



Victoria Walks Inc.  
Level 7, 225 Bourke Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
P: 03 9662 3975  
E: [info@victoriawalks.org.au](mailto:info@victoriawalks.org.au)  
**[www.victoriawalks.org.au](http://www.victoriawalks.org.au)**  
Registration No. A0052693U

20 February 2017

Sport and Recreation Victoria  
[strategy@sport.vic.gov.au](mailto:strategy@sport.vic.gov.au)

## **SUBMISSION TO VALUING SPORT AND RECREATION, A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE – DISCUSSION PAPER**

### **Introduction and summary**

This submission essentially has one key message – the government should provide more support for walking. There are various reasons for this, principally:

- Walking is clearly the most popular form of sport or active recreation, but receives very little government support
- Walking is particularly popular amongst women, who are less likely than men to participate in sport
- We have a rapidly ageing population, and walking is particularly important for older people
- Walking is flexible, easy and attractive to people who are mostly inactive, unable or unwilling to participate in organised sport.

Walking therefore meets many of the strategic objectives for sport and recreation set out in the Discussion Paper. However, it is highly under-resourced compared to organised sport and other transport modes.

Participation in walking is driven by a range of factors, from infrastructure and urban design through to behaviour of others (such as aggressive dogs and anti-social behaviour) through to personal issues such as time and motivation. Successful strategies to support participation in individual and unorganised recreation such as walking will require sophisticated approaches that consider all of these factors. SRV has the opportunity to promote walking by supporting and collaborating with existing organisations with expertise and experience in this area, such as Victoria Walks, rather than attempting to 'start from scratch.'

This submission focuses on walking as recreation, but also discusses how decision making in the transport sector impacts on recreational walking. Much of Victoria Walks' current work involves influencing decisions in transport and urban planning to improve support for walking. SRV could directly advocate for the importance of recreation in transport decision making. Alternatively, or additionally, sport and recreation could support Victoria Walks to work with transport agencies to ensure walking is prioritised.

To discuss any aspect of this submission or for any further information relating to walking, please contact Duane Burt, Senior Advisor on 9662 3975 or [dburt@victoriawalks.org.au](mailto:dburt@victoriawalks.org.au).

## **Recommendations**

1. Provide significant and greatly increased financial support to walking through sport and recreation funding, recognising that walking meets many of the strategic objectives for sport and recreation set out in the Discussion Paper.
2. Provide program support for walking participation via existing organisations with relevant experience and expertise, such as Victoria Walks.
3. Assist councils in providing walking paths for recreation and supporting facilities such as lighting, toilets and seats.
4. Support recognition of the recreation importance of walking in transport and urban planning decision making.

The rationale behind these recommendations is explained in the remainder of this submission.

