



## MEDIA RELEASE

18 October 2011

### Road safety concerns stop kids from walking to school alone: survey

*Survey results released on eve of Victoria Walks to School Day (Wednesday, 19 October)*

Three-quarters of parents are concerned about road safety and even more don't trust children to cross main roads or take public transport alone, a survey of Victorians has found.

But the majority of residents think it's important for children to independently walk or ride around and believe that their neighbourhood is safe for children during the day.

VicHealth's [Towards Active and Independently Mobile Children](#) report, released today, was undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research in 2009. Researchers surveyed 1044 children (from Year 3 to Year 6), 755 parents and 1606 local residents from across Victoria.

Victoria Walks Executive Officer Dr Ben Rossiter said there were positive results about safe and friendly neighbourhoods, access to footpaths and bike paths, and childrens' knowledge of road rules.

"Almost all of the children surveyed felt confident about the road rules and knew the way to and from school," Dr Rossiter said.

"So on the one hand, the conditions seem ideal for children to regularly walk, ride or scoot to school, but in reality, three in five Victorian primary school students are still driven, even though almost half of these trips are less than two-kilometres.

"The reasons parents don't allow their kids to walk to school include lack of time, the distance, concerns about traffic and public transport and parental fears that something bad will happen along the way.

"That's why we have a responsibility to support parents, to give them confidence that the community is looking out for their kids when they walk to and from school. We'd love *Victoria Walks to School Day* to become a daily habit."

On Wednesday, more than 70,000 Victorian children from more than 370 schools, will walk to school for this year's **Victoria Walks to School Day**, funded by VicHealth and part of the month of Walktober.

Now in its sixth year, the event raises awareness of the need for children to make physical activity part of their daily routine to improve fitness, friendships, the environment and their confidence.

*Victoria Walks to School Day* ambassador, Olympian and VicHealth board member, **Nicole Livingstone** (OAM), said teaching children to rely on their legs as their primary source of transport is crucial for health.

"One in four children aged five to 17-years-old are overweight or obese, but encouraging kids to make active transport a part of their day puts them on track for better health in later life," Ms Livingstone said.

"As a mother of three young children, I walk my children to school whenever I can. When they walk they are happier, more alert and ready for the school day."

[www.victoriawalks.org.au/walktoschool](http://www.victoriawalks.org.au/walktoschool)

**See survey results from parents, neighbours and children on the next page**

**For interviews and photo opps:** Jane Gardner, VicHealth media, 9667 1319/ 0435 761 732



**Results from VicHealth's [Towards Active and Independently Mobile Children](#) survey of 3405 Victorians:**

**Parents**

- More than two-thirds of parents drove their children to school.
- 72 per cent reported availability of public transport was not a problem in their area, however, 89 per cent said it was not safe for children to take public transport alone.
- 54 per cent said footpaths/bike paths were easy to get to.
- Only two out of 10 parents thought it was safe for their children to cross main roads.
- 73 per cent said road safety was a barrier to their children walking to school.
- One in three live less than one kilometre from their school.

**Children (Year 3 to Year 6)**

- 68 per cent say they have to cross one or more roads to play.
- 74 per cent of children said their school encouraged them to walk, cycle or scoot to school.
- 93 per cent said they knew the road rules.
- 81 per cent said they could read street signs to help them get home.
- 86 per cent knew the way to school.
- 82 per cent knew the way to the shops, park and playground and 74 per cent knew the way to their friends' house.
- 94 per cent of children own a bike.

**Neighbours**

- 80 per cent said it was important for children to walk and ride around the area without the need for adult supervision.
- 82 per cent described their neighbourhood as friendly.
- 91 per cent said it was safe to walk around during the day.
- 54 per cent said strangers present a danger for children.
- 70 per cent said there were bicycle paths and footpaths near their neighbourhood.

**ENDS**

Notes to editors:

- For local media and photo opportunities for Victoria Walks to School Day, please contact your local school/s.
- The VicHealth-funded ACER research included schools in Bendigo, Brimbank, Cardinia, Darebin, Geelong and Wodonga.
- Please note the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) data included in this report was released to media last year – please see the media release:  
<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Media-Centre/Media-Releases-by-Topic/Physical-activity/Survey-shows-parental-fear-hinders-kids-physical-activity.aspx>
- VicHealth has commissioned a large three-year Victoria-wide study into parental fear as a barrier to children's mobility, due to begin in December 2011.