

CITIES



The main asset of cities is the health of its citizens. Cities offer many services for health and well-being, as well as income opportunities. Conversely, cities concentrate risks to health, such as air pollution, social isolation and violence. Health, environmental, societal and climate benefits can be achieved through proper city governance and healthy urban planning. Actions to unlock benefits include moving towards sustainable transport; efficient land use and solid waste management; adequate provision of housing, water and sanitation; and open and green spaces for all.

Green space in urban areas creates opportunities for physical activity, social and leisure activities.

PRIORITY SETTINGS FOR ACTION



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Over half the world's population live in cities



70%

of the world's population are expected to live in cities by 2050

Cities can be hot spots for many health and environment risks – from air pollution, to waste and chemical contamination, to traffic injuries.

BUT HEALTH-FOCUSED URBAN DESIGN AND CITY GOVERNANCE CAN MAKE CITIES A BEDROCK FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLES THROUGH ACTION ON:



Supply of energy



Urban planning



Water and sanitation



Waste management

LEVELS OF URBAN TRANSFORMATION:

- 1.** Current policies assessed and mapped
- 2.** Health policy-makers enhanced their competencies
- 3.** Tools developed and applied for assessing health and economic benefits
- 4.** Alternative scenarios tested – vision for healthy urban future articulated
- 5.** Targeted information has intensified demands for change
- 6.** Urban leaders act – changes in policies, air quality, climate, environmental and health indicators are tracked



View of green roof on modern buildings and other residential buildings in Sydney, Australia.

WHAT ARE KEY ACTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT?

Key actions on urban health and environmental risks include the following:

1.

Awareness

Raise awareness of the huge health impacts of unhealthy urban environments among policy leaders and the public, including through better monitoring of air pollution and other risks.

2.

Health leaders

Convene health leaders at urban level to assess pollution risks and take action, building on Health in All Policies approaches.

3.

Sectoral and urban policies

Incorporate health criteria in sectoral and urban policies, city master plans, and sector development policies and plans for transport, energy, housing, and waste management.

4.

Economic costs

Assess the economic costs of risks to health and monitor risks and the effectiveness of new interventions for health and health equity.

5.

Policy change

Track progress on policy change and results from city initiatives to address environmental risk, as well as their links to health.

MAIN WHO ACTIONS

WHO's Urban Health Initiative provides a model for the health sector to contribute to healthy urban planning and policies, sustainable development and climate resilience. The Urban Health Initiative develops health sector leadership, capacity and tools to address urban planning and health issues more effectively through the following measures:

Tools and training materials

Provide health-oriented tools and training materials, adapted for use at the city level, to assess air pollution and other environmental risks and compare the health benefits or costs of particular development strategies.

Competency and leadership

Enhance health sector competency and leadership to use these tools, to demonstrate the health costs of unsustainable development and demand more health-enhancing urban policies.

Economic costs

Provide evidence about economic costs of poor development choices so as to leverage investments that benefit health as well as equity, particularly for vulnerable groups.

BreatheLife campaign

Develop and promote membership of the BreatheLife campaign (5) to leverage policy and public commitments to clean air, climate-friendly cities and healthier urban lifestyles.

SECTORAL POLICIES INTERACTING WITH HEALTH IN CITIES

Cooperation with the following sectors may be required to sustainably reduce risks to health:



Industry



Energy



Transport



Land use planning



Labour



Health



Water and sanitation

Further information: www.who.int/health-topics/urban-health.

Source: Healthy environments for healthier populations: Why do they matter and what can we do? WHO, 2019.



World Health
Organization