## **Background – Victoria Walks**

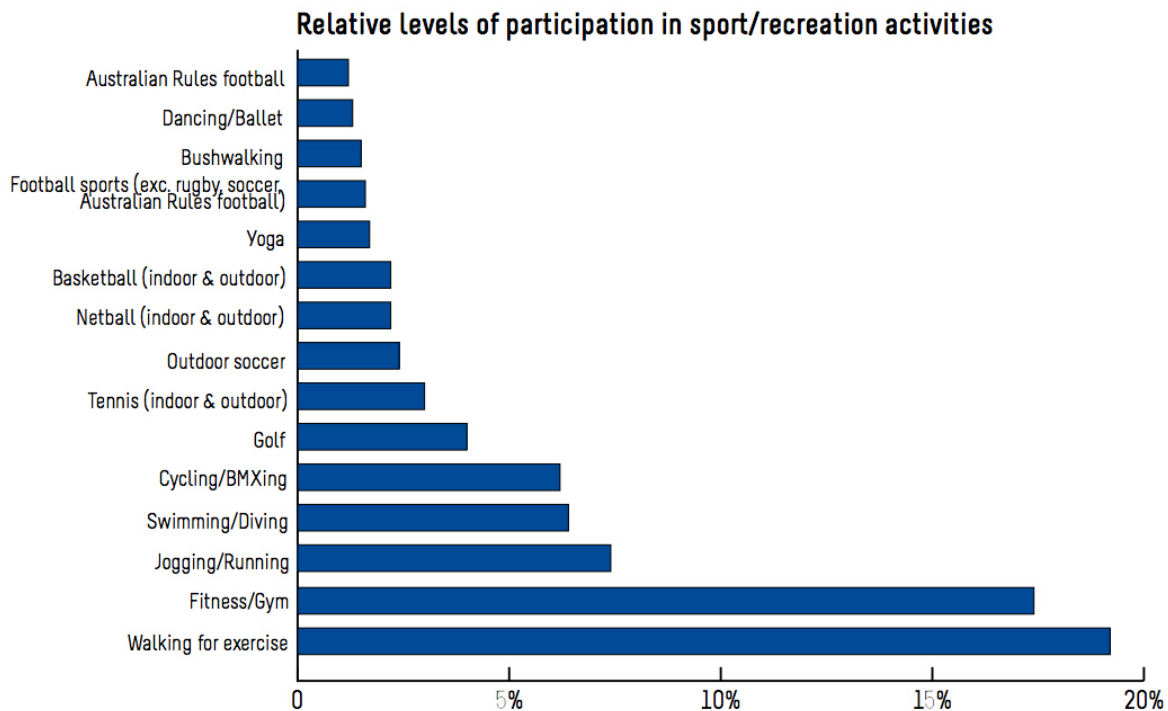
Victoria Walks is a walking health promotion body, established by VicHealth in 2009, working to get more Victorians walking more every day. Our vision is for vibrant, supportive and strong neighbourhoods and communities where people can and do choose to walk wherever possible.

Our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and urban areas have become largely automobile dependent and less walkable. This has contributed to the emergence of more sedentary lifestyles in which Victorians do not engage in the recommended levels of physical activity. Physical inactivity is a significant factor in the dramatic rise in the levels of obesity and preventable diseases such as Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Walking-friendly neighbourhoods and urban spaces are essential to encourage and enable people to walk. Walking is associated with positive health outcomes, improved fitness and better physical, social and mental health. Making towns, cities and suburbs more walkable has many health, environmental and economic benefits.

## Context – the importance of walking

Walking for exercise is the most popular form of sport or recreation in Australia, with 19.2% participation, followed by 'fitness/gym' at 17.4%, while no other activity exceeds 7.5% (ABS 2015). In addition to those walking for exercise, 1.5% of the population participate in bush walking. This is illustrated in the table below, sourced from the Background Information document.



Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, "Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation"

It should be noted also that the activity with the third highest participation – jogging/running – uses essentially the same infrastructure as recreational walking. An investment in walking infrastructure therefore serves the needs of two of the three most important activities.

Even the high level of participation indicated above perhaps understates the importance of walking. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) *AusPlay Survey* interviews 20,000 Australians aged 15 years or older. The recently released survey found that 42.6% of adults, or more than 8 million Australians, participate in recreational walking at least once a year. A further 5.4% participate in bushwalking. By comparison, the next highest participation was 'fitness/gym' at 32.1% and no other activity exceeds 16% (ASC 2016).

Like other sports and active recreation, walking has significant societal benefits, particularly in maintaining and improving health. Amongst other things, this has great economic benefits through reduced health care costs. Walking also has significant economic benefits through tourism. The Background Information document notes:

"Bushwalking is by far the most popular adventure tourism activity and recent research into the economics of Victoria's outdoors sector estimates a gross value-add contribution to Victoria's economy of \$6.2 billion per annum."

## **Context – government investment in walking**

Despite the clear importance of walking as the most popular recreational activity, there appears to be very little government investment in walking, particularly from sport and recreational funding sources.

As noted in the Background Information document:

“The highest participation recreation activities, such as walking, jogging or recreational cycling are self-initiated and not generally supported other than in the provision of the streets, parks and trails in which they are undertaken.”

