

Designing Cities for Every Age: Liveability and Healthy Ageing in Australian Cities and the **Australia Urban Observatory**

Professor Melanie Davern

Dr Lucy Gunn

Age Friendly Cities Workshop

International Conference Urban Health

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Introduction



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RMIT's Centre for Urban Research



Dr Lucy Gunn

Senior Lecturer and Researcher at
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- Liveability and Healthy Ageing in Australian Cities and the **Australia Urban Observatory**

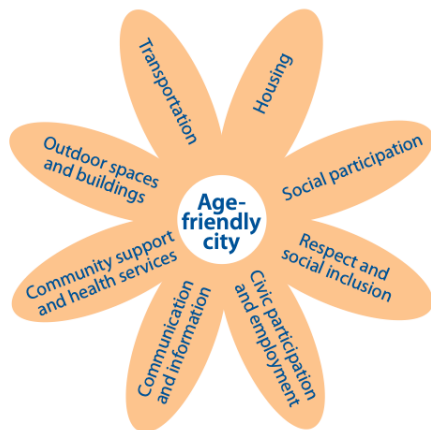
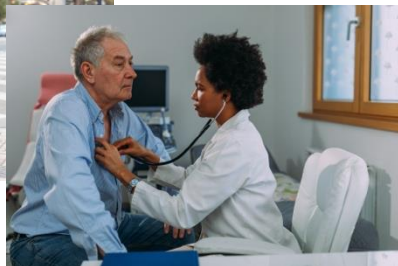


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- **Project Lead:** Australian Research Council funded project : *Designing liveable neighbourhoods to support healthy ageing*
- **Empowering Senior Voices:** *Inclusive Civic Innovation and Healthy Ageing through the Our Voice Methodology*



Age Friendly Cities



Decade
of healthy
ageing

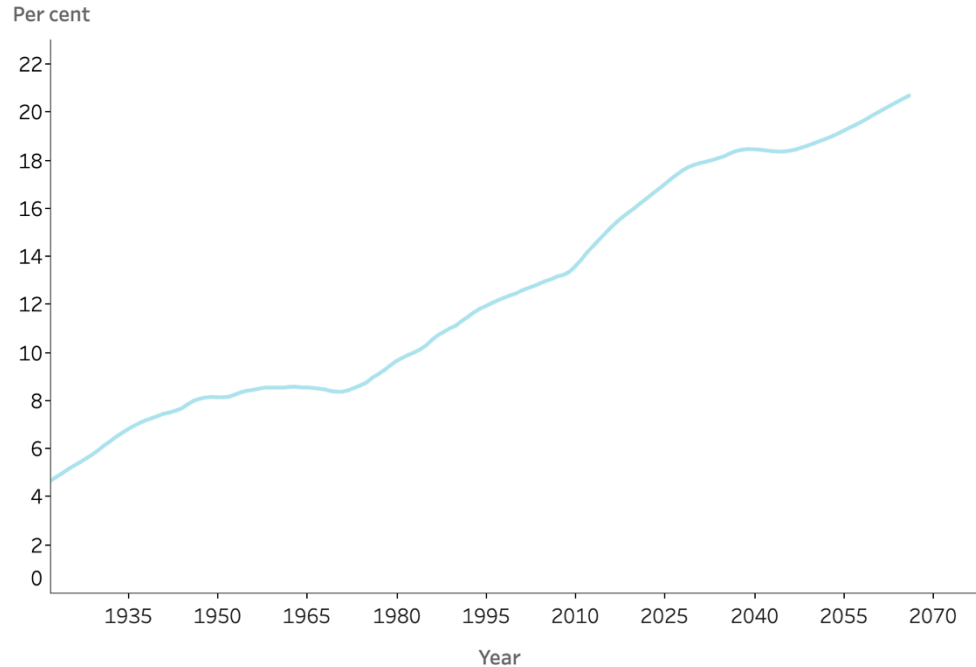
2021 - 2030

- Ageism
- Age friendly environments
- Integrated care
- Long term care

Ageing population of Australia and New Zealand



Figure 1.1: Percentage of the Australian population aged 65 and over, at 30 June, over time



