



Media Release

A STEP OUT OF FASHION

Tuesday 19 October, 2010

Tomorrow, tens of thousands of school children who do not usually walk to school will do so as part of Walktober Walk to School Day. While this is to be celebrated and encouraged, it is of great concern that most children are usually driven to school.

Since the early 1970s the number of children walking to school has more than halved. This dramatic decline in walking is extremely significant as physical inactivity and obesity are rising at an alarming rate; one in four Australian children are now overweight or obese.

“This is an appalling situation, we are failing our children by not ensuring they are physically active” says Dr Ben Rossiter, Executive Officer of Victoria Walks “We know children want to walk to school and this offers a great opportunity for physical activity”.

“Walking to school is important because patterns established during childhood tend to carry into adulthood. Those who walk when young are more likely to do so as adults” explained Dr Rossiter. “We are creating a generation of children who are driven everywhere”.

“Walking also offers children a range of other benefits and improves their self-confidence, energy levels and the ability to concentrate when they arrive at school”.

With 17% of the Melbourne morning peak now being the school run, the decline in children’s walking clearly contributes to congestion. The cost of Melbourne’s congestion is projected to rise from the 2005 level of \$1.2 billion to \$3 billion by 2020.

VicHealth research released today has found that 63 per cent of parents believe there is too much traffic on the roads to allow their children to walk to school unsupervised.

“This extremely important research clearly highlights that we need to put our streets on a car diet” said Dr Rossiter. “The number of cars and car speed is deterring parents from letting their children walk.”

“We need to look at 40 km/h speed limits on all the streets around schools and not only at the school front gate.”

“If we want to see more children walking then we all need to walk more” said Dr Rossiter. “We can’t expect children to walk while the rest of us are hoping in the car for the shortest of trips.”

“The benefits of walking go far beyond physical activity and health benefits - walking helps create socially, environmentally and economically vibrant communities” said Dr Rossiter.

Further Information: Dr Ben Rossiter, Executive Officer, 0425 805 578 or 9667 1339

Victoria Walks is a walking promotion body funded and supported VicHealth and governed by an independent Board. Victoria Walks envisages vibrant, supportive and strong neighbourhoods and communities where people can and do choose to walk wherever possible. Its mission is more Victorians walking every day. www.victoriawalks.org.au