In the current financial year, \$46.4 million has been allocated to sport and recreation (Victorian Government 2016), but the proportion of that funding allocated to walking appears to be minimal. In recent years there has been a relatively small level of funding for walking through VicHealth and other health sources.

In addition to government funding, many organised sports generate large amounts of revenue through participants, sponsorship and broadcasting rights. These opportunities are generally not available to walking organisations.

The Background Information document says:

“Vicroads, along with local councils, maintains the roads, streets and paths on which Victorians walk, run and cycle.”

In practice, however, VicRoads does not necessarily consider footpaths to be its responsibility, even on the relatively small proportion of streets that it manages. Maintenance of footpaths is usually left to local councils, who have greatly varying levels of resources at their disposal. Even for well-resourced councils, footpaths are competing with a myriad of other potential priorities for investment (including organised sports, typically represented by local clubs with strong council connections). As a result many areas, particularly rural towns, industrial areas, some outer suburbs and places originally developed as holiday resorts, do not have footpaths. Where footpaths do exist, arterial roads in particular are designed to prioritise vehicles and are typically hostile to walkers.

The State Government investment in transport is massive and walking is a significant mode of transport – about 13% weekday trips in Melbourne are walked (Department of Transport 2009). However, any transport funding of pedestrian infrastructure is typically only a side-item in a project designed to support other transport modes. The biggest investment that is at least partly focused on walking is the Safer Cyclists and Pedestrians Fund, providing \$100 million over four years. However our understanding is that the majority of that funding will be directed to cycling. Also, because this funding is sourced from the TAC, the focus of investment will be road safety improvements, which may have little or no impact on walking participation.

In summary, given the significance of walking as the most important type of sport or active recreation and a significant mode of transport, it is highly under-resourced compared to organised sport and other transport modes.

## Meeting future demand

The discussion paper asks:

“How can the sport and active recreation system meet future increased demand?”

Existing recreational walking paths offer substantial opportunities for increased utilisation to meet future increased demand. As noted in the Discussion Paper:

“In addition, Victoria has a network of over 2,000 trails, including 800km of rail trails, that provide opportunities for recreational walking, cycling and horse riding.”

Walking trails are typically available all day, every day, with no need for staff supervision. A relatively small investment in maintaining and (where necessary) upgrading these paths can provide for recreation by large numbers of people accessing the paths whenever it suits them. By comparison, sporting facilities typically require high levels of investment to support relatively brief periods of peak usage, often interspersed with periods where they are not utilised.

A global review of the cost-benefit of active travel projects for the UK Department of Transport (Davis 2014) found they provide excellent value for money. The report assessed 16 British and international studies of the cost and benefits of walking and cycling programs or infrastructure. It found an average benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 5.95.

The report concludes:

"Consequently, environmental and other interventions to facilitate increased population physical activity through cycling and walking are likely to be amongst the 'best buys' across many areas of public policy i.e. public health benefits, cost savings for health services and for transport planning."

