



Centre for Urban Research
School of Global, Urban and Social Studies

Submission on National Urban Policy for Australia

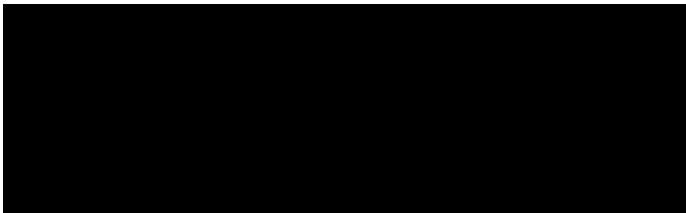
Submission provided by the Australian Urban
Observatory at RMIT University

June 13 2024

Dear Committee Members,

Feedback provided in this submission is made by Professor Melanie Davern on behalf of the [Australian Urban Observatory](#) research team at RMIT University. Further information can be provided upon request and I congratulate the Australian government on the extensive community engagement on this important developing National Urban Policy for Australia.

Kind regards,



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- **A shared government vision: Currently placeholder text is provided to describe how state and territory governments will work with the Australian government.** This is really important context and also needs to describe how multiple portfolios of these government departments will work collaboratively and how this will be supported by the new national policy.
- **We commend the 5 goals of liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable and resilient.**
- However, Areas of Focus and Principles of the policy (p.6) must also be **linked to targets and indicators measuring, monitoring and tracking progress over time.** This is a big omission from the current policy document.
- **In terms of the current Areas of Focus, it is great to see active transport and social infrastructure included under “environments and communities” though specific targets are needed to include targets demonstrating priority actions.** These are big topics to address and government should include targeted priorities over time. Housing should also include housing diversity as we all housing affordability with over-supply and under-supply of diverse housing options in specific locations. Similarly housing density should be included as separate measures and directly connected to the walkability of cities.
- **It is wonderful to see health and wellbeing as a specific Area of Focus in National Urban Policy** and the government is commended for this inclusion.
- It is also commendable to see Arts and Culture included within the priority area of “all people belong and are welcome”. **Future action and targets must be linked to these priorities to ensure measured progress is achieved so the policy is directly linked to future national and state aligned action.**
- **Access to green infrastructure and public open spaces could also be included in the Area of Focus on health and wellbeing with decreasing vegetated areas and canopy coverage common in increasing densified areas (e.g. Adelaide).** The links between multiple areas of focus might also be better visualised with a venn diagram to show the overlap between many of the focus area categories.

- **The draft policy links the Department of Infrastructure actions to SDG Goal 11 and Goal 3 but there is no mention to health promotion and preventable medicine through good urban design.** The role of good urban design linking the preventative medicine and health departments needs to be included in the policy development as partners to really push the links between liveable and sustainable cities and health and wellbeing. Urban policy is key to health and this needs to be reinforced in the new draft urban policy.
- The department should be congratulated for establishment of a new Cities and Suburbs unit.
- **We also recommend embracing academic expertise into decision-making by inclusion/development of an Academic Urban Policy Forum of Experts and not just policy experts alone.** This will ensure that evidence can be considered in the development of new policy and academics identified to consult according to the Urban Policy Areas of Focus. A broad academic advisory group could be identified to ensure access to the latest research knowledge during urban policy formation with specific members selected for consultation as urban policy topics are investigated.
- **We recommend that the Australian government develop stronger partnerships with the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority with great reputation for urban policy development and their use of public engagement for longterm master planning.** Partnership with Scotland is also recommended noted the importance of addressing inequity in this proposed urban policy. Similarly, the [Living Standards Framework](#) (2021) from New Zealand Treasury provides great examples of good national urban policy that is tracked and monitored over time.
- **Place-based approaches are commended in the National Urban Policy.** An international [evidence review of place-based approaches](#) was prepared for the [Victorian Government](#) in 2022 by RMIT University and Jesuit Social Services. The research also used [case studies to inform a review of practice](#) with the project informing public service training materials by ANZSOG to increase knowledge and organisational capability about success features of place-based approaches in urban policies. These resources have condensed summaries of findings and valuable resources for Government.

