



# HEALTHY PLACES

Designing  
for Health  
in Alberta

WHAT THAT MEANS, WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE & HOW PUBLIC POLICY CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN



## WHAT IS A HEALTHY PLACE?

An environment that promotes healthy behaviour like walking, cycling, socializing, playing and healthy eating for those of all ages, incomes, genders and cultural backgrounds.

# Why Healthy Places?

We are facing a new health crisis: diabetes and obesity are on the rise, and we are increasingly sedentary. Adapting the built environment can improve health and health equity. Healthy places have many benefits: they are age-friendly, climate-friendly, and good for the economy.

## HEALTHY PEOPLE

Physical activity helps prevent and manage diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Even those who 'aren't that into walking' will walk more in accessible environments.

**\$120 million**

estimated cost to Calgary per year (2016) for pedestrian collisions and fatalities

**20 minutes**

of cycling per day can reduce the risk of heart disease by 50%

## IN ALBERTA

**37%**

of Albertans are sedentary 10+ hours per day

**39%**

increase in diabetes 2003-2014

**15 km/ hour**

decrease in residential speed limit (from 45-30km/ hour) can increase survival in pedestrian collisions from 50 to 90%

**Inactivity is estimated to cost Canada \$10 billion annually**

## HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Healthy Places are climate-friendly. Developing walkable communities is the most effective way to reduce household greenhouse gas production.

**Alberta is the #1 producer of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada**

**10%**

the environmental footprint of a commuting cyclist compared to someone who drives to work

**2/3**

of household greenhouse gas emissions are from transportation in Canada

**247 megatonnes**

Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions in 2015

**3.6 million**

vehicles in Alberta

**4,400 deaths**

(premature) per year are linked to air pollution in Canada

## HEALTHY ECONOMY

Healthy design can reduce health care and congestion costs, and increase productivity. Commercial districts and home-owners benefit from healthy design through increased property values and sales.

**Congestion cost \$2.3-3.7 billion to the 9 largest Canadian cities in 2006**

**\$2 billion**

lost to San Francisco businesses annually through employees stuck in traffic

**\$700-3000**

U.S. dollar increase in home values alongside a 1 point increase in WalkScore™

## HEALTH FOR ALL AGES

Not everyone can drive. Children, seniors & people with mobility issues rely on other modes of transportation. By 2031, 1 in 5 Albertans will be a senior. Research tells us that community design plays a role in how happy and productive they will be.

**1 billion**

volunteer hours provided by seniors in Canada yearly. Without access to their city and community, seniors cannot make these contributions

**Physically active children are better students**

They have better academic achievement, concentration, and classroom behaviour

## HEALTH EQUITY

Communities experiencing low-incomes are more likely to have poor infrastructure: less green space, fewer sidewalks, and less connectivity. The result, they disproportionately experience poor health.

**Neighbourhoods with lower household incomes are linked with more pedestrian collisions in Calgary**

**The more affluent are 3-5x more active**

Households in Alberta with an annual income between \$125,000 and \$149,999 were 3.5 times more likely to be physically active than those with less than \$20,000

# What do Healthy Places look like?

Sustainable Calgary’s Active Neighbourhoods Canada program has been developing design schemes based on community feedback for the past six years. These aim to promote more liveable, walkable and vibrant communities. What do healthy places look like? Here are some of our ideas!



**Acadia Pop-Up Plaza**  
A neighbourhood gathering space is also a traffic calming strategy. A prototype of the Pop-Up Plaza turns unused parking stalls into an “outdoor living room”, with outdoor furniture, espresso, pop-up bookstore, bocce ball, ping pong, board games, arts & crafts, snacks, and simple traffic calming.



**Laneway + Parkway, Marlborough, Calgary**

Green walking networks, parkside living and gentle density make walking/cycling safe and attractive, and increase use of local parks.



**Reimagine Catwalks Project**  
How can we take advantage of great existing infrastructure? Catwalks are pedestrian pathways that provide shortcuts to schools, parks, stores and bus stops.



**Mercer Trail and Pedestrian Bridge, High River**  
A north-south pedestrian link across the river connects residents to each other and to local businesses.

*“Generally, areas with higher population density, a mix of residential, commercial, educational and employment areas, connected streets, good access to destinations, bike paths, good sidewalks, good public transit, green spaces and attractiveness have been linked to more active transportation or reduced driving”*  
— Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Officer of Health



**Healthy Places: Focus on health care facilities**  
Health facilities are meant to improve health, but how can they do so beyond the walls, in the neighbourhoods of which they are a part?



**Landscape LRT Bridge, Bridgeland-Riverside**  
The green bridge creates an oasis above city traffic and helps connect three popular communities that each have missing amenities.



**Re-imagining Bonaventure Drive, Acadia**

Behind almost every commercial street in Calgary sits another street that does the ‘dirty work’: loading, shipping, and dividing commercial from residential. What if it became a walkable main street?

# Time to scale up!

We want to start a conversation about healthy places in Alberta with a set of provincial policy recommendations that emerged from what we heard from communities, subject matter experts, and from our experiences with the co-design process.

Let's start a conversation about investing in #healthyplaces in Alberta

---

## ABOUT SUSTAINABLE CALGARY

---

Our mission is to encourage and support community-level actions and initiatives that make Calgary a safer, healthier, more sustainable city. Projects are based on our State of the City reports, which identify where interventions are needed. Recent work with communities focuses on municipal design and planning processes. Our expertise is producing credible research, and engaging with communities to participate in research, discussion and action. We would love to work with you!



---

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

---

All new provincial infrastructure projects will demonstrate their support for healthy and equitable built environments, as outlined in new guidelines.

- 1. Health:** The Ministry of Health supports and broadens the role of Alberta Health Services' Public Health Professionals, such as public health inspectors, health promoters and medical officers of health, who already work collaboratively in local communities providing expertise on healthy built environments. They and public health academics are engaged in developing inter-ministerial policy guidelines and tools for designing and evaluating healthy built environments.
- 2. Infrastructure:** All new healthcare facilities, schools, roads, bridges, and seniors' and affordable housing investments will demonstrate how they support a healthy and equitable built environment.
- 3. Transportation:** (a) Roads and bridge projects will demonstrate how they support healthy and equitable built environments. (b) An Active Transportation group is created to advise the Ministry and local communities on infrastructure projects, and liaise with other ministries. (c) A fund for active transportation projects for Alberta communities is created in partnership with the Ministry of Environment.
- 4. Affordable Housing:** New affordable housing projects funded by the province are located in healthy and affordable places.
- 5. Seniors' Housing:** New seniors' housing projects funded by the province are sited in healthy and age-friendly places.
- 6. Education:** (a) The Ministry of Education invests in walking school buses and bike-to-school programs, and (b) incorporates healthy place-making into curriculum. (c) The Ministries of Education and Transportation collaborate with municipalities and towns to create active transportation infrastructure around schools, and contribute to healthy behaviour and successful learning environments.
- 7. Tourism:** The Ministries of Tourism and Transportation collaborate on investments in regional active transportation infrastructure that meet the needs of local communities and tourists alike.
- 8. Environment:** The Ministry of Environment and Parks will demonstrate how Land Use Frameworks support public health and collaborate with Municipal Affairs to enhance support for brownfield development.