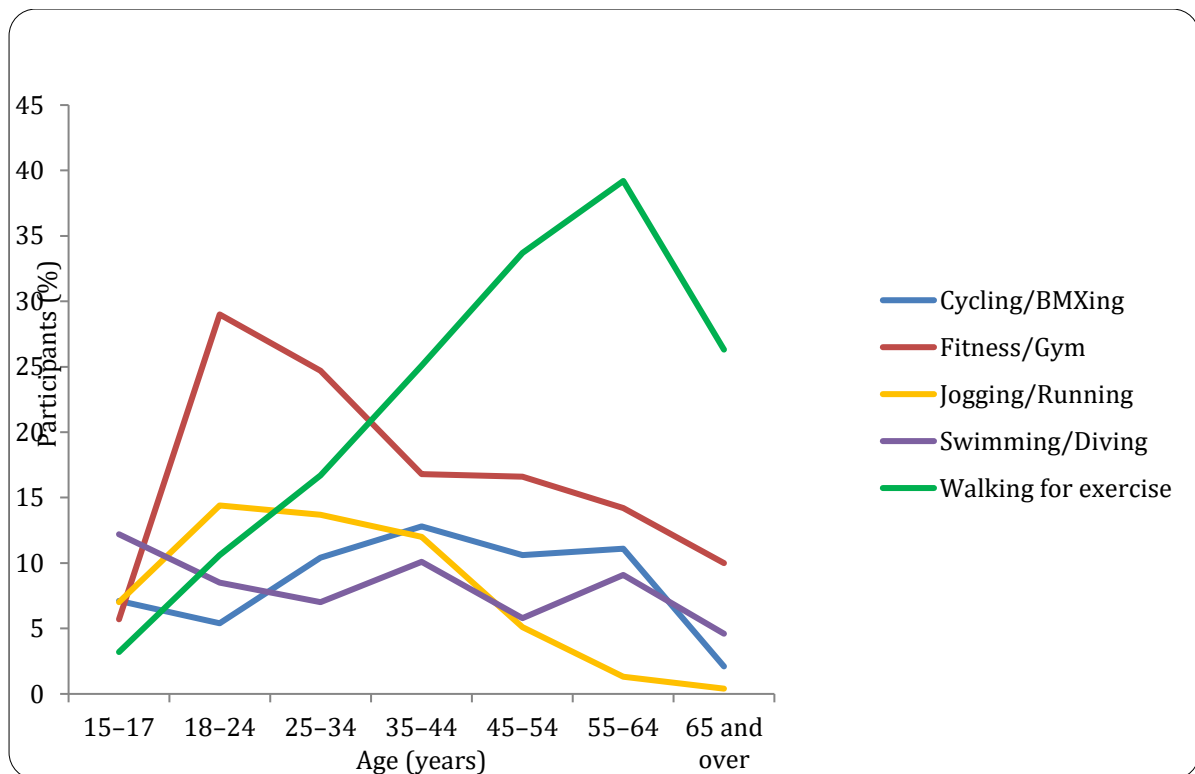
## Recreation for an ageing population

In considering future demand it is also important to recognise the changing nature of demand, especially an ageing society. As noted in the Background Information document:

“Population projections show that the proportion of Victorians over the age of 65 will grow from 14% to 21.5% in 2051.”

However that doesn't really communicate the full extent of the issue. Because older people will be a larger proportion of a substantially increasing population, Government projections anticipate that in 2051 the number of people aged 65+ will be almost *three times* what it was in 2011. There will be an almost 200% increase in older people.

Walking is exceptionally important as a form of recreation and exercise for older people. The graph below illustrates the declining involvement in organised sport as people age, while walking becomes increasingly important as a form of recreation.



**Participation in the top five forms of sport and physical recreation, Victoria**

(Source: Garrard 2013 based on ABS data)

Garrard (2013) summarised the importance of walking for older people’s physical activity, based on the 2011-12 Australian Bureau of Statistics *Australian Health Survey*. She notes:

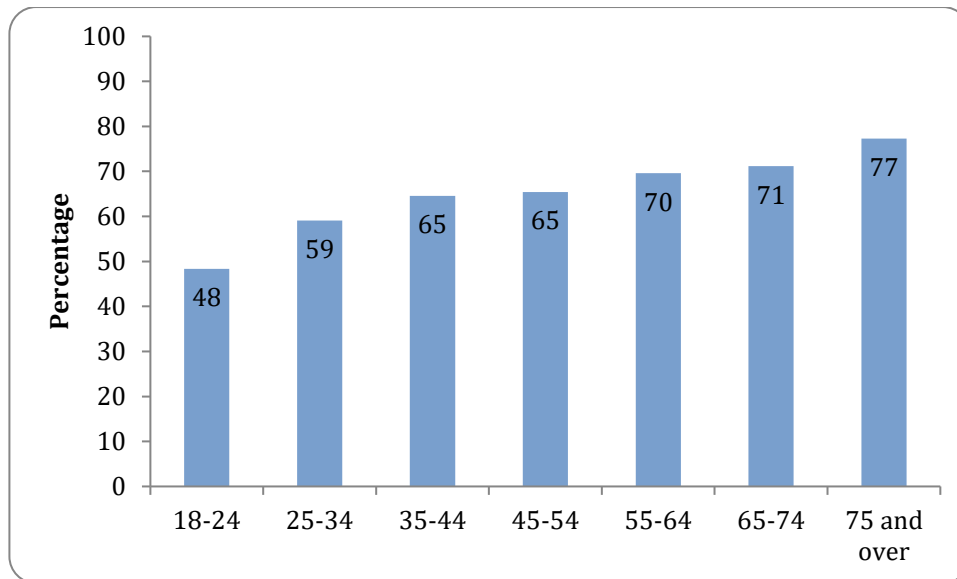
“Total physical activity<sup>1</sup> declined with age, particularly in the 75+ age group, and most markedly for vigorous activity. Walking for fitness increased with age up to 65-74, and then declined in the 75+ age group. Walking for transport showed less variation with age, but also declined in the 75+ age group.

