



# Media Release

## IT'S TIME TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT CHILDREN WALKING TO SCHOOL

14 November 2013

Victoria Walks says that we will not get great numbers of children walking to school without further reducing urban speed limits to 40 km/h around schools and 30km/h in high pedestrian areas.

“November is VicHealth’s Walk to School month which is a wonderful event that shows children want to walk to school” said Dr Ben Rossiter, Victoria Walks Executive Officer. “However we are not doing enough to address some of the bigger obstacles to children getting back on their feet every day of the year”.

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. 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>.

“Regular walking is the closest thing we have to a wonder drug. It can protect kids against obesity, reduce stress and anxiety, improve self-confidence, self-esteem, energy levels and the ability to concentrate” said Dr Rossiter.

“With such low levels of walking to school we are failing our children and setting them up for a lifetime of poor health” said Dr Rossiter.

“Research shows that traffic concerns are one of the biggest barriers to parents letting their children walk to school, yet we are doing little to combat their concerns.”

“Too many neighbourhood streets are drag strips or rat runs. This is not only about enforcing speed limits, but the speed limits in many residential areas are simply too high if we want to see more children walking” explained Dr Rossiter.

“Schools Zones are manifestly inadequate. If a school is lucky enough to have a zone, they only centre on the area around the school gate and don’t cover the journey to school” said Dr Rossiter. “Everywhere around a school should be a School Zone, not just the front door”.

“Governments over the last four decades have clearly not done enough to create walkable communities” said Dr Rossiter. “Victoria Walks is calling on all levels of government to lift their game and make more walkable neighbourhoods a priority, including lowering speeds on routes to school”.

“Many countries around the world are doing so much better than us in getting children to walk to school” said Dr Rossiter, who is on the board of the International Federation of Pedestrians.

**ENDS**

Further comment

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<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>