Australia:

17% in 2025

21% by 2041

23% by 2066

New Zealand:

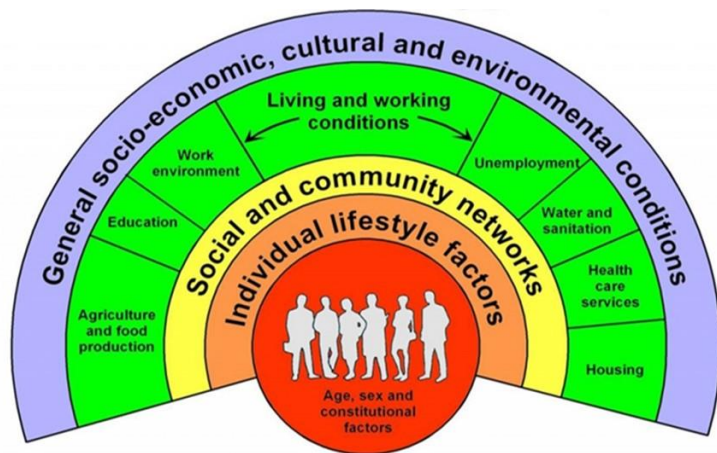
20% in 2028

25% by 2050s

social determinants: non-medical influences of health



government decision-making shapes the design and development of local places and influences health inequities



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991



LIVE WELL PEI

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Adapted from BCCDC Foundation for Public Health

what is liveability?

Safe, socially cohesive, inclusive, environmentally sustainable with affordable and diverse housing linked via public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure to employment, education, public open space, local shops, health and community services, leisure and cultural opportunities'

(Lowe et al., 2013)



Why did we develop the Australian Urban Observatory?

Problem

1 The liveability of a city is dependent on **effective policy and planning** designed and informed by evidence and need.

2 Liveability declines as Australian **cities grow faster than effective planning and policy** can be designed and implemented.

3 **Policymakers are time poor** without time to collate, analyse and interpret complex urban data or research.

4 Policy making cycles are short so **data must be easy to understand and readily available.**

5 Multi-disciplinary, multi-sector problems occur in **siloes policy and planning practice.**

6 **Neighbourhood data** are not easily accessed for Australian cities **nor measure change** over time

7 **Too much data** can lead to data-phobia, ignoring evidence, being overwhelmed or unsure of what to use.

Solution:



A digital platform that delivers data-driven insights into urban liveability across Australia's 21 largest cities and replicable for others.



A bridge between cutting-edge research and actionable tools that empower decision makers to act.



Data that are translated into easily understood and engaging liveability indicators for neighbourhoods.



Enable understanding of social, economic and environmental issues of importance.



Save government and industry money, time and people resources.



A unique and invaluable resource to design effective policy outcomes for places and enhance liveability equity.

introducing the Australian Urban Observatory



A digital planning platform measuring, mapping and monitoring liveability by transforming complex **urban data** into easily understood **liveability indicators**

Liveability



Transport



Public Open Space



Walkability



Food



Employment



People



Social Infrastructure



Alcohol



Housing



- ▶ Makes **understanding** and **measuring** liveability simpler, **linking health, place and people**
- ▶ Translates **research knowledge on health and planning** into practice to create real world **impact** for evidence-informed **planning, evaluation** and **engagement**
- ▶ Measures and maps **liveability** for Australia's largest 21 cities **LGAs, Suburbs & Neighbourhoods** (SAIs) **across time** (2018/2021/2024)
- ▶ With **72 indicators** across **9 domains** of liveability
- ▶ PLUS **People domain** 115 demographic indicators from Census
- ▶ **auo.org.au/measure** and downloadable data