While time spent walking for fitness and transport declined for those aged 75+, walking for fitness and walking for transport were relatively more important sources of physical activity for older adults than for young and middle-aged adults. Crucially, for people aged 75 years and over, walking for fitness and transport comprised 77% of the total time spent on physical activity (see Figure 3).

The data outlined above suggest that walking is an increasingly important source of recreational physical activity and personal mobility as the population ages.”

The Figure 3 referred to in this quote is set out below:

<sup>1</sup> Across the four areas of vigorous and moderate physical activity, and walking for fitness and transport.



**Proportion of total physical activity undertaken by walking for fitness and transport**  
(Source: Garrard 2013 based on ABS data)

### **Broadening participation**

The Discussion Paper asks:

“What are the key levers and methods needed to drive broader and more inclusive participation in sport and active recreation?”

Walking has considerable potential to meet the needs of people who do not participate in organised sport because of the cost, time commitments, exertion involved, or skills required. Walking is free, accessible any time during the day and almost anywhere. It does not need to be scheduled or co-ordinated with other people. For those who are currently inactive, it is likely to be an attractive introduction to physical activity compared to other activities that require a level of fitness and/or involve exposure and comparison to others (swimming or gym). Cycling has similar attributes, but is perhaps more dangerous and many people have less confidence cycling than they do walking.

An illustration of the health benefits of getting inactive people walking a little more is a new study of people (55 years and over) from the University of Newcastle. It found a 9% reduction in hospital bed-days for every 1,000 step increase in daily step count (Medical Journal of Australia 2017). As the authors note:

“Previous investigation of the dose–response curves for various health indicators in older people has shown that the steepest part of the curve is at the lower end of activity. Moving from 3000 to 5000 steps per day is of greater benefit than moving from 8000 to 10 000 steps.”

Programs that seek to get inactive people moving often utilise walking, because people tend to enjoy walking and therefore maintain it, while they tend to drop out of other forms of exercise. However, some people progress to other forms of sport or recreation once they have built their physical confidence through walking. To that extent, walking can be an introduction to sport and recreation more generally.