- Australian Urban Policy must address and align with Measuring What Matters as Australia’s first national wellbeing framework. Social infrastructure identified in this Urban Policy directly aligns to Access to care and support services/access to health services and overall life expectancy.** Neither policy includes the measurement of subjective wellbeing and improved subjective wellbeing should be an identified measured and monitored outcome for both major Australian policy frameworks. The connections between these major policies need to be linked and better addressed.
- Liveability of Australian cities has been measured by the [Australian Urban Observatory](#) at RMIT University since 2020 and is a major source of liveability evidence for the Australian Government.** Liveability is measured according to the geographies of neighbourhood (Statistical Area Level 1), suburb and LGA and whole of city results are also made available for the 21 largest cities of Australia and the time periods of 2018, 2021 and 2024 (December 2024).

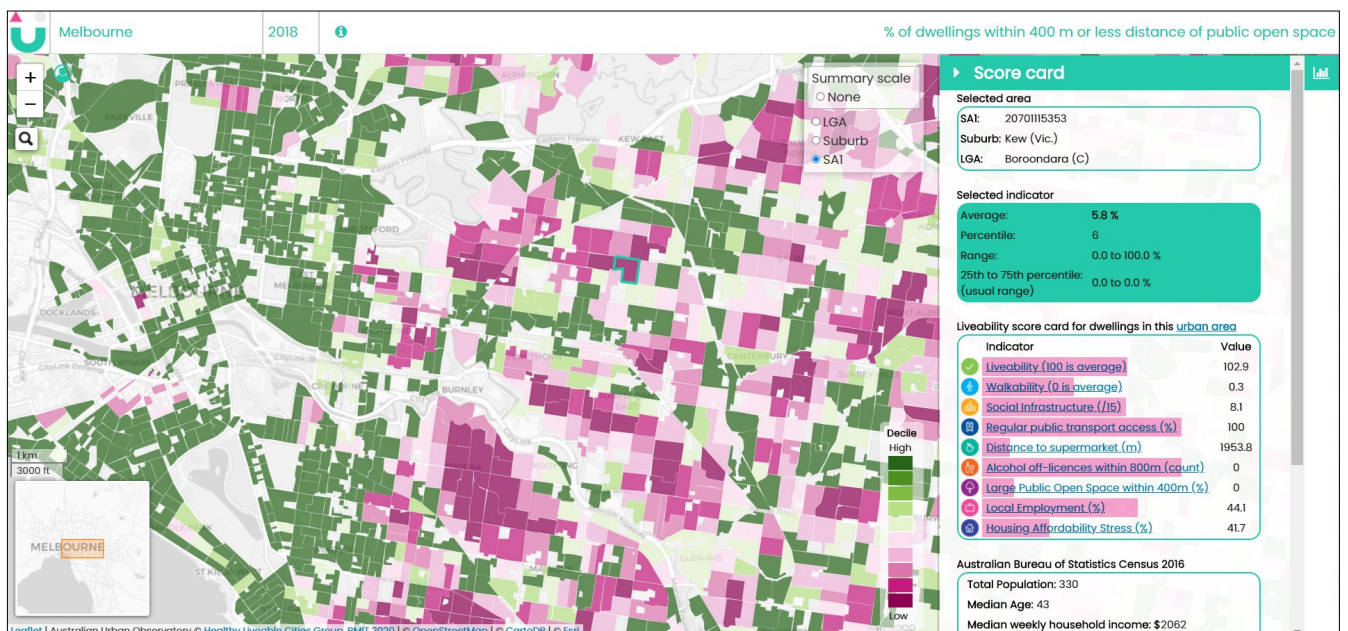


Figure 1: SA1 proportion of dwellings within 400m distance to public open space (neighbourhoods across Melbourne presented) included within the Australian Urban Observatory (auo.org.au)

- The [Australian Urban Observatory](#) (AUO) is housed at the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University and able to customise current/new indicator results to support urban policy measurement and monitoring over time. Social infrastructure is measured by 16 different service types in the AUO across all cities with canopy coverage, vegetation coverage and cycling infrastructure currently being developed. Small area spatial analysis ensures investigation of equity in all liveability assessments supported by the AUO and critical for the Government objective of “no-one and no place left behind”.