21 cities across Australia

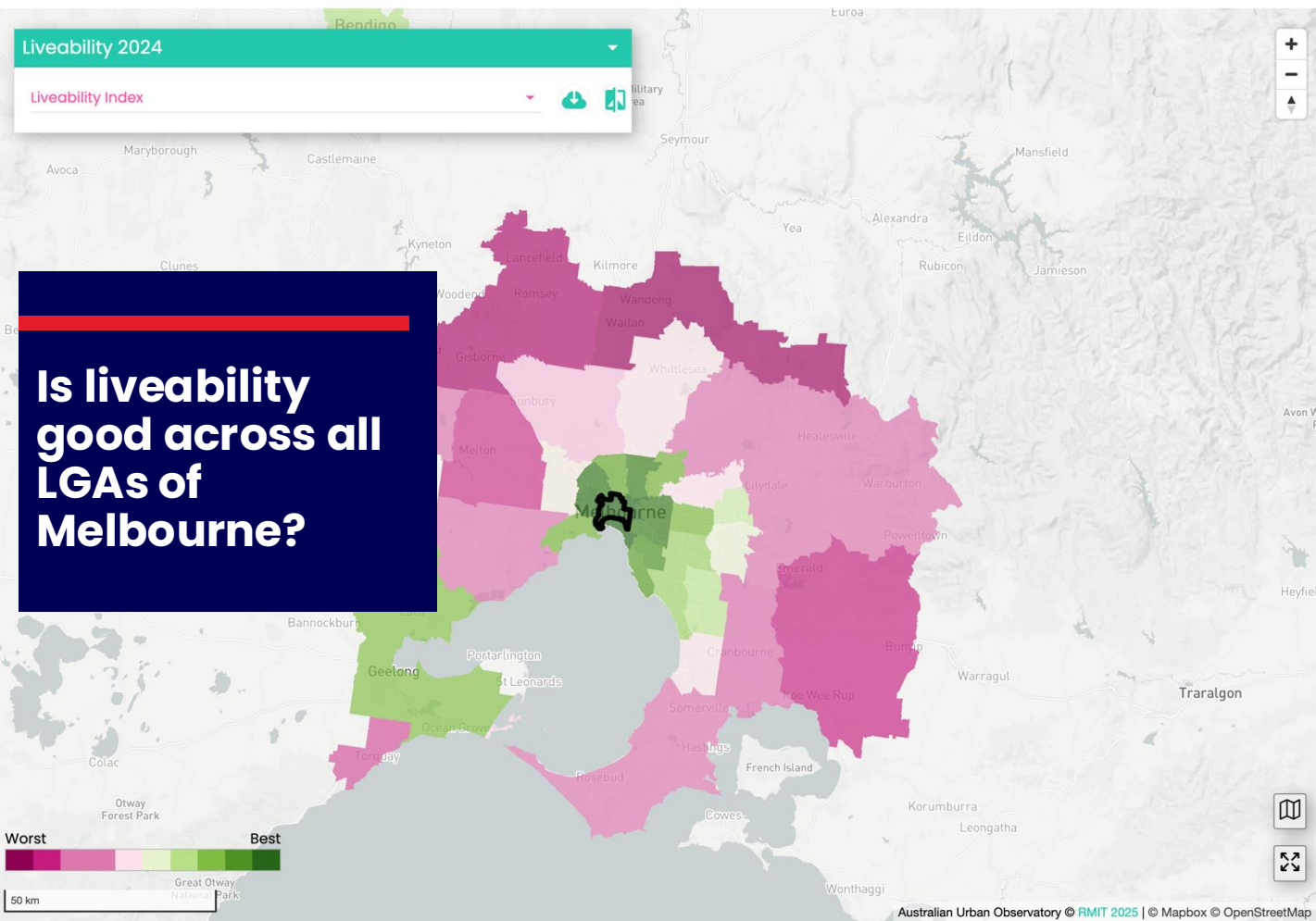


| | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACT | Canberra |
| NSW | Albury-Wodonga, Newcastle-Maitland, Sydney, Wollongong |
| NT | Darwin |
| QLD | Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast-Tweed Heads, Mackay, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Townsville |
| SA | Adelaide |
| TAS | Hobart, Launceston |
| VIC | Albury-Wodonga, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Melbourne |
| WA | Perth |

Liveability 2024

Liveability Index

Is liveability good across all LGAs of Melbourne?



