



Global Observatory of  
**Healthy and  
Sustainable Cities**

# **Canberra Australia 2024**

**Policy and spatial indicators for healthy and sustainable cities**  
1000 Cities Challenge report



Full details of the data and methods are available at:

Global Observatory of Healthy & Sustainable Cities  
<https://www.healthysustainablecities.org>

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Global Healthy & Sustainable City Indicators Collaboration

City team members: Vincent Learnihan, Gweneth Leigh & Laura Farag

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#### Population data:

Schiavina, Marcello; Freire, Sergio; MacManus, Kytt (2022): GHS-POP R2022A - GHS population grid multitemporal (1975-2030). European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC)  
[Dataset] doi: 10.2905/D6D86A90-4351-4508-99C1-CB074B022C4A

#### Urban boundaries:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/access-and-downloads/digital-boundary-files>

#### Urban features:

OpenStreetMap Contributors. geofabrik.de (2024).  
<https://download.geofabrik.de/australia-oceania/australia.html>

#### Colour scale:

Cramer, F. (2018). Scientific colour-maps (3.0.4). Zenodo.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1287763>

Report design and editing: Carl Higgs, Eugen Resendiz, Melanie Lowe and Deborah Salvo

#### Recommended citation:

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## **Policy and spatial indicators for healthy and sustainable cities**

### **1000 Cities Challenge report**

This report outlines how Canberra performs on a selection of spatial and policy indicators of healthy and sustainable cities. As part of the 1000 Cities Challenge, we examined the spatial distribution of urban design and transport features and the presence and quality of city planning policies that promote health and sustainability.

The findings could inform changes needed to local city policies. The maps show the distribution of urban design and transport features across Canberra and identify areas that could benefit the most from interventions to create healthy and sustainable environments.

### **Canberra context**

Canberra is the national capital of Australia. With a population of approximately 466,566 (June 2023), it is Australia's largest inland city, located approximately 150 kilometres from the east coast and covering an area of 814.2 square kilometres. Canberra is a planned city and its layout is influenced by the garden city movement.

### **Levels of government**

Metropolitan and district planning are the responsibility of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government and areas of national significance are under the responsibility of the National Capital Authority. Both levels of government policy are considered in this report.

### **Demographics and health equity**

Canberra has been one of the fastest-growing Australian cities in the nation, with a 23.3% increase in population between 2011 to 2021. A high share of Canberra residents are university-educated (52.8%); the median age is 35 years with 12.7% aged 65 years and over.

### **Environmental disaster context**

Environmental hazards that may impact the urban area over the coming decade include: severe storms, bushfires/wildfires, heatwaves.

