



# Media Release

## “GOVERNMENTS ARE FAILING YOUNG PEDESTRIANS”

30 October 2012

Wednesday 31 October marks the end of VicHealth’s ‘Walk to School’ challenge which encourages children and their families to walk to school every day in October.

“We congratulate VicHealth for developing the ‘Walk to School’ challenge which promotes the importance of children walking and developing healthy habits” said Victoria Walks Executive Officer, Dr Ben Rossiter.

Since the 1970s the number of children walking to school has more than halved. This is extremely worrying as walking offers children one of the best opportunities to build physical activity into everyday life. New figures from the ABS show that in 2011-12, over 25% of Australian children aged 5-17 were overweight or obese<sup>i</sup>. Obesity is estimated to cost Victoria \$14.4 billion each year<sup>ii</sup>.

“Children walking to school is a marker of a healthy community” said Dr Rossiter. “Children want to walk to school and with such low levels of walking we are failing them and setting them up for a lifetime of poor health, this is an absolute disgrace”.

“Physical activities like walking are the closest thing we have to a wonder drug. They protect against obesity and also reduce stress and anxiety, improve self-confidence, self-esteem, energy levels and the ability to concentrate” said Dr Rossiter.

“Governments over the last four decades have clearly not done enough to create or maintain walkable communities” said Dr Rossiter. “Victoria Walks is calling on all levels of government to lift their game and make walking to school and the creation of walkable communities a priority”.

The Minister for Planning has released the Metropolitan Planning Strategy discussion paper for public debate. Victoria Walks calls on the government to make increasing walking to school a clear target of the Strategy or it will not achieve a more productive, prosperous and liveable Melbourne.

The Minister for Transport is overseeing the development of a new Victorian Road Safety Strategy. Victoria Walks calls for a pedestrian centred approach that reduces pedestrian injury and fatality, while importantly increasing the levels of walking, particularly to school.

“Previous road safety and planning strategies have often worked in isolation from other government priorities such as reducing traffic congestion, increasing physical activity, and creating strong, socially connected communities” said Dr Rossiter. “We need a more coordinated approach to these major challenges”.

“We need a holistic approach across government to ensure that we can once again hear children’s footsteps on our streets in great numbers and all Victorians are safe, physically active and walking to local destinations relevant to their everyday lives”.

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

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4364.0.55.001?OpenDocument>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/PageFiles/7830/FULLREPORTGrowingCostOfObesity2008.pdf>