Address search

Boundary type: LGA (free) Year: 2024

Overlays: Schools: None

Walking distance: 10 mins

Set centre

Selected area

| LGA | Melbourne |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Indicator | Liveability Index |
| Average | 107.2 |
| Percentile | 100% |
| Percentile within city | 100% |

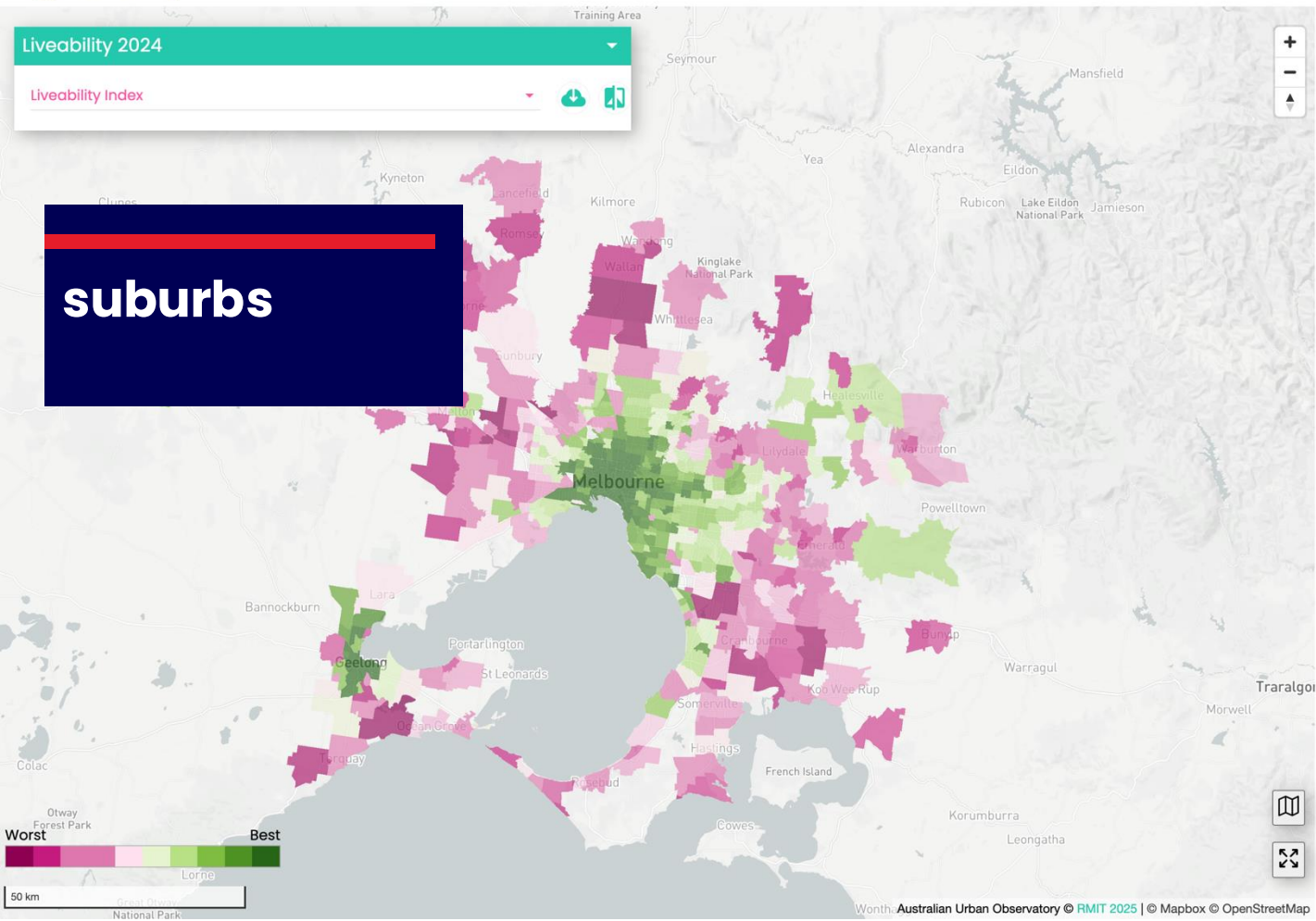
Scorecard

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Liveability | 107.2 | Median |
| Walkability | 9.9 | |
| Social infrastructure | 11.5/16 | |
| Regular public transport access | 95.1% | |