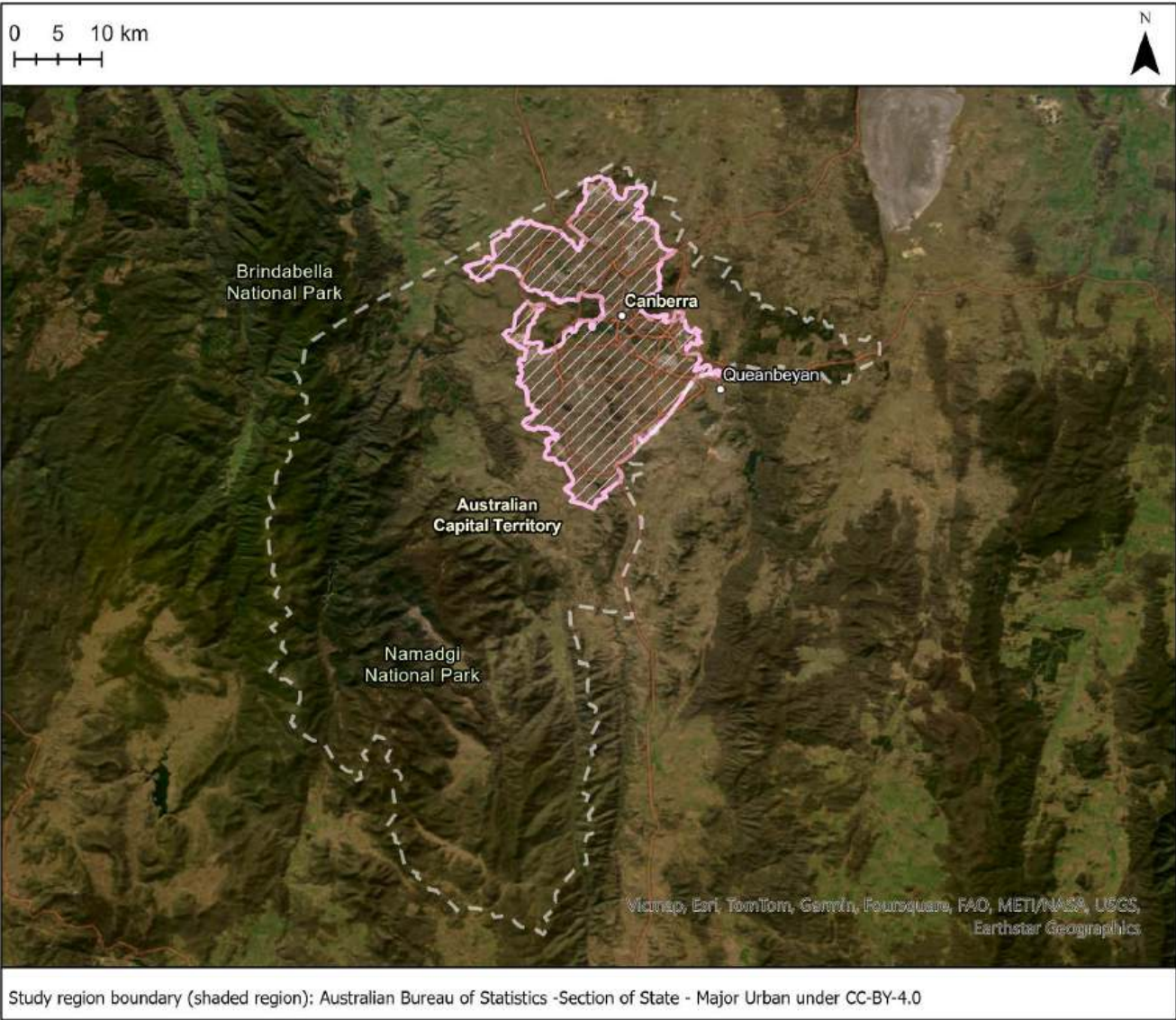
*iStock - credit - Daniilc , 2022*





# Study region

The study region used to calculate spatial indicators for the population of Canberra presented in this report has been highlighted in the map below using parallel line shading.



## Map legend



Study region boundary  
Australian Bureau of Statistics Remoteness Structure.  
Canberra: July 2021-June 2026.

## Policy indicators for healthy and sustainable cities

Public policies are essential for supporting the design and creation of healthy and sustainable cities and neighbourhoods. The 1000 Cities Challenge Policy Checklist was used to assess the presence and quality of policies aligned with evidence and principles for healthy and sustainable cities.

