

The “Built Environment”

How does it influence children’s health?

“Spaces and Places that Keep Kids Well”

March 17, 2015

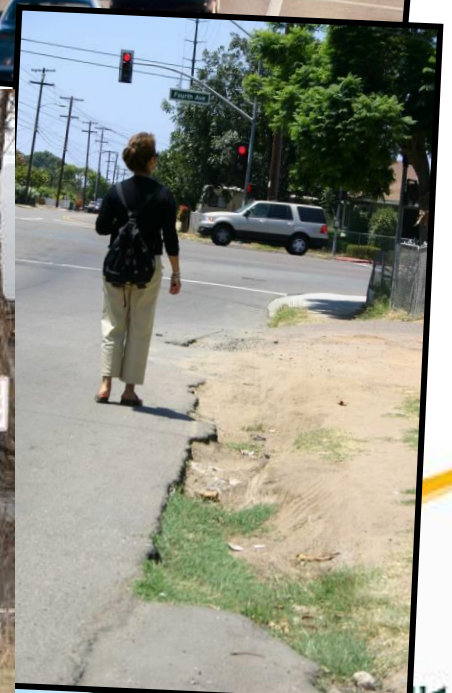
What is the “Built Environment”?

- Where we work, live, learn & play
- Constructed (or ‘built’ by people) places, features, amenities, housing, and spaces that together make and link our neighborhoods, communities, Towns and Cities.
- Includes indoor and outdoor places



Built Environment and Health?

- The way we live and interact with our environment directly influences **chronic disease** and injury.
 - Diseases that are largely preventable
 - Diseases of energy
- Promoting healthy lifestyles is not enough. A culture shift is also necessary.



Built Environment and Health?

- Many aspects of
 - engineering
 - planning
 - funding
 - design

of the “built environment” affect or influence healthy choices and behaviours.

- “We must make Healthy Choice the Easy Choice”.

Planning and Design...and Health?

planning and investment policies
(provincial initiatives, regional and municipal plans, zoning and development rules)

urban form patterns
(density mix, transport options, access to parks and schools)

individual behaviour
(amount of walking, social activities, diet choices, recreation choices)

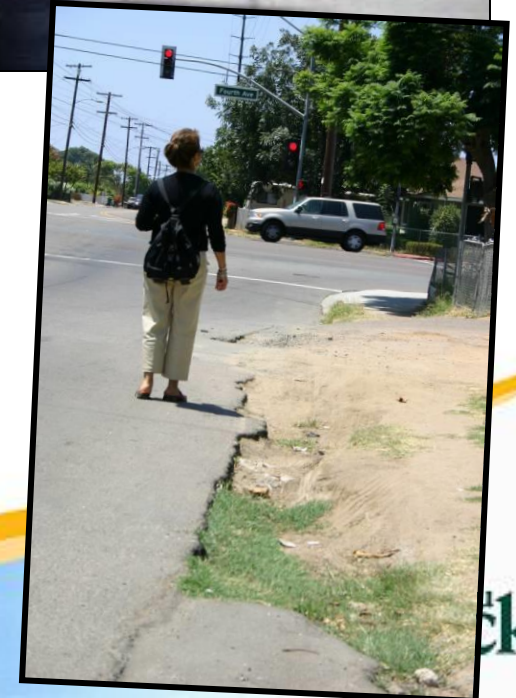
population health impacts
(physical fitness, pollution exposure, risky behaviours, coping/decision-making skills)

Ripple Effect

Adapted from Frank, Kavage, Litman

Children & the Built Environment: Preventable Injuries

- Road design - wide arterials in suburban areas = many cars driving FAST!
- Traffic calming - reducing vehicle speed reduces risk of pedestrian injury
- Busy Intersections
- Broken sidewalks and pavement surfaces
- Lighting on trails and pathways?



Children & the Built Environment: Air Quality



- Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease
- More asthma among youth living in neighborhoods with high traffic pollution
- Climate change
- Properly designed BE can also help reduce our car dependent societies.

Children & the Built Environment: Access and Inclusion

- Loneliness and isolation are toxic
- Youth with strong social networks are healthier overall:
 - are less depressed
 - use alcohol and drugs less
 - have fewer teen births
 - Avoid criminal and other anti-social behaviours



Children & the Built Environment: Physical Activity and Nutrition

- Rate of overweight Canadian children has nearly tripled since 1981
- Often persists into adulthood. A “conveyor belt” to future chronic illness for today’s overweight children and adolescents
 - 1 in 3 will be diabetic
 - Heart disease
 - Hypertension
 - Various cancers
 - Osteoarthritis
 - Sedentary lifestyle



Built Environment and Children's Health: A Cross-sector Approach is needed

- **Physical activity** (walk/bike to school, after-school programs)
- **School environment** (access to nature, physical education)
- **Childcare** (include nutrition & outdoor exercise)
- **Access to healthy food** (by-laws to restrict locations of fast-food?)
- **Marketing to children** (energy drinks)
- **Policies** (cafeteria, vending machines)
- Many others....



The Built Environment and how it influences children's health