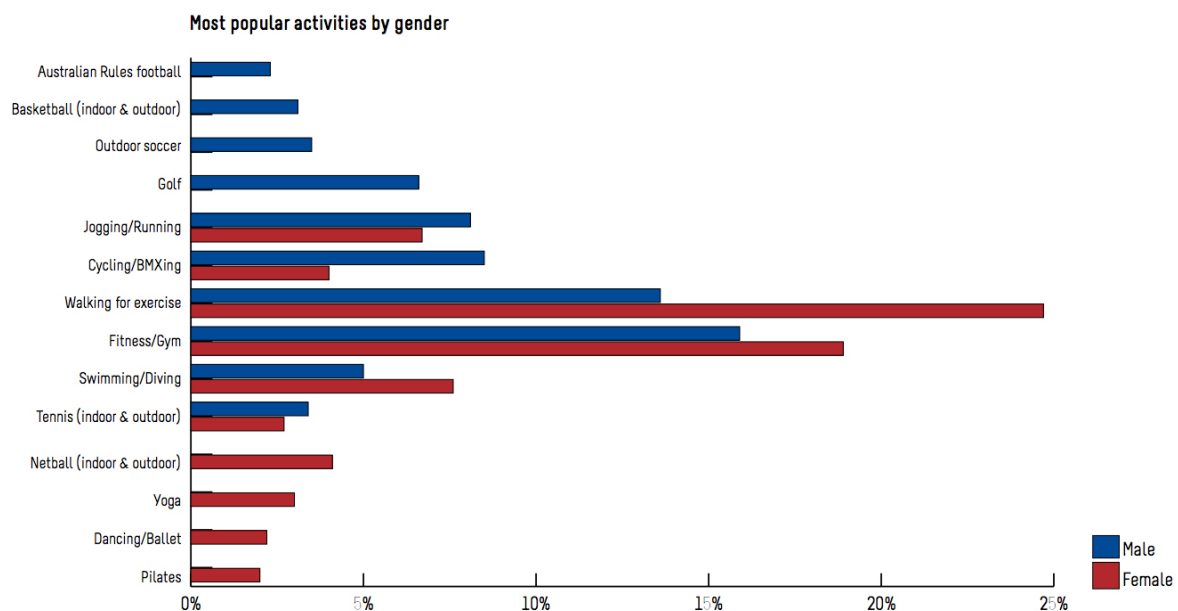
One of the key requirements here is to drive participation amongst women. As noted in the Discussion paper, “twice as many men as women participate in sport” and “...boys have double the sport participation rate of girls.”

Women are more likely to participate in non-organised active recreation and walking is particularly important as a form of recreation and exercise for women. As noted in the Background Information document:

“Almost a quarter of all sport and recreation activity (24.7%) undertaken by women consists of walking for exercise...”

The *AusPlay* survey found that 52.3% of Australian women – 5.2 million – participate in recreational walking at least once a year and 5.4% go bush walking. By comparison, the next highest participation was ‘fitness/gym’ at 35.4% and once again no other activity exceeds 16% (ASC 2016).

The relative importance of different activities by gender is illustrated in the diagram below, sourced from the Background Information document.



Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, “Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation”

### Supporting participation in unorganised recreation – challenges

One of the key questions in the Discussion Paper is:

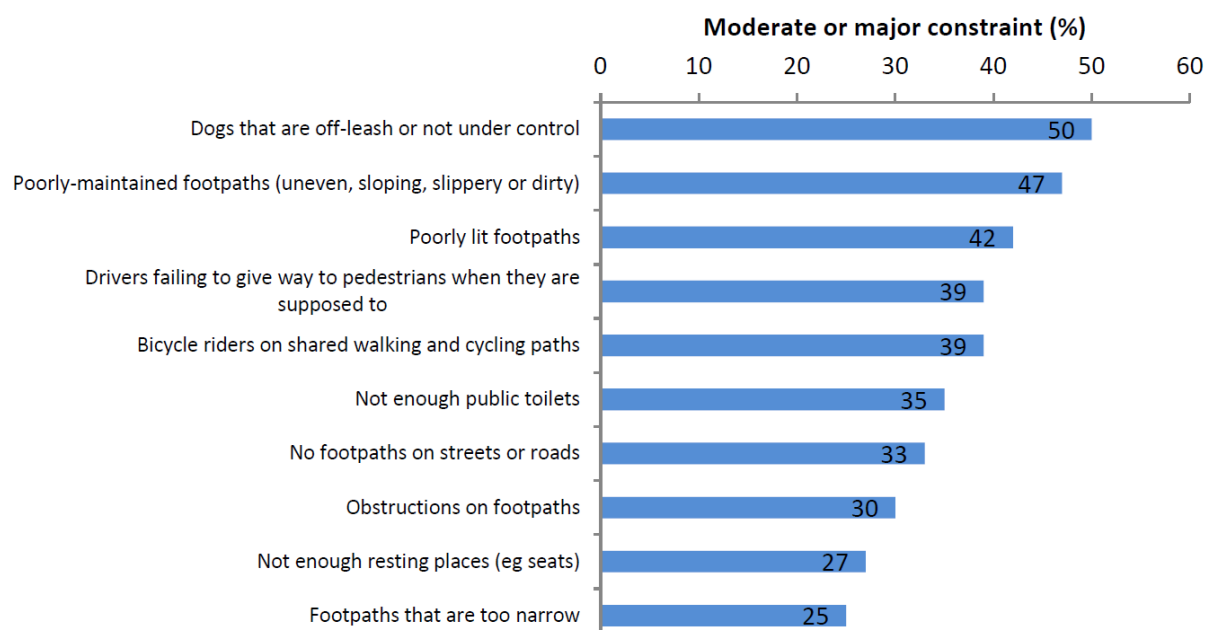
“How can the sport and active recreation system support the increasing demand for participation in individual and unorganised recreation activities?”