### Policy presence score

*Presence of urban and transport policies supporting health and sustainability*

**30/32 (93.8%)**

### Policy quality score

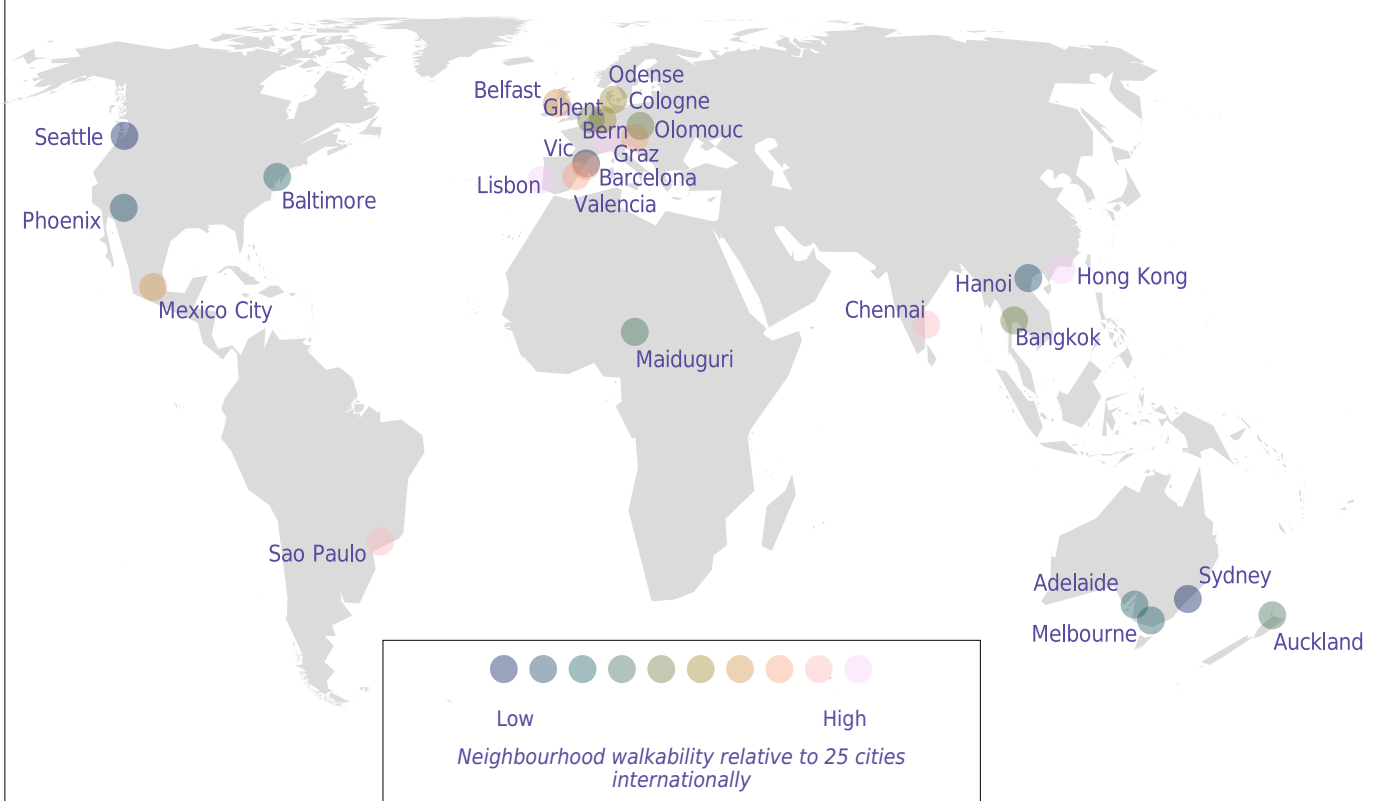
*Policy quality score for measurable policies aligned with evidence on healthy cities*

**26/62 (42.7%)**

### Box 1: The Lancet Global Health Series study of 25 cities internationally

The 1000 Cities Challenge extends methods for assessing the health and sustainability of cities outlined in the 2022 Lancet Global Health Series on urban design, transport, and health. Policy and spatial indicators were calculated, analysed and reported in multiple languages for 25 diverse cities across 19 countries and 6 continents. These cities provide a useful reference for comparisons, but are not a representative sample of all cities internationally.

For more details, please see the 2022 The Lancet Global Health Series on Urban design, transport, and health (<https://www.thelancet.com/series/urban-design-2022>).



Integrated city planning policies for health and sustainability

Many sectors are involved in creating healthy and sustainable cities, including land use, transport, housing, parks, economic development, and infrastructure. Integrated planning is required to ensure policy alignment across sectors. Health considerations need to be embedded in transport and urban policies, and investment in active and public transport should be prioritised.

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Transport policy with health-focused actions	✓	✓	✗
Urban policy with health-focused actions	✓	✓	✓
Health Impact Assessment requirements in urban/transport policy	-	-	-
Urban/transport policy explicitly aims for integrated city planning	✓	✓	✗
Publicly available information on government expenditure for different transport modes	✓	✓	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -

Walkability and destination access

Walkable neighbourhoods provide opportunities for active, healthy, and sustainable lifestyles through having sufficient but not excessive population density to support adequate provision of local amenities, including public transport services. They also have mixed land uses and well-connected streets, to ensure proximate and convenient access to destinations. High-quality pedestrian infrastructure and reducing traffic through managing demand for car use can also encourage walking for transport.