- For more information on the Australian Urban Observatory please contact auo@rmit.edu.au or Professor Melanie Davern on melanie.davern@rmit.edu.au or visit [here](#) for a project prospectus.
- **National urban policy on climate adaptation must include multisectoral action** linking climate, health and environment policy not separated and segregated policy initiatives.
- **Government should be commended for inclusion of objective 5 “Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing”.** This should align to the recently announced \$100M of National Active Transport Fund to quantify and assess how Australian cities support walking and cycling. The Australian Urban Observatory at RMIT University already measures and monitors walkability of 21 Australian cities but there is no measurement of cycling infrastructure in Australian cities that is needed to promote active transport. Federal government must fund access to high resolution aerial imagery to research institutions to support identification of local area access to cycling infrastructure and walking infrastructure such as footpaths. There are no national datasets available to support measurement and monitoring of these critical active transport issues and prohibitive PSMA data licensing costs are major barriers that need to be addressed to really investigate and plan for the Government policy objective of “no one left behind”.
- **Additional evidence on homelessness could be derived from analysis of the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection funded under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.** These data are an untapped resource of evidence identifying homelessness service provision identified by the Australian Urban Observatory at RMIT University through a [Specialist Housing Indicators](#) project completed in 2023.
- **Violence against women should be included as a specialist target area of urban policy in “Our urban areas are safe”.** There are no nationally comparable data on violence against women or family violence and this should be created to measure and monitor both policy/program and population improvements over time and spatially identify areas of key risk and associated influencing factors.
- In 2021 only 1% of 12 million Australians cycled to work. **New indicators are needed to identify safe and connected cycling routes across Australian cities that make it safe for people to use active transport to get to work, school, see friends and family and connect within their community.**

- Similarly, a shift to active travel needs to improve and enhance existing footpath and road infrastructure if government is serious about action to decrease 2005 emission by 43% by 2030 and net zero by 2050. **The links across the different domains of key urban challenges need to be clearly identified in national urban policy to decrease siloed policy making and planning across these different policy domains/objectives.**
- Green and blue spaces have no current national datasets to support identification or measurement of these key issues. If these issues are going to be identified in urban policy they must be quantified and linked to urban policy targets and actions. **Free access to high resolution photogrammetry data are essential to identify blue and green spaces in urban areas and current costs and licensing of these types of data prevent important innovative action on these critical urban issues.**
- **New measurement of social infrastructure service provision is needed to understand service capacity and not just geographic access.** Current measurement of social infrastructure in **the Australian Urban Observatory at RMIT University can currently identify over 16 different types of social and educational service types needed to support health, education and wellbeing across the lifespan** (for 2018, 2021 and soon 2024). **However, geographical location does not address service system capability such as available childcare places, General Practitioners who have capacity to take on new patients or Secondary Schools at student capacity.** This should be investigated to better inform future urban policy and community needs planning.
- National Urban Policy must draw on and link all existing cross-portfolio planning (e.g. health, education, biodiversity, climate etc) and not remain siloed: City planning and governance must be collaborative and adaptive. **We congratulate the Department for embracing long term strategic planning across portfolios and relevant existing policies should be identified throughout the new urban policy document to ensure horizontal alignment.**
- **National Urban policy must be connected to and outcomes, measurement and national reporting mechanism to support improved outcomes and democratic process and trust in government:** Urban outcomes should actively improve social, environmental and economic outcomes. Without a clear measurement and reporting process aligned to national policy (e.g. New Zealand Living Standards Framework) the new urban policy is at risk of wasted opportunity. Cross policy outcomes (e.g. health outcomes and health inequities) should also be reported as outcomes.