Unfortunately this is a complex area and effective strategies to broaden participation will require consideration of a range of barriers that include environmental factors, interaction with others and personal motivations and challenges.

Victoria Walks’ research on seniors (Garrard 2013) found that while concerns with footpaths were significant issues for older walkers, other issues were just as important, if not more so.



These included lack of supporting infrastructure such as lighting, toilets or seating. They also include issues of behaviour by others, such as poorly controlled dogs, drivers failing to give way and bike riders on shared paths.



**Top ten barriers to walking participation by Victoria seniors (percentage of respondents rating as a moderate or major constraint)**  
(Source: Garrard 2013 based on ABS data)

A very significant consideration, particularly but by no means exclusively for women, is personal safety (from other people) and anti-social behaviour (Sykes Consulting 2011). Parental concerns around ‘stranger danger’ are also a fundamental issue for children’s mobility and walking.

Although they are hard to quantify, it is generally accepted in urban design literature that aesthetic considerations and the psychological perceptions of space are important. Other environmental issues include poor quality or poorly accessible open space areas (Mitchell and Thompson 2014).

Even these broad considerations, however, are only part of the picture. Personal considerations and motivations are also highly significant. A perceived lack of time to walk is perhaps the most significant factor (Cerin et al 2010). Disability, limited personal mobility or health conditions are also important factors for some people (Mitchell and Thompson 2014). Other important factors include lack of motivation and lack of information (Cerin et al 2010).

Successful strategies to support participation in individual and unorganised recreation such as walking will require sophisticated approaches that consider all of the factors above.

### **Supporting participation in unorganised recreation – governance**

The Background Information document notes the challenges of supporting non-organised activities such as walking and jogging:

“The Victorian Government currently engages with, and supports, the active recreation sector through investment in facility development and funding to support the operation and capacity of peak organisations.”

“The active recreation sector does not generally, however, have the regulatory, governance and organisational structure provided to sport by state sporting associations.”

“The largest areas of activity – non-organised or self-directed activities such as walking and jogging – present an even more challenging area for government to support and encourage growth in participation. While there are some peak representative and advocacy groups and a number of interested stakeholders, the largely individual nature of the activities requires the ability to directly communicate with, and provide support to, individual participants.”

This seems to imply that the Government would need to communicate directly with individuals in order to support walking, but this may not be necessary.

While walking and organised sports have different characteristics, it is not clear that supporting walking needs to be substantially different to the conventional model of government support for sport.

There are existing organisations set up to promote walking that the Government can, and to some extent already does, support. In very simplified terms:

- Bushwalking Victoria is the peak body for bushwalking
- The Heart Foundation supports organised walking groups and provides evidence to support healthy urban design
- Victoria Walks works to inspire everyday, non-organised recreational walking, and promotes walkable urban design.

SRV has the opportunity to support and promote walking by supporting and collaborating with these organisations, rather than attempting to ‘start from scratch.’

