

Policy Extract

[Promoting Healthy Cities: Why planning is critical to a healthy urban future](#)

This paper describes the scale and pace of urbanisation around the world, the health and wellbeing issues experienced by urban populations, and the environmental factors that shape these issues.

To plan healthier cities for all, we need to recognise that cities have environmental characteristics – both physical and social factors – that can promote or harm health. Conditions such as obesity, chronic heart disease, stress and mental health are intricately linked to the environments in which people live and work.

While there are no simple solutions for the complex health problems facing cities, some countries such as Scotland have recognised the scope and scale of the urban health challenge and have invested in the need to create positive physical environments which actively nurture better health and wellbeing. More countries need to do the same, and there are some important steps that nations, regions, cities and towns can take.

- **Develop more integrated strategies for healthy placemaking**
Cities need to adopt a more integrated approach to urban health. Cross-sectoral action is required to improve health, as well as location policies supporting health. In addition, health providers need to work much more closely with urban planners and other infrastructure providers, in particular to address location of healthcare services and how to improve access to them
- **Gather greater intelligence**
Urban planners and policy- and decision-makers need a clearer picture of the social and economic determinants of health in their area to guide decisions and investments. Currently there are limitations and gaps in the evidence that prevent health issues from being effectively and efficiently incorporated into planning decisions, and vice versa. In the developing world, for informal settlements, where development has happened outside planning and building regulations, there is often a lack of basic data about populations.
- **Reform and strengthen institutions**
Ultimately it is not urbanisation that necessarily produces ill health but the failure to develop systems of governance that promote healthy urban environments. Governance and the greater integration of health and other policies are crucial as cities become an important scale at which to tackle health issues, and city governments often need to have the powers necessary to tackle them. This requires strategies at city level through which actions for better urban health can be achieved.
- **Involve professions and communities**
'Health' needs to be better understood and included in policy decisions outside of healthcare and public health, including by planners. Equally, urban planning needs to be much better understood by health professionals. Further, many communities' lack of power and control over their environments can also contribute to poor health. To promote healthy cities it is crucial to involve communities in urban planning in the broadest sense.