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Dear Jane

Re: Draft Urban Design for Regional NSW: A guide for creating healthy built environments in regional NSW - Heart Foundation submission

The Heart Foundation is pleased to provide feedback on the Government Architect New South Wales' (GANSW) draft *Urban Design for regional NSW: A guide for creating healthy built environments in regional NSW*. We commend GA NSW on releasing this important design guidance.

The Heart Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation committed to improving cardiovascular health in Australia. The Heart Foundation's vision is an Australia free of heart disease. We aim to prevent heart disease and improve the heart health and quality of life of all Australians through our work in prevention, support and research. Advocating for healthy public policy is a key way we work to achieve that aim in an effective and equitable way.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the term used for a group of diseases including heart disease, stroke and blood vessel disease. It affects more than 3.3 million Australians and is one of Australia's leading causes of death – more than 47,000 Australians die each year because of cardiovascular disease. The biggest contributors to poor heart health are smoking, poor nutrition, insufficient physical activity and overweight/obesity. In Australia, 60% of adults and 70% of children and adolescents do not do enough physical activity to obtain health benefits¹, and addressing lifestyle related factors can reduce CVD mortality risk by 66%². Nationally, people living in inner regional and outer regional/remote areas have higher levels of risk factors for poorer health including overweight and obesity, high blood pressure, and no/low levels of exercise³. In NSW, those living outside our major cities are far less likely to reach these physical activity levels than those living within⁴. The Heart Foundation advocates for improved built environment features that encourage physical activity, such as walking and cycling. The Heart Foundation supports the Draft Urban Design for Regional NSW guide, as it is an important mechanism to address these regional inequities.

Urban Design for regional NSW: A guide for creating healthy built environments for regional NSW also aligns with the Premier's Priority of reducing childhood overweight and obesity⁵. The document adds impetus for regional and rural urban designers, planners and decision makers to consider the health outcomes of the community in which it is serving. Better outcomes will make it easier for children and adults alike to access the environments that support a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity and fresh, healthy food. Reducing childhood overweight and obesity requires a coordinated and multifaceted solution, from all levels of government and industry. The Heart Foundation is advocating for a comprehensive commitment to improving Active Travel to School infrastructure and outcomes in NSW. Active Travel to School principles are supported by the *Urban Design for regional NSW* guide.

We thank the GANSW for their invitation to provide feedback on the document. Our four main points are summarised under the following headings.

1. Strengthen emphasis on the link between the built environment and health

We commend the focus on creating healthy built environments through urban design. This is a cause that the Heart Foundation is strongly engaged in, as seen through our development of the [Healthy Active by Design web-based resource for planning professionals and the general community](#). We feel that although the title of the document references health, the well-researched links between built environment characteristics and health outcomes could be made more clearly throughout the document. For example, in *Section 1: Supporting Regional NSW* there is no discussion of how the built environment can impact health, despite stating that the guide aims to “promote well-designed and healthy built environments” (page 15). We feel that it would be beneficial to acknowledge that it is widely accepted that the built environment can impact on health outcomes, and to provide some pertinent evidence which highlights this. We feel that this will more strongly convey to planners and designers in our regions of the importance of considering health outcomes during development.

Healthy Active by Design has the background research and information which supports the recommendations in the design guide. For example, one of the recommendations in the *infill development in existing neighbourhoods* section (page 51) is to “integrate street trees, street lighting, drainage and other infrastructure to improve accessibility”. Healthy Active by Design has a comprehensive evidence review of how and why these considerations can improve the likelihood of people engaging in a more socially connected and physically active community. Healthy Active by Design also has case studies from Regional NSW of current examples of healthy built environments. We suggest that for this reason, Healthy Active by Design could be included as one of the ‘Other Publications’ listed on page 80.

Further to this, we support the process for urban design that is put forward, initially on page 26 and recurring with specific guidance for each project type. Adding “understand how the built environment can influence health behaviours, and integrate health supporting changes into the project” to these sections places greater importance on this aspect of design, and gives designers the opportunity to integrate appropriate and creative solutions into projects.

2. More explicit prioritisation of active movement networks

We strongly support the theme of health throughout the design guide, and congratulate GA NSW on making this a priority. We believe there are significant opportunities for the people of New South Wales to increase their levels of physical activity by walking and cycling for transport around their local area. We are particularly pleased to see that improving connectivity, walkability and cycling is one of the seven design priorities. We would like to see this priority strengthened further, by more explicit prioritisation of pedestrian and cycling movement during development. Under the *Infill development in existing neighbourhoods* section on page 50, we would like to see one of the recommendations read “Prioritise walking and cycling as modes of transport”.

3. Importance of maintaining productive peri-urban agricultural land

We are concerned about the degradation of land suitable for large scale food production in New South Wales. As our urban fringe expands with the projected population increase, this may be at the expense of our peri-urban agricultural land, which may have significant implications for food security. We would like to see this acknowledged in the *Greenfield development in new neighbourhoods* section. In particular, we recommend specifically that the urban design guidance for *Greenfield development in new neighbourhoods* includes investigating the viability and appropriateness of other sites for development before rezoning or impeding on previously undeveloped land. We feel this is a particularly pressing matter for the regional communities which the design guide is to serve, and should be addressed accordingly.

4. Place further importance on monitoring and evaluation

As stated by Anthony Roberts MP, "Past urban design guidance has usually been developed with a metropolitan focus, and does not necessarily apply to regional and rural environments." (page 4). With this in mind, it is particularly important to highlight the importance placed on monitoring and evaluation, as urban design guidance specifically for regional and rural areas has been rarely available. As many of the recommendations may be different to those traditionally considered, we feel that clearer linkage to and promotion to the *Better Methods* document, which "provides overarching advice on advice on...evaluation and procurement methods" (page. 81) is necessary. There is an opportunity to do this on page. 27, which recommends to "develop evaluation tools at the outset". Articulation that *Better Methods* will provide a framework or assistance to this process will support those using the urban design guidance.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Draft *Urban Design for Regional NSW* guide. We reinforce that considering health during development is critical for the future health of the people of NSW, by enabling people to be healthy, active and socially connected in their local areas.

Heart Foundation policies and resources relating to healthy built environments, including Healthy Active by Design are freely available online at: <http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au> and <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/professionals/physical-activity>

For further information about this submission, please contact Laura Oakley, Senior Coordinator Heart Health (Active Living) on phone (02) 9219 2478 or email laura.oakley@heartfoundation.org.au

Your sincerely,



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Chief Executive Officer NSW

1. Australian Department of Health. Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines – Children, Adolescents and Adults, 2017. Available at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-strateg-active-evidence.htm> (accessed 7 July 2018).
2. Loefer M, Walach H. The combined effects of healthy lifestyle behaviours on all cause mortality: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Preventative Medicine* 2012; 55:163-170.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Rural and Remote health report. Accessed online 30 October 2018 at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-health/rural-remote-health/contents/rural-health>
4. NSW Ministry of Health, Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. Physical activity in adults – insufficient physical activity by remoteness from service centres and sex, persons aged 16 years and over, NSW. 2017. Accessed 31 October 2018 at http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/Indicator/beh_phys_age/beh_phys_aria_snap
5. Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW. Premier's Priorities, 2017. Accessed online October 31 2018 at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/premiers-priorities/>