

Healthy Eating & Active Living - What are NSW councils doing?

A baseline of healthy eating and active living within NSW local government Community Strategic Plans and selected Delivery Programs

INTRODUCTION

Physical inactivity and the consumption of foods high in salt and saturated fats has seen Australia experience some of the highest levels of chronic disease and obesity in the world. Statistics show that physical inactivity is now second only to tobacco as the leading cause of death and disability amongst Australians¹ while 52.3% of New South Wales (NSW) adults aged 16 and over are overweight or obese².

Local governments are well positioned to combat chronic disease and obesity within their communities through the rollout of infrastructure and programs that encourage healthy behaviour. The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework (Figure 1) is the primary mechanism for planning within local government in NSW. Within this framework the *Community Strategic Plan* (CSP) is the principal long term planning document that sits above all others, its intent cascading down through the plans below, the *Delivery Program* (DP) being the next plan in the sequence.

The intent of a CSP is to identify, through community engagement, a community's main priorities and aspirations for the future and articulate these through a vision statement and strategic objectives. A DP is a statement of commitment to the community from each newly elected council which systematically translates CSP objectives into principal activities/actions that council will undertake during their 4-year term.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to record a baseline measure of *healthy eating and active living* (HEAL) objectives, strategies and actions within the CSPs of all NSW local governments from 2013 as well as a select group of DPs. This information will enable comparative analysis to be conducted once the next iteration of CSPs and DPs are finalised in 2018. This analysis will assist policy makers to determine how effective actions to strengthen the presence of HEAL within the IP&R framework have been.

The considerable content within this report also serves as a valuable resource for those wishing to strengthen the presence of HEAL within their IP&R documentation. Additionally, the report offers guidance for those looking to improve the structure and systematic translation of CSP objectives to DP actions.

This report looks at 152 CSPs written in 2013, in addition to 15 of the subsequent DPs from the local government areas of Sydney, Wollongong, Gosford, Marrickville, Blue Mountains, Pittwater, Maitland, Wingecarribee, Bathurst, Kempsey, Leeton, Temora, Carrathool, Brewarrina and Wollondilly.

MAIN FINDINGS

- NSW local governments have embraced HEAL principles in general, however many have experienced difficulty in translating these principles into clearly defined objectives, strategies and actions within their IP&R documentation.
- Nearly half of all CSP objectives relating to HEAL are associated with 'getting people active' whilst 'healthy eating' objectives account for a mere 9%, see figure 2.

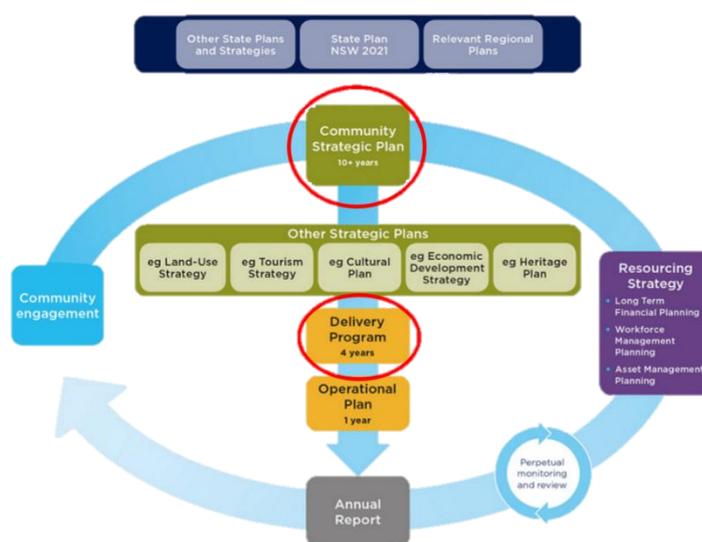


Fig. 1 Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) Framework

MAIN FINDINGS cont.

- Rural councils were found to be more likely to include healthy eating objectives within their CSP than larger metropolitan councils. Further investigation into the nature of these objectives and their translation into action is needed.
- There is substantial improvement to be made in identifying appropriate and meaningful assessment methods for CSP objectives.
- The translation of CSP HEAL objectives into DP actions varied considerably; some documents followed a logical and reasoned approach whilst the linkage between documents in others was difficult to determine.
- The translation of CSP HEAL objectives to DP actions was found to be heavily influenced by the structure, complexity and content of the CSP.

- Within CSPs and DPs there was a wide variety in the structure, format, complexity and interpretation of the IP&R Manual's essential elements.

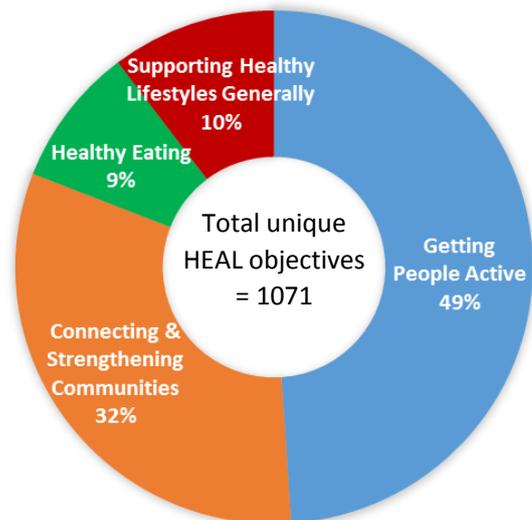


Fig. 2 HEAL objectives from 152 CSPs (2013) categorised by the domains of the Healthy Built Environment Program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- That further investigation is undertaken into the processes that led to the inclusion of HEAL principles within CSPs, including analysis of the Community Engagement Strategy and its findings.
- That the IP&R Manual for local government in NSW be reviewed and updated to clarify the specific requirements for councils when preparing IP&R documentation. This update should showcase examples of best practice from across NSW local government including metropolitan, regional, rural and remote local government areas.
- That comprehensive support and guidance be given to NSW local government to improve the structure, clarity and strategic nature of CSPs and DPs. Assistance should aim to improve the accessibility of the documents and facilitate the delivery of objectives as identified in CSPs.
- That attempts are made to better understand the processes by which a community's vision and objectives within a CSP is translated into actions within a DP by council.
- That future research attempts to understand how successfully HEAL actions are built or delivered by NSW local councils.
- That greater focus be directed toward capacity building around healthy planning principles for decision makers in council.
- That the methodology of this project's baseline analysis be replicated in the future to measure the continued application of HEAL principles in CSPs and DPs.
- That additional research into the application of HEAL principles in local government CSPs and DPs be undertaken in the areas of: application of HEAL performance indicators, CSP Themes and Delivery Programs.
- That the HEAL database be further analysed to determine patterns in the use of HEAL principles in CSPs and DPs by various local government characteristics.
- That a system of benchmarking HEAL principles in CSPs be established.
- That the promotion of HEAL principles and their implementation within NSW councils continues and the mechanisms to demonstrate the practical application of these principles be further advanced.
- That a greater understanding of how councils can implement healthy eating and food policy in a local government context be explored through the provision of incentives to encourage the piloting of ideas.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For free access to the full report including many examples of local government healthy eating and active living objectives, strategies and actions visit <http://www.nswpcalipr.com.au/examples/csp-heal-baseline-report>.

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¹ - Giles-Corti B 2006, 'The impact of urban form on public health', paper prepared for the 2006 Australian State of the Environment Committee, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra.

² - http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au/indicator/beh_bmi_age