

NEWS RELEASE

May 17 2010

Link between built environment and health to be a focus at Critical Horizons conference

Can the design of your neighbourhood make you sick?

Dr Lisa Wood, who is speaking at the upcoming Critical Horizons Regional Futures Conference, says there is growing evidence that the built environment impacts on both physical and mental health.

“The design of neighbourhoods is associated with levels of walking, cycling and use of public transport, together with sense of community, positive mental health, depression and asthma,” she said.

“Transport planning, housing and public open space design are also associated with health and wellbeing at the individual and community level.

“In relation to mental health, social isolation, loneliness and lack of sense of community are factors that impact on mental health.”

Dr Wood, from UWA’s Centre for the Built Environment and Health, will speak on the topic at the upcoming 2010 Critical Horizons Regional Futures Conference.

Hosted by the South West Development Commission, the conference will see 15 of Australia’s leading experts come together in Bunbury on June 2 and 3 to talk about global trends and their possible implications for the South West region in the future.

Dr Wood said her presentation at Critical Horizons would be of interest to people from throughout the South West who wanted to know how the build environment could influence health.

“In terms of ensuring the built environment has a positive effect on health, there are things we want to plan and design ‘in’, and plan and design ‘out’,” she said.

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Plan and design 'in'

- Connected street networks to encourage walking
- Public transport, parks and shops/cafes within walkable distance of homes and workplaces
- Mixed density and housing that caters to a variety of life stages
- Presence of greenery and nature
- Things for people to do within the community
- 'Eyes on the street' to promote community safety
- Bring back local shops and eating places as this is good for sense of community and for walking.

Plan and design 'out'

- Streets that go nowhere
- Urban sprawl
- Poorly designed high density that doesn't provide adequate social and recreational spaces around it
- Car dominance
- Vandalism that results from alienating young people or not providing places and things for them to do
- Less dominance of massive centralised retail centres.

For more information or to register for the 2010 Critical Horizons Regional Futures Conference, visit www.criticalhorizons.com.au or phone Alan Cross on 9792 2000. Speakers include 'beyondblue' chairman and former Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, futurist and strategist Dr Peter Ellyard, and author and historian Bill Bunbury. Ticket price covers morning and afternoon teas, and lunches each day of the conference, plus a dinner at Barbados on June 2.

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