

**The major drivers of health in urban settings are beyond the health sector.**

The social determinants of health that greatly influence the choices that people make towards their better health in turn strongly influence their health status.

These determinants include physical infrastructure, access to social and health services, local governance, and the distribution of income and educational opportunities. That is why local councils need to work across sectors and in partnership with Government entities, Non-governmental Organisations, the industry and all other sectors present in their localities. It is only through coming together of all the relevant stakeholders that may bring about change for healthier lives of the locality.

**It is therefore advocated that:**

- All decision makers give priority to health within their own sectors by considering health in all policies they may be working on.
- All local councils hold health high on their agenda for their locality by actively encouraging and organising health promoting activities
- Individuals promote their own health by making healthy decisions and adopting healthy behaviour throughout their lives, and are champions of health to others within their community.

Good health can only be attained if all stakeholders work together towards building healthy local communities.



Ministry for Health, the Elderly & Community Care

# Healthier Localities



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## Healthier localities – making our towns and villages healthier places to live

According to the World Health Organization, the rapid increase of people living in cities will be among the most important global health issues of the 21st century. Locally, the profile of towns and villages are changing too.

Malta, while having no big cities, is the most densely populated of the European Union Member States, with 1274 people per square kilometre. This phenomena presents health issues that need to be addressed if the population of Malta is to live healthy, fulfilling lives.

The World Health Organization is giving priority to health in localities where people live, work and play by **raising awareness** about the health challenges associated with urbanisation, **promoting action** around the health risks with the greatest impact from urbanisation, and **mobilising local governments** in sharing in the responsibility and action for health in local settings and thus create a better quality of life for citizens within their community.

## Addressing the local challenges

Locally, there is already a strong sense of a caring and supportive environment within communities. Both local councils and individuals are being called to build on this and empower citizens towards better health by:

- making sure that localities are all inclusive, supportive, sensitive and responsive to the diverse needs and expectations of its citizens
- investing in early childhood development, addressing the health needs of older people that emphasize participation, empowerment, independent living, supportive and secure physical and social environments and accessible services and support
- providing an effective infrastructure for community participation and empowerment, and promoting social networking opportunities and appropriate decisions to maintain and promote their health.

Localities are encouraged to provide conditions and opportunities that support healthy lifestyles. There is therefore the need to strengthen the capacity of primary health services as the first point of contact to prevent, control and manage cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease and alcohol-related disease.

### There is the need to:

- address the need to enforce widespread smoke-free policies in public and working spaces
- developing intersectoral plans of action to prevent alcohol and drug abuse
- making active living, physical activity and pedestrian mobility a core part of locality development policies and plans.
- increasing equitable access to healthy food and broadening the understanding of healthy eating habits
- promoting accessibility, by facilitating the ability for everyone, including very young people and people with limited mobility, to reach their required destination without having to use a car
- creating safe public spaces, cycling lanes and recreation/sports facilities
- encouraging the availability of fresh wholesome food as opposed to energy-dense food in all localities.
- ensuring safety measures that would limit injuries in localities, including road crashes and home accidents.
- Larger numbers of people are exposed to second hand smoking in crowded urban leisure facilities and places of everyday life including, restaurants, bars and shopping malls especially when enforcement of non-smoking regulations are not observed.

## What can be done?

Action needs to be taken to counteract urbanisation at all levels.

Local Councils are being advocated to share in making their localities healthier by creating opportunities for people to be healthier. The following are a few examples that the localities can take up in the short term to make this a reality:

### Physical Activity

- Local councils may take the lead in organising a 5 or 10km run or walk led by a named person on a regular basis with an identified route;
- Identify walking routes within the locality that are easily accessible to a wide range of age groups;
- Plan a biking trip or walk to a cultural landmark or nature area in the town or village;
- Promote fun athletics in open areas around the locality – line dance, salsa, karate, taekwondo; etc
- Hold a special football match or championship series commemorating special days, including locality days.

### Healthy Days

- Set up "Move for health zones" – a health fair in the streets with BMI screening stations, displays of health products, and samples of a variety of health drinks and foods made from local produce;
- Organise a **Health Fair** in an open space within the locality;
- Set up a health booth that provides Body Mass Index (BMI) and/or blood pressure tests;
- Hold a farmers market to sell fresh fruits and vegetables
- Hold food preparation and demonstrations by local chefs to promote healthy food;
- Provide a trader's fair of sporting goods, equipment and athletic wear, and encourage people to pick up a new sport or join a team.

### Cultural Events

- Hold classical concerts and other cultural events for all to enjoy thus promoting social health within the community.