

Walking to school

Walking is a fantastic way to get around Canberra, be it for health, recreation or getting to school. Australian governments recommend that young people should have a minimum of sixty minutes of moderate physical activity each day, to keep healthy and help prevent serious illness in later life.

Walking to school gives children opportunities to practice independent decision making. This teaches responsibility and empowers them to make good decisions in future. Walking also helps children to develop their spatial awareness and road sense, making them 'street smart' and better able to negotiate traffic.

Experts agree that by reducing the number of cars around school gates we can help reduce the risk of injury to child pedestrians. By parking the car a few blocks away and walking part of the way to school with their children, parents or carers can greatly help school areas to become less congested with traffic and therefore safer for young children.

Apart from the health and safety benefits of walking by not using cars to get to school children and parents can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our cars and the way we use them are responsible for nearly a fifth of all household greenhouse gas emissions. This represents a whopping 16% of Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions. And despite our green efforts in other aspects of living, car usage is increasing. Some would argue, not out of necessity.

Despite common excuses like "I have to drive because public transport is unreliable", half of car journeys are less than 3 kilometres. The best transport for that length of journey is not a car or a bus, for most people, a three kilometre round trip is a very walkable distance. Walking just half a kilometre to school each day instead of driving saves about 500kg of greenhouse pollution each year. It is a way parents, teachers, carers and students can help ease global warming and climate change, as they reduce car-dependency.

The ACT Government Ride or Walk to School initiative aims to increase walking, cycling and use of public transport among school students in the ACT. Launched in September 2012, eleven schools are participating in the first round of the three year program. Participating schools receive bikes, helmets, maintenance support, personal safety sessions, road safety education, BMX skills development workshops and a range of other activities as part of the initiative. If you would like to

participate in future years, please contact Kym Wojcik on 02 6205 0702.

To find out more download the plan brochure from www.health.act.gov.au (search for "Ride or Walk to School").

CANwalk is an organisation set up to help Canberrans to find a walking activity or event that suits their needs. To find out what's happening in the Canberra walking community, check out the CANwalk website: www.canwalk.org.au