Liveability 2024

Liveability Index

suburbs



Address search

Boundary type: Suburb (free) | Year: 2024

Overlays: Schools, Boundaries: None

Walking distance: Set centre | Walking time: 10 mins

Selected area

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| LGA | Melbourne |
| Indicator | Liveability Index |
| Average | 107.2 |
| Percentile | 100% |
| Percentile within LGA | NA |
| Percentile within city | 100% |

Scorecard

Download PDF

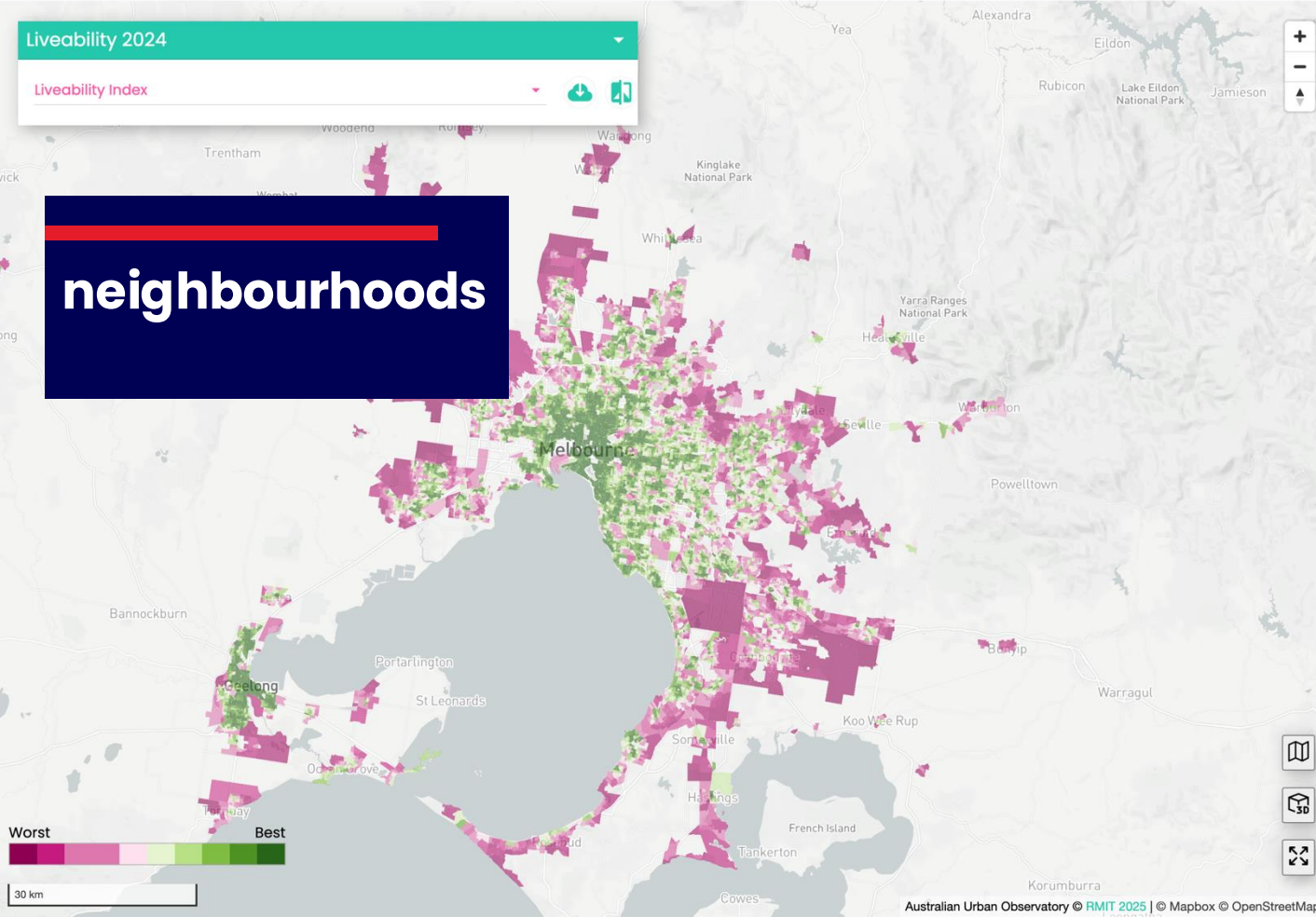
| | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| Liveability | 107.2 | Median |
| Walkability | 9.9 | |
| Social infrastructure | 11.5/16 | |