### **Supporting participation in unorganised recreation – opportunities**

Many areas already have reasonable ‘hard’ infrastructure, including paths in parks and green spaces, but they are not promoted well. This is a lost opportunity to promote walking as the most popular form of active recreation of Victorians. Within limited resources, Victoria Walks fills the role of promoting walking and highlighting the walking opportunities that are available. We seek to overcome barriers around where to walk. We start and build conversations about walking and connect people to walking, particularly in and around where they live.

Our successful digital and social media is a starting point for many Victorians and meets their thirst for content around walking. Our Facebook following of over 42,000 highly engaged Victorians and our Walking Maps ([www.walkingmaps.com.au](http://www.walkingmaps.com.au)), which is continually growing in popularity, are examples of how these walking needs are being met. However Victoria Walks has very limited capacity to undertake this work and there is much more we could do, if resourced accordingly.

With support from SRV, Victoria Walks is exploring potential program approaches to encourage walking amongst women in diverse communities who are concerned about personal safety, with the pilot program [Let's Walk Braybrook](#).

There is a strong argument that the Victoria Government should look to further support the type of innovative work Victoria Walks is doing to promote walking.

### **Supporting hard infrastructure**

As noted above, government responsibility for the hard infrastructure that supports walking (and jogging) tends to lie with parks or road managing agencies. In some ways this is more complicated, because of the large number of councils involved.

There is a role for Sport and Recreation to assist councils in providing paths where they are clearly designed for recreation, rather than transport, and supporting facilities such as lighting, toilets and seats. Otherwise, responsibility for paths and street design that facilitates walking lies with the Government's transport functions.

There is a need for the recreation importance of paths and pedestrian oriented design to be highlighted in transport decision making. If not, this important role will be lost in the other priorities of transport decision making.

The need for health considerations to be prominent in urban planning and transport has recently gained traction. The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (State of Victoria 2015) identifies pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods as a key health solution. Health considerations feature in planning documents such as Plan Melbourne. There is a need for a similar recognition of active recreation.

SRV could directly advocate for the importance of recreation in transport decision making. Alternatively, or additionally, sport and recreation could support Victoria Walks to work with transport agencies to ensure walking is prioritised. The health function, particularly VicHealth, has recognised this need and supports Victoria Walks to (at least partly) fill it. Much of Victoria Walks' current work involves influencing decisions in the transport and urban planning sectors to improve support for walking. However there is much, much more to be done in this area.

It is important to note that pedestrian oriented urban design is much more complicated than simply providing footpaths. Designing a city that supports walking includes the organisation of land uses and density, provision of public transport, balance of support for competing modes (eg. car parking), and detailed street design (eg. traffic light phasing).

## REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015). 4177.0 - Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2013-14.
- Australian Sports Commission (ASC 2016). *AusPlay, Participation data for the sports sector. Summary of Key National Findings, October 2015 to September 2016 data*, December 2016
- Cerin, Ester; Leslie, Evie; Sugiyama, Takemi; and Owen, Neville (2010). 'Perceived barriers to leisure-time physical activity in adults: an ecological perspective,' *Journal of physical activity & health*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 451-459.
- Davis, A (2014). *Claiming the Health Dividend: A summary and discussion of value for money estimates from studies of investment in walking and cycling*, UK Department for Transport, November 2014.
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP 2016). *Victoria in Future 2016*, Population and household projections to 2051.
- Department of Transport (2009). *Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity*.
- Garrard J, (2013). *Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities: Summary Report*. Melbourne, Victoria Walks.
- Medical Journal of Australia (2017). 'More Steps Means Less Hospital for Older Aussies,' media release, 20 February 2017.
- Mitchell, E and Thompson, S (2014). 'Planning and Building Healthy Communities: Exploring the Relationship Between the Built Environment and Walking,' presentation to the Walk21 Conference, Sydney, October 2014.
- State of Victoria (2015). *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019*, September 2015.
- State of Victoria (2016). Budget summary outlined at [https://www.budget.vic.gov.au/program\\_project/sport](https://www.budget.vic.gov.au/program_project/sport)
- Sykes Consulting (2011). *Sport and Recreation Participation Study – Consultation Outcomes Report*, City of Greater Dandenong.