



MEDIA RELEASE

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Seniors missing out: new research

Victoria's inadequate footpaths, dogs not leashed or under control, poor street lighting at night and irresponsible drivers are preventing thousands of seniors in Victoria from getting the exercise vital to their health and wellbeing, a new Victoria Walks report has found.

Gerard Mansour, Commissioner for Senior Victorians, will today launch *Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities* at VicHealth. The research, which includes a survey of 1128 seniors from across Victoria, focus groups and an international literature review, was conducted by Dr Jan Garrard for Victoria Walks and the Council on the Ageing.

The report highlights that 58 per cent of senior Victorians do not get the recommended level of physical activity.

The survey revealed the key barriers to seniors walking, the following issues were moderate or major constraints:

- Dogs that were off leash or not under control (50% of respondents)
- Poorly maintained footpaths (47%)
- Poorly lit footpaths (42%)
- Drivers failing to give way when required (39%)
- Cyclists on shared walking and cycling paths (39%)ⁱ.

"Traffic-related and fall injuries among older pedestrians impact on their walking, yet we expect them to just fit in" said Victoria Walks Executive Officer Ben Rossiter. "We need to stop telling seniors to take extra care while walking and create road environments that take care of them".

Results show that walking is extremely important for older adults. Walking is their most common form of physical activity, comprising 77% of total physical activity for those aged 75 years or over.

Commissioner for Senior Victorians Gerard Mansour said the Victoria Walks report will make an important contribution to the development of a whole-of-government action plan, commissioned by the Victorian Government for supporting better participation among senior Victorians.

"Walking is vital for the health and fitness of seniors as they age, as well as being a crucial means of transport to ensure seniors can continue to participate in their community," Mr Mansour said.

"Improving walkability and transport options is a key focus for the new Ministerial Advisory Committee for Senior Victorians. The Committee is busy working on a new action plan that will detail strategies to promote an age-friendly society, enhance community participation of older people and coordinate plans across Government," said Mr Mansour.

The research found that walking for transport becomes more important as seniors get older. The proportion of walking trips for shopping or personal business increases from 53% of trips by 60-69 year olds to 81% of trips by those over 80. Even those aged 80 years and over are willing and able to walk up to about 1 km to get to places like shops and services.

“Victoria’s relatively low rate of transport-related walking among seniors is the result of poor walkability rather than seniors’ ill health or functional decline” said Dr Rossiter “. In Victoria, 14% of household trips by older adults are done on foot, yet it is up to 48% in a number of other industrialised countries”.

Seniors in inner Melbourne (68%) were much more likely to walk for transport for more than an hour per week compared to those in rural or regional Victoria (38%) and middle (31%) or outer Melbourne (33%).

Dr Rossiter said lack of ‘walkable’ streets meant seniors were missing out on improved health, wellbeing, independence, personal mobility and friendships.

“With the ageing of the population, increasing walking levels is a social and economic imperative” said Dr Rossiter, “we need more age friendly neighbourhoods with better walking infrastructure and access to shops, services and public transport within 1 km of housing.

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Download the summary and full report *Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities* www.victoriawalks.org.au/seniors

Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities will be launched by Gerard Mansour, Commissioner for Senior Victorians at 11 am on Thursday 5 December 2013 at VicHealth, 15-31 Pelham Street, Carlton.

Further information:

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- Dr Jan Garrard, report author, 0400 575 586

Victoria Walks is funded by VicHealth to get more people walking every day

ⁱ See p.121 of the full report www.victoriawalks.org.au/seniors