100 is average
0 is average
Out of 16

Liveability 2024

Liveability Index

neighbourhoods



Address search

Boundary type: Neighbourhood (free) Year: 2024

Overlays: Schools: None

Walking distance: 10 mins

Selected area

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| LGA | Melbourne |
| Indicator | Liveability Index |
| Average | 107.2 |
| Percentile | 100% |
| Percentile within LGA | NA |
| Percentile within city | 100% |

Scorecard

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| Liveability | 107.2 | Median |
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Project overview

Designing liveable neighbourhoods for healthy ageing

Healthy ageing?

Behaviours



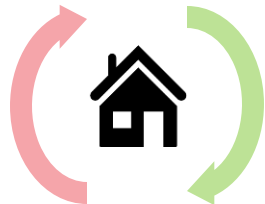
- Physically active
- Sedentary
- Motor vehicle use
- Public transport use
- Social interactions

Health




- Physical functioning
- Mental health
- Chronic disease
- General health
- Wellbeing

Neighbourhood environments change



Research activities



- Survey data
- GIS data – AUO 
- People mid-to-older aged adults
- 5 waves:
2007, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2016



Brisbane



Workshops on liveability



Reviews / Data modelling

Project overview - aims

Aims:



- Provide **robust evidence** on the role of neighbourhood **liveability** for **healthy ageing**



- Through this **evidence**, support **capacity building** and **policy change**



Research so far....

Systematic reviews on:

- Walking – Protocol, Review
- Physical functioning
- (3 papers)



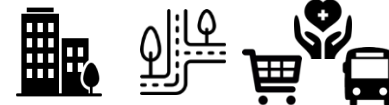
2 gaps: Sex

Age groups



Empirical research on:

- Walking: Street lights
- Liveability Indicator development
- Walking: Built environment (under review)
- Physical functioning (under review)
- Workshop findings (to come)
- (4 papers)



Researcher team: *Designing liveable neighbourhoods to support healthy ageing*

Chief Investigators:

Dr Lucy Gunn (Lead)
RMIT University

Professor Melanie Davern
RMIT University

Professor Gavin Turrell
RMIT University

Professor Takemi Sugiyama
Swinburne University of Technology

Admin Assistance: Maria Sortino
RMIT University

Interdisciplinary team:

Dr Manoj Chandrabose (Discovery Grant)

Dr Alan Both

Dr Ori Gudes (Discovery Grant)

Ms Rebecca Roberts

PhD Students

Mr Tharindu Bandara

Mr Pouya Molaei

Ms Dewi Kumalasari (Discovery Grant)



GIS



Statistics



Complex analysis

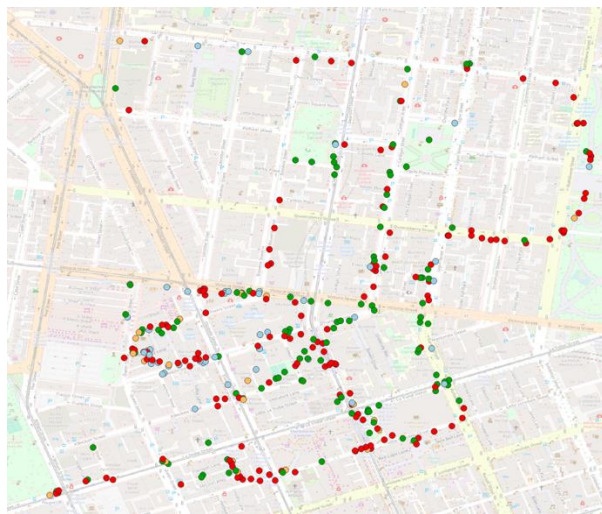


Empowering Senior Voices:

