



Standing up for older pedestrians: a Victoria Walks case study

Walkability research, investment and policy development tends to focus on young and middle-aged population groups, despite many countries being faced with a rapidly ageing population. As a small organisation, Victoria Walks opted to focus on older walkers.

Advocating for improved walking conditions necessitates a solid evidence base. Victoria Walks commissioned the study '[Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities](#)' was undertaken in partnership with the Council on the Ageing, and conducted by Dr Jan Garrard of Deakin University. It comprised: a wide-ranging literature review; secondary analysis of existing seniors' walking data; focus groups; and a survey of 1128 seniors, with a large number of respondents over 80 years of age (n=110), representing the views of older seniors.

Walking is particularly important for older adults' physical activity, as they are less likely than younger adults to participate in more vigorous forms of exercise, more likely to experience social isolation and less likely to have access to other forms of transport such as driving a car. Unlike other forms of exercise that decline with age, walking increases markedly with age up to 65 years. Barriers to walking include both personal and environmental factors, but the focus of the study was on potentially modifiable environmental barriers. Reducing these barriers will assist older Victorians to maintain or increase walking at a broad population level, without necessitating individual participation in programs or groups.

The research found that walking for transport does not suffer the same decline in participation rates amongst lower socio-economic groups that other forms of exercise do. It also demonstrates that walking for transport is particularly important for older seniors, both for exercise and to live their everyday lives. For those aged 80 or over, 81% of walking trips are for shopping or personal business. Consistent with an 8-80 cities approach, the research confirms that older people are more likely to walk, especially for transport, if they live in a walkable community.

Victoria Walks engaged directly with the Commissioner for Senior Victorians, who launched the research report, with state-wide television and newspaper coverage. Walking was subsequently recognised as an important element in Victoria's [Seniors Participation Action Plan](#).

The research identified that interaction with bicycle riders impacted seniors' walking – 39% said that sharing paths with cyclists was a moderate or major constraint to their walking. This led to the development of the position statement '[Footpaths are for Feet](#)', which was endorsed by key agencies from the ageing, vision impaired and disability sectors and formed the basis of an advocacy campaign targeting Members of Parliament, with positive media coverage. The study also led to research on shared walking and cycling paths and a '[Shared Paths – finding solutions](#)' position statement. Presentations have been made to a range of local, national and international forums and conferences. The project was Highly Commended in the 'research into action' category of the 2014 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Awards.

In May 2015 a media campaign on senior pedestrian road safety resulted in feature stories in [The Age](#) and the main national newspapers, as well as major television and radio coverage. Throughout the campaign, social media ([Facebook](#) and Twitter) have been used to build momentum and public support. The research has informed detailed submissions at all levels of government on road safety and walkable urban design, including the [Australian Senate Inquiry into Road Safety](#).

The Transport Accident Commission has funded Victoria Walks to develop age-friendly street design guidelines that will direct local government investment in the creation of walkable communities.