

10 keys to integrating health into urban and transport planning

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Infographic that summarizes the 10 principles and corresponding indicators to help urban planners incorporate public health into their work. Credit: ISGlobal / Catalan Government

As much as 20% of premature mortality can be attributed to poor urban and transport planning. Nevertheless, quantitative indicators to guide the integration of health components into urban design have been lacking. To address this gap, a team from the Barcelona Institute for Global

Health (ISGlobal), a center supported by the 'la Caixa' Foundation, has identified 10 principles—and corresponding indicators—to help urban planners incorporate public health into their work.

The new study, published in the *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, was undertaken at the request of the Directorate-General for Environmental Policies and the Natural Environment, which forms part of the Catalan Department of Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda, with the aim of guiding urban planners in the design of healthy cities. The researchers conducted a review of the scientific literature and organized a participatory process with relevant stakeholders in Catalonia, including the Catalan Government, the Barcelona Provincial Council, the Barcelona Metropolitan Transport Authority (ATM) and the Catalan Land Institute (INCASÒL).

"This study is unique in that it brings together [scientific evidence](#) on urban health, which means that the proposed principles have a solid theoretical basis," commented Mark Nieuwenhuijsen, coordinator of the study and Director of the Urban Planning, Environment and Health Initiative at ISGlobal. "At the same time, having drawn on the experience of relevant stakeholders, we are able to guarantee that the indicators can be applied in practice and will be useful for decision-makers."

The review of the scientific literature was guided by four urban and [transport planning](#) objectives that previous studies have associated with favorable health and well-being outcomes:

1. Development of a compact city with mixed [land use](#) and high street connectivity
2. Reduction of private motorized [transport](#)
3. Promotion of active and public transport (walking and cycling)
4. Development of green and public open space

10 Principles and Indicators

The new paper summarizes the scientific literature and the participatory process into 10 principles for integrating health into urban planning right from the outset (zoning phase) and provides a checklist for this purpose. For example, for the first principle, which has to do with the distribution of green and public open space, one of the proposed indicators is that at least 25% of the total land area should be dedicated to these types of spaces.

The checklist is designed to be used right from the outset of urban development. It can be used in all sorts of contexts but is especially intended for European cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. For application in other contexts, the indicators can be adapted to local conditions.

"If implemented, the principles identified in this study should reduce the burden of disease and death associated with urban and transport design and lead to cities that are not only healthy but also liveable, desirable, equitable, sustainable and climate change-resilient, thereby achieving co-benefits," explained ISGlobal researcher Natalie Mueller, lead author of the study. "For example, a shift from private car use to active and public transport and the greening of cities is not only beneficial for [health](#), but also reduces the carbon footprint and helps to mitigate the effects of climate change. However, it is important that cities are improved consistently and equitably without leaving any neighborhoods or groups behind."

"Building healthy cities requires a multidisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders, from [urban planners](#) to [public health](#) experts," concluded Nieuwenhuijsen.

The 10 principles for designing healthy cities are as follows:

1. Land-use mix
2. Street connectivity
3. Density
4. Motorized transport reductions
5. Walking
6. Cycling
7. Public transport
8. Multi-modality
9. Green and public open space
10. Integration of all planning principles

More information: Natalie Mueller et al, Integrating health indicators into urban and transport planning: A narrative literature review and participatory process, *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijheh.2021.113772](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2021.113772)

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