



## Media Release

### ACTIVE TRANSPORT AND INDEPENDENT TRAVEL IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN

**21 February 2017**

A new study published today in [Health and Place](#) has provided novel information on patterns of children's active transport and independent travel that could be used to help children and adolescents be more physically active in the future.

The study by the Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) at Deakin University, in partnership with VicHealth, looked at changes over two years in 184 children with an average age of 12 years. Significantly, those who took part in the survey came from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas in both urban and rural areas of Victoria.

Dr Jenny Veitch from IPAN said the research is of particular importance because children in this demographic tend to have low levels of physical activity and are at risk of poor health outcomes.

"Our study is among the first to examine predictors of active transport and independent mobility to school and other local destinations and we looked at how individual, social and physical environmental factors are associated with these behaviours over time.

"We found that 43.5 per cent, or almost half of the children surveyed used a form of active transport, such as walking, riding a bike, skateboard or scooter to get to or from school at least three or more times a week and this didn't change over the two year period.

"However, we did see a drop in the number of children who used a form of independent active travel to get to or from school, such as walking, riding a bike, skateboard or scooter without a parent or adult, at least three or more times a week over the two years of the study.

"When we started our research, 35 per cent of the children used some form of independent travel on the school journey, but two years later, that number had dropped to 30 per cent, she said.

The study found that how often a child independently travelled to and from school was affected by how much they enjoyed it, parental safety concerns and proximity to walking tracks.

"We also found that road safety and social norms were associated with both active transport and independent travel by children to local destinations and these factors provide us with potential areas to target in the future," said Dr Veitch.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said: "The proportion of children walking to school has declined dramatically in recent decades and obesity levels are on the rise. Only one in five children aged 5-17 gets the recommended amount of physical activity every day so it's important we try and turn those statistics around.

"Walking, scooting and riding to and from school helps children get the physical activity they need each day to be healthy and can kick-start healthy habits to set them up for a lifetime of good health.



“This study highlights some of the barriers children face to becoming more physically active in their local neighbourhoods, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Changing social norms isn’t easy or a quick fix”.

Dr Veitch said further studies are now needed with diverse populations of children and adolescents to build more conclusive evidence.

“We hope this research will then inform the work of health promotion practitioners, urban planners, and local councils to plan programs to promote active transport and independent mobility among youth,” she said.

Download a PDF of the paper: “What predicts children’s active transport and independent mobility in disadvantaged neighbourhoods?” - <https://authors.elsevier.com/a/1Ub1y4pqpjbNBR>

This research was supported by a Linkage Grant from the Australian Research Council (LP0990183), in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), Australia; and by a National Health and Medical Research Council Strategic Award, (NHMRC, ID 374241). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or Australian Research Council.

Dr Jenny Veitch is supported by a National Health and Medical Research Council Early Career Fellowship, (ID 1053426).

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