthy program, for example, is geographically concentrated along the coastal strip. While the program acknowledges that there are huge areas of parks and open spaces in Gold Coast City, these activities are overwhelmingly located either in beach parks, community centres and some commercially run premises. Meanwhile, there are many suburbs in the Gold Coast without a single activity program.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Gold Coast city council has assumed a key role as an enabler for promoting active living in a number of ways. First, it has been instrumental in developing strategic partnerships with a range of stakeholders involved in sports and recreation resulting in the setting up of the Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance. The *partnership alliance* includes not only sports and recreation groups but also health promotion organisations such as the Heart Foundation and Queensland Health. Secondly, it has put in place the Gold Coast Physical Activity Plan 2010-2020, a *comprehensive plan* to provide strategic directions to physical activity planning across the city. This document may be seen as the embodiment of development of principles and plans to promote health and well being.

The council has also played a crucial role in the creation of knowledge through the dissemination of information on a range of activities and events sponsored by public and private organisation. It has been active in the provision of services and promoting activities and events with health and wellbeing outcomes. In doing so, it has attempted to cater to the needs of a diverse group of people by developing specific programs for active living focussing on children, youth, seniors and people with disabilities. Many of the active and healthy programs for disadvantaged groups as well as those with wider benefits to community are subsidised by the council. The council has been instrumental in

enhancing the built environment and infrastructure to support and facilitate healthy community outcomes. It has made available physical spaces such as public parks and beaches for conducting activities such as yoga and *tai chi*. The Council has also embarked on foreshore development in areas such as Surfers Paradise to make the beach fronts more attractive and conducive to physical activities. It is worth noting here that the The Heart Foundation awarded the Healthy Community Award the Gold Coast City Council this year.

While the Gold Coast City Council has assumed and played a positive role in promoting healthy lifestyles, many barriers and challenges to active living in the city still remain. There are issues of spatial and social inequity relating to accessibility to the programs on offer. The bulk of the program of activities seems more concentrated along coastal locations. Access to these activities by residents of inland suburbs is a problem that needs to be addressed. An absence of adequate public transport services linking parks in coastal locations to inland suburbs is likely to create transport disadvantage especially for the low-income households residing in the inland suburbs. Some of the programs in parks tend to focus more on life style and quality of life rather than health *per se* and may not be found equally attractive across various age and income groups. Active Transport in Gold Coast is still in its infancy and more investments need to be made to develop safer bike-paths and pedestrian walkways in the city. It is worth noting that current Active Transport initiatives also have some spatial bias with more bikeways planned along the coast rather than within inland communities.

The coastal rather than inland focus of the healthy living initiatives could be seen as a natural choice due to the ease of implementation, even at the cost of social equity considerations. It could also be explained in terms of the motivation of the Alliance membership, which comprises a number of private sector partners. There may be a bias stemming from a preference to target a more upmarket clientele. The council itself could have an added motivation to promote the Gold Coast's image as that of a vibrant place offering a desirable lifestyle rather than addressing social and spatial inequity issues. The coastal strip has iconic value in branding Gold Coast's global identity. Adding a 'health conscious' label to the branding of the iconic coastal strip would further boost Gold Coast's QOL index, significantly improving its chances of attracting global investments.

The following recommendations are suggested to overcome the challenges facing the Gold Coast City Council in building active and healthy communities. Firstly, there needs to be greater integration of active transport with easier access to public transport and activity centres by cycling and walking. There needs to be greater focus on travel smart initiatives targeting large employers such as government departments, educational institutions and health facilities. As the Gold Coast City Council itself is one of the largest employers in the city, the Travel smart initiative could well target council employees as a demonstration project.

The health and active living initiatives proposed in the physical activity plan need to be integrated in the council strategic and statutory plans. Although there is partnership with forty different agencies and service providers, there is need for greater involvement of the community to ensure effectiveness of these programs. There need to be put in place participatory mechanisms for the evaluation of the programs measuring healthy community outcomes in terms of healthy lifestyles, physical activities, improved social equity and social inclusion.

A greater urban design focus is required to bring about improvement and enhancement of built environment making it more supportive of healthy lifestyles. Locations for healthy activities and events must be integrated within an adequate public transport service that is affordable as well as accessible to both coastal and the inland suburbs. This should guide the locations and perhaps the type of health activities

There is potential for other similar councils in Australia to learn from the Gold Coast's experience both in terms of its physical activity initiatives and the challenges it is facing. Likewise, Gold Coast needs to examine the relevance of innovative projects from other councils for its healthy and active programs.

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