Empowering Senior Voices: Inclusive Civic Innovation and Healthy Ageing through the Our Voice Methodology

Project Lead: Prof Bernardo Figueiredo

- Location: Inner City Area of City of Melbourne
- Social Innovation Precinct
- Large residential area, apartments, increasing older residents



- 23 people interviewed using a photo voice method
- Raise their voice, through digital inclusion using 'Our Voice' software from Stanford University
- Series of workshops with stakeholders





Empowering Senior Voices:

- **8 Themes were uncovered relating to the area**
 - 1. Infrastructure and Maintenance
 - 2. Regulation and Enforcement
 - 3. Safety and Accessibility
 - 4. Community Engagement and Education
 - 5. Collaboration and Partnerships
 - 6. Environmental and Urban Design
 - 7. Sustainability and Green Infrastructure
 - 8. Equity and Inclusion in Public Spaces



INFRASTRUCTURE AND MAINTENANCE

Participants appreciated the character of the bluestone streets and the council's efforts to preserve mature trees while maintaining footpaths. These heritage elements were valued for the sense of place they created. Participants highlighted tripping hazards, blocked paths, and inconsistent maintenance. There were strong views on ongoing audits and redesigns that balance heritage with safety. The "three-dimensional" idea emerged to manage pedestrian congestion.



SOLUTIONS / NEXT STEPS

- Schedule quarterly pavement audits
- Redesign surfaces with non-slip material
- Enforce construction clean-up obligations

REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Residents noted that traffic lights and new slow-down signage had improved safety in some locations and that most drivers and riders respected crossing rules. Delivery riders and cyclists speeding through crossings were viewed as major risks. Participants also flagged confusion around tram zones and inconsistent signage. Enforcement of existing laws and education were key solutions.

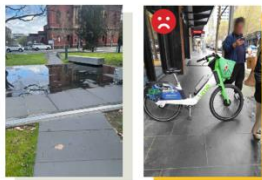


SOLUTIONS / NEXT STEPS

- Increase on-street enforcement and camera coverage
- Extend pedestrian light durations
- Educate on pedestrian right-of-way and tram safety

SAFETY / FALLS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Participants valued tactile paving and audible crossing signals that helped them feel safer and more confident when navigating intersections. Older residents expressed anxiety navigating intersections and cluttered footpaths. Accessibility concerns spanned lighting, design, and lack of maintenance. Safety and comfort were tied to inclusivity. Safety for older adults with the crime rates rising.



SOLUTIONS / NEXT STEPS

- Lengthen crossing times and adopt automatic walk lights
- Upgrade lighting on shared paths

KEY BARRIERS

- Short pedestrian paths
- Dim lighting on paths
- Slippery pavement
- Street clutter (signage)

"This bicycle too much space on the footpath making people and walk around"



- Redesign tactile in risk
- Remove obstructive furniture
- Co-develop safety and health groups

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Several residents recognised that council responded to maintenance reports and appreciated the use of community boards and local information points to share updates. However, they feel this is not sufficient and information does not get to older adults in the way it should. Participants proposed local pop-up information hubs and trained "community connectors." Better two-way communication and accessibility of civic information were recurring needs.

KEY BARRIERS

- Residents unaware of Council updates
- Hard-to-navigate digital platforms
- Minimal feedback loops and dialogue
- Exclusion of non-digital or older residents



"The new library near the market is an excellent resource and a beautiful space to be in, and is a wonderful thing for old and young, a great resource to use"



SOLUTIONS / NEXT STEPS

- Create pop-up Council info hubs in libraries and malls
- Have staff or volunteers available to help residents in person ("civic connectors")
- Involve local students in awareness activities
- Use newsletters, community radio, and translated materials
- Promote shared path etiquette and community pride campaigns

Empowering Senior Voices:

- StoryMap highlights some these issues:



Scan to open on your phone



Further Information:



auo.org.au



**Empowering
Senior Voices**

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