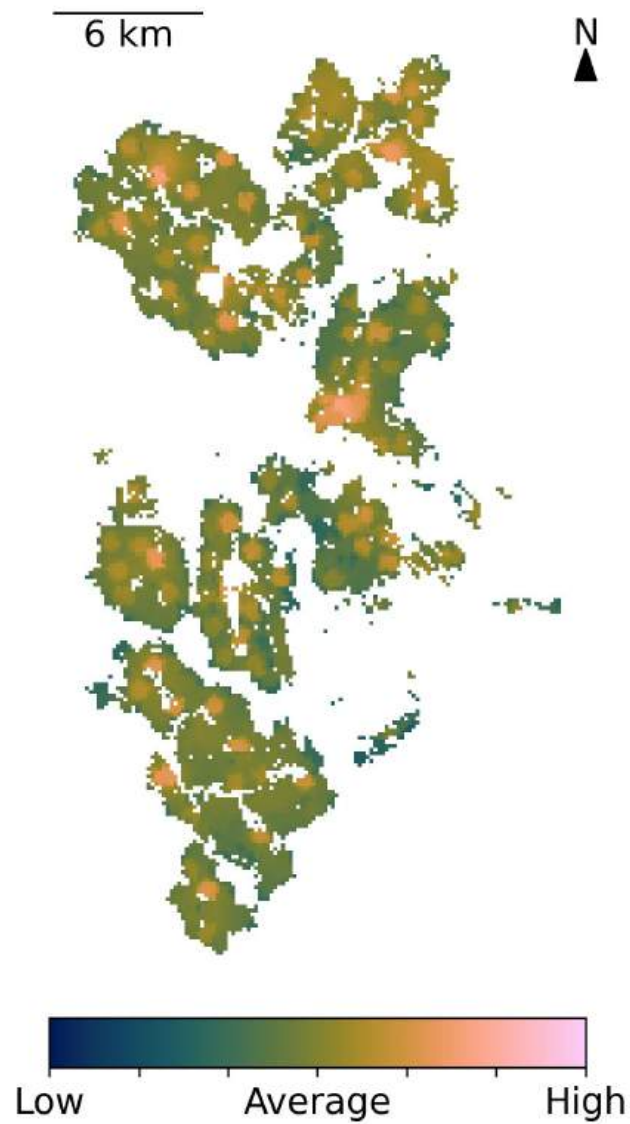
## Walkability and destination access policies

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Street connectivity requirements	✓	✓	✗
Parking restrictions to discourage car use	✓	✓/✗	✓
Traffic safety requirements	✓	✓	✗
Pedestrian infrastructure provision	✓	✓	✗
Cycling infrastructure provision	✓	✓	✗
Walking participation targets	✓	✓	✓
Cycling participation targets	✓	✓	✓
Housing density requirements	✓	✓/✗	✓
Residential building height restrictions	✓	✓/✗	✓
Limits on greenfield housing development	✓	✓	✓
Mixture of housing types/sizes	✓	✓	✓
Mixture of local destinations for daily living	✓	✓	✗
Close distance to daily living destinations	✓	✓	✓
Employment distribution requirements	✓	✓/✗	✗
Ratio of jobs to housing	✓	✗	✗
Healthy food environments	✓	✓	✓
Crime prevention through environmental design	✓	✓	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -

