



VICLANES

Victorian Lifestyle and
Neighbourhood Environment Study

What does it mean for planners?

VicLANES is a multilevel study of individual, household and environmental information from 4913 households in 50 areas across Melbourne, Australia. The data were collected between September and December 2003.

Some of the key research questions include: To what extent does a person's neighbourhood environment influence their health behaviour? What characteristics of the built environment (such as streets, pedestrian crossings, lighting) affect physical activity levels? What is the impact of individual and area socio economic status?

The study was funded by VicHealth and conducted by researchers from the Universities of Melbourne, Monash, Deakin and QUT.

Data was collected on:

Characteristics of the local environment

- walkability of areas – detailed audits
- presence of recreational facilities
- presence of food shops
- price and availability of healthy and less healthy food alternatives

Food

- the purchase of healthy or less healthy foods
- location of purchase
- perceptions regarding the availability and price of healthy and less healthy alternatives
- attitudes and knowledge about diet and demographic factors

Physical activity

- Types and frequency of physical activity
- Subjective perceptions of availability, quality and affordability of recreational facilities and safety of the local area
- Activity level of other household members and the perceived influence on the respondent's level of physical activity
- Individual determinants of physical activity (cognitive factors, enjoyment of physical activity, motivational factors)

Alcohol

- Frequency and amount of alcohol consumption
- Location of purchase and consumption of alcohol
- Type of alcohol consumed.

The data produced from this study represents a goldmine of evidence for planners in local government.

Researchers are now working with the Victorian Local Governance Association and two metropolitan local governments (Knox and Brimbank) to ensure the results from VicLANES are translated into the activities and decisions of local councils.

What have we found so far?

1. The degree of disadvantage in an area is an important predictor of **adult Body Mass Index, with people in poorer areas being on average 3kg heavier.**

2. Even when individual socio-economic and education levels are taken into account, people living in the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas are:

- less likely to be ‘sufficiently active for health’ .
- more sedentary in their behaviour.
- Women spend more time walking than men.
- Older people are more likely to walk.
- For both men and women, longer walking tracks, the presence of vehicle parking signs and crossings, the number of driveways per building, and commercial types of views increased the likelihood of walking.
- The presence of destinations, such as transport infrastructure (eg bus stops), household convenience and other retail stores, religious and educational institutions, and entertainment facilities also increased the likelihood of walking for men and women.

These research findings support the need to focus on improving local environments to increase physical activity participation.

A VicLANES **research forum for local government** will be held later in 2006.

Participant numbers will be limited. To register your interest or for other details, contact Amanda Tattam on atattam@unimelb.edu.au

More information and peer review publication details at <http://www.kcwhs.unimelb.edu.au/research/programs/viclanes>