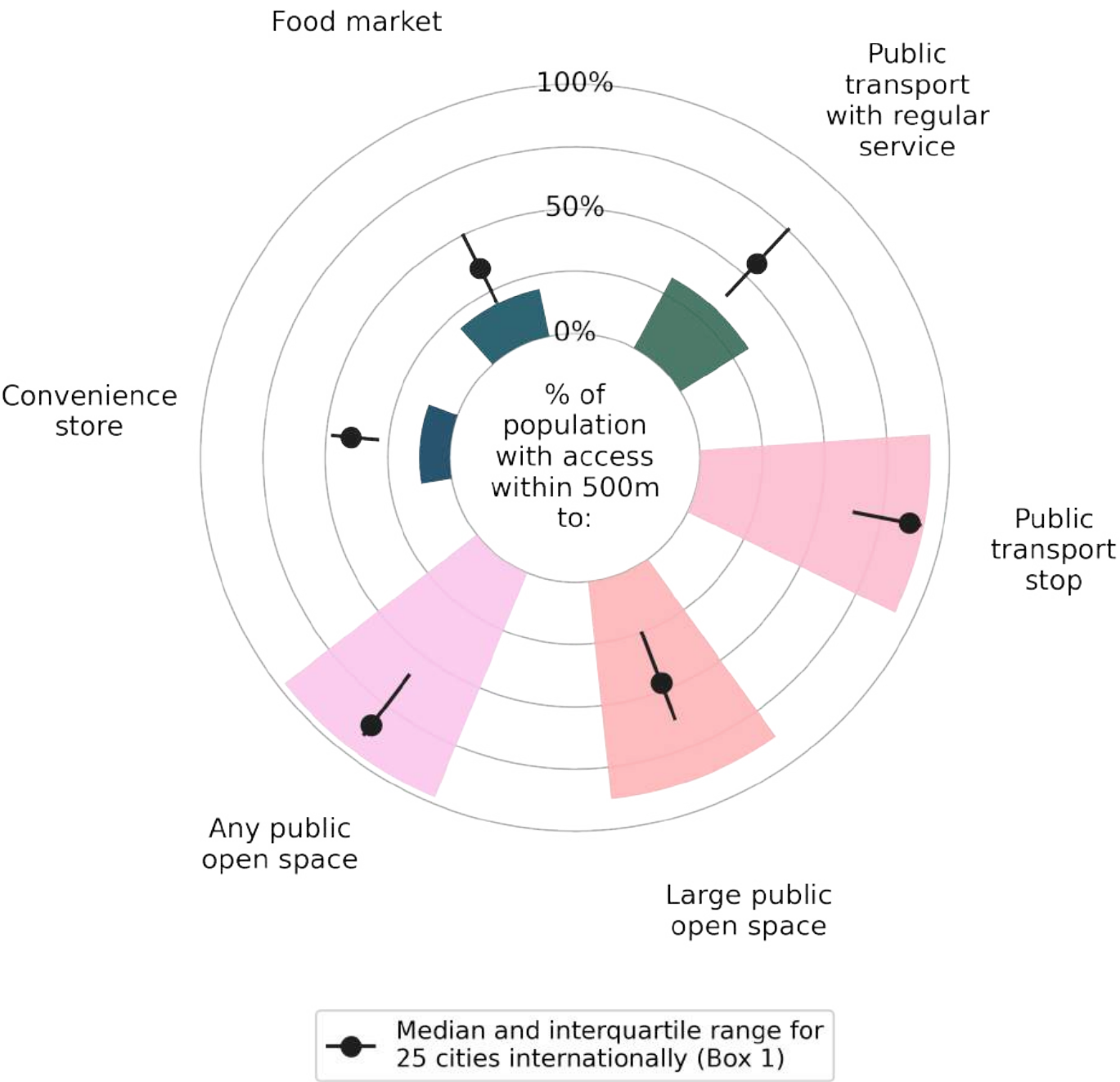


## Neighbourhood walkability relative to 25 cities internationally



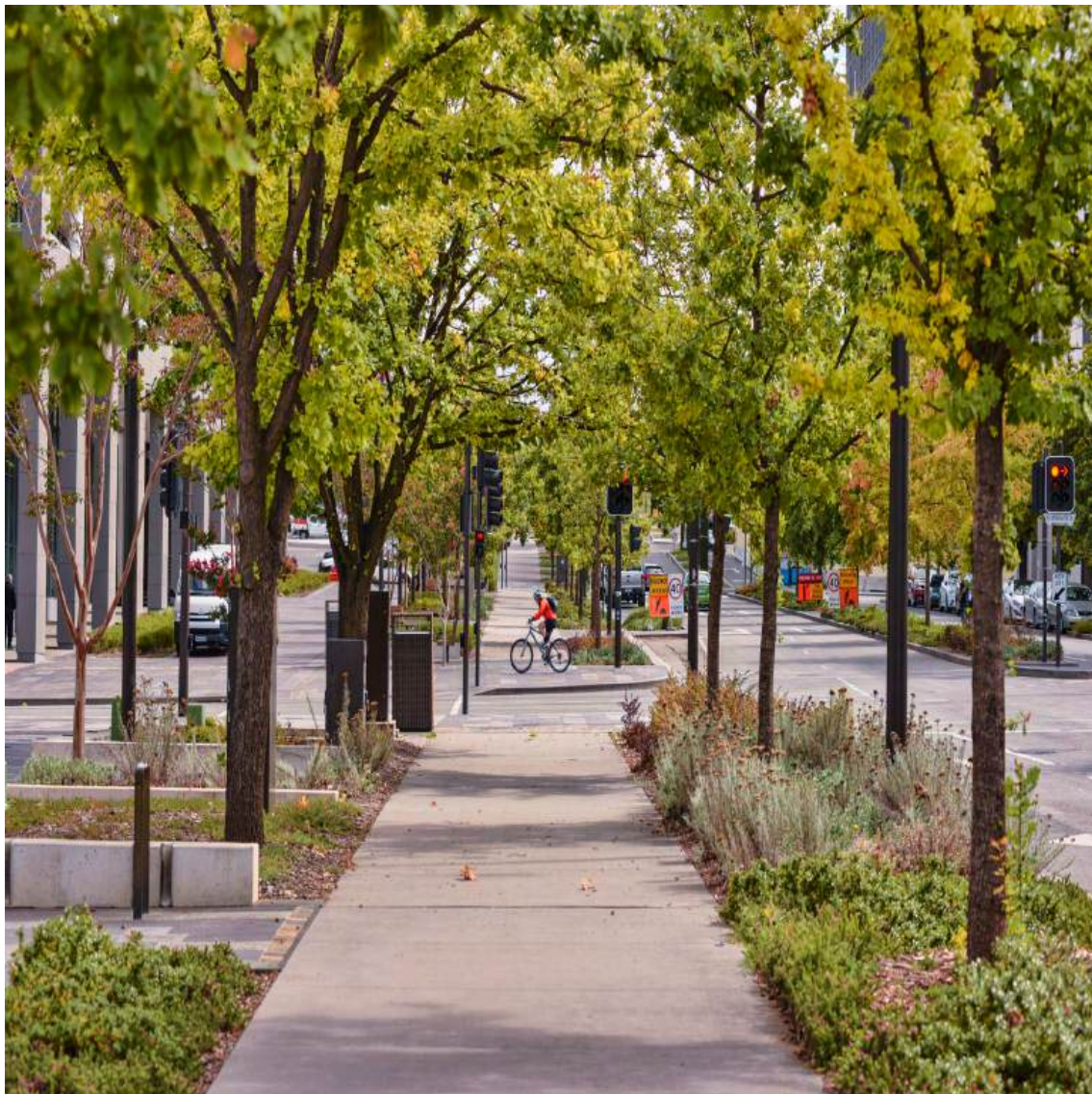
35.2% of the population in Canberra live in neighbourhoods with walkability scoring below the median of 25 cities internationally (Box 1)

Percentage of population with access to amenities within 500 metres (m)



## Urban design thresholds to promote walking

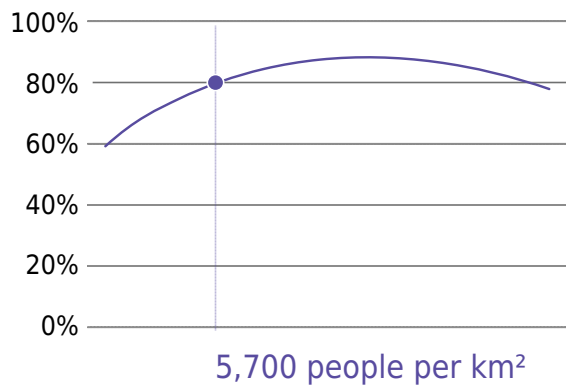
The 2022 Lancet Global Health Series found that to achieve at least 80% probability of engaging in any walking for transport, an average urban neighbourhood would need a population density of at least 5700 people km<sup>2</sup> and street connectivity of at least 100 intersections per km<sup>2</sup>, approximately and depending on context. Preliminary evidence showed that street intersection density above 250 per km<sup>2</sup> and ultra-dense neighbourhoods (> 15,000 persons per km<sup>2</sup>) may have decreasing benefits for physical activity. This is an important topic for future research.



iStock - credit - Daniilc , 2020

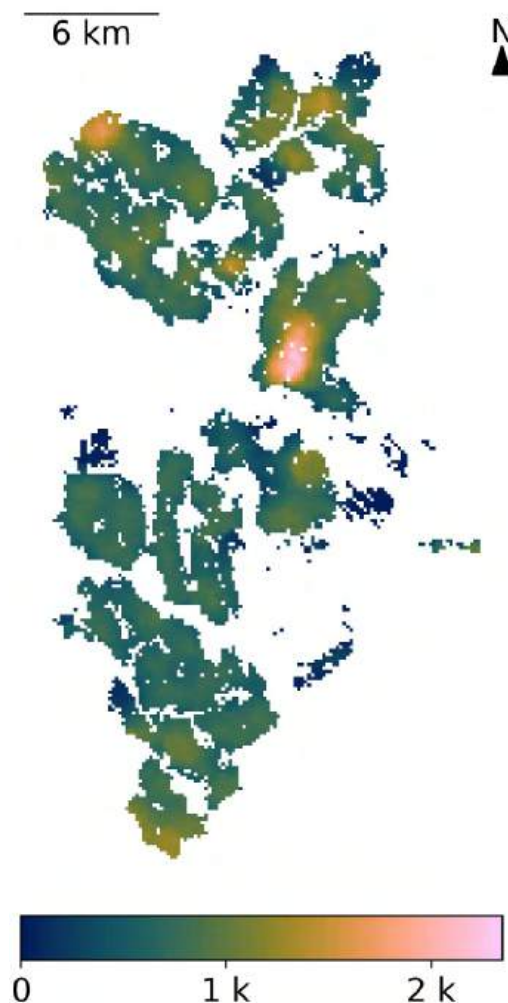
## Neighbourhood population density (per km<sup>2</sup>)

### Probability of engaging in any walking for transport



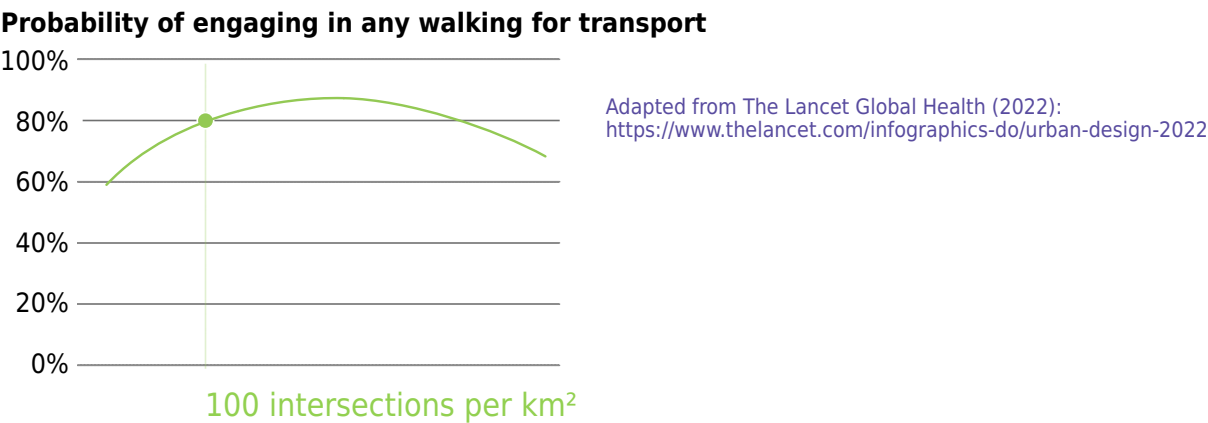
Adapted from The Lancet Global Health (2022):  
<https://www.thelancet.com/infographics-do/urban-design-2022>

0.0% of the population in Canberra live in neighbourhoods meeting the population density threshold for 80% probability of engaging in any walking for transport (5,700 people per km<sup>2</sup>)

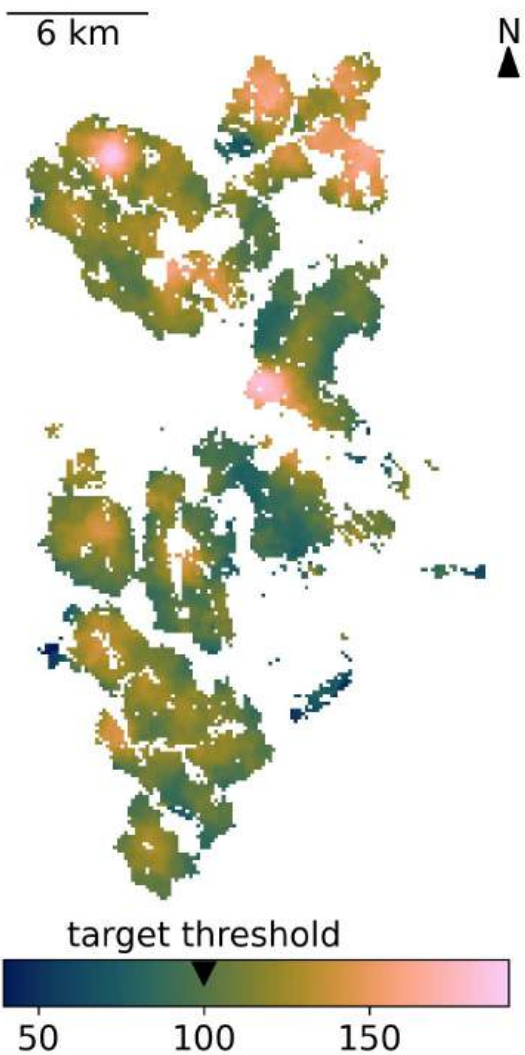




Neighbourhood intersection density (per km<sup>2</sup>)



79.8% of the population in Canberra live in neighbourhoods meeting the street intersection density threshold for 80% probability of engaging in any walking for transport (100 intersections per km<sup>2</sup>)

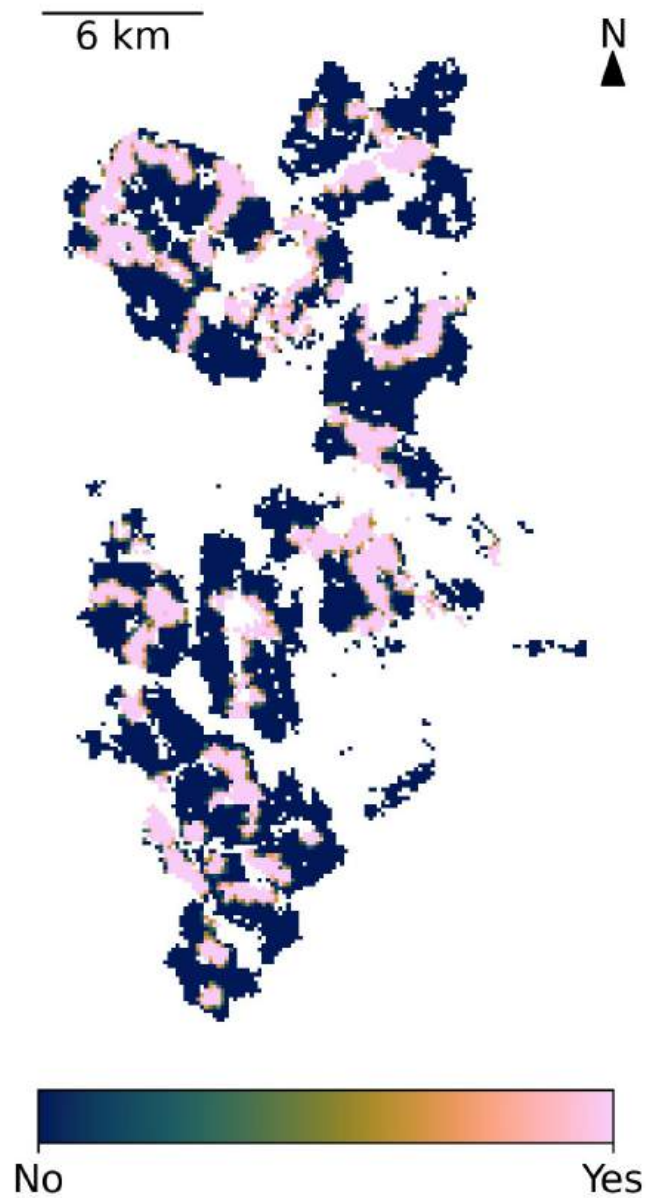


# Public transport access

Easy access to frequent public transport is a key determinant of healthy and sustainable transport systems. Public transport near housing and employment increases the mode share of public transport trips, thus encouraging transport-related walking; offering access to regional jobs and services; improving health, economic development, and social inclusiveness; and reducing pollution and carbon emissions. The frequency of services also encourages public transport use, in addition to the proximity of stations or stops.

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Requirements for public transport access to employment and services	✓	✓	✓
Minimum requirements for public transport access	✓	✓	✓
Targets for public transport use	✓	✓	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -



32.3% of the population in Canberra live within 500m of public transport with 20 mins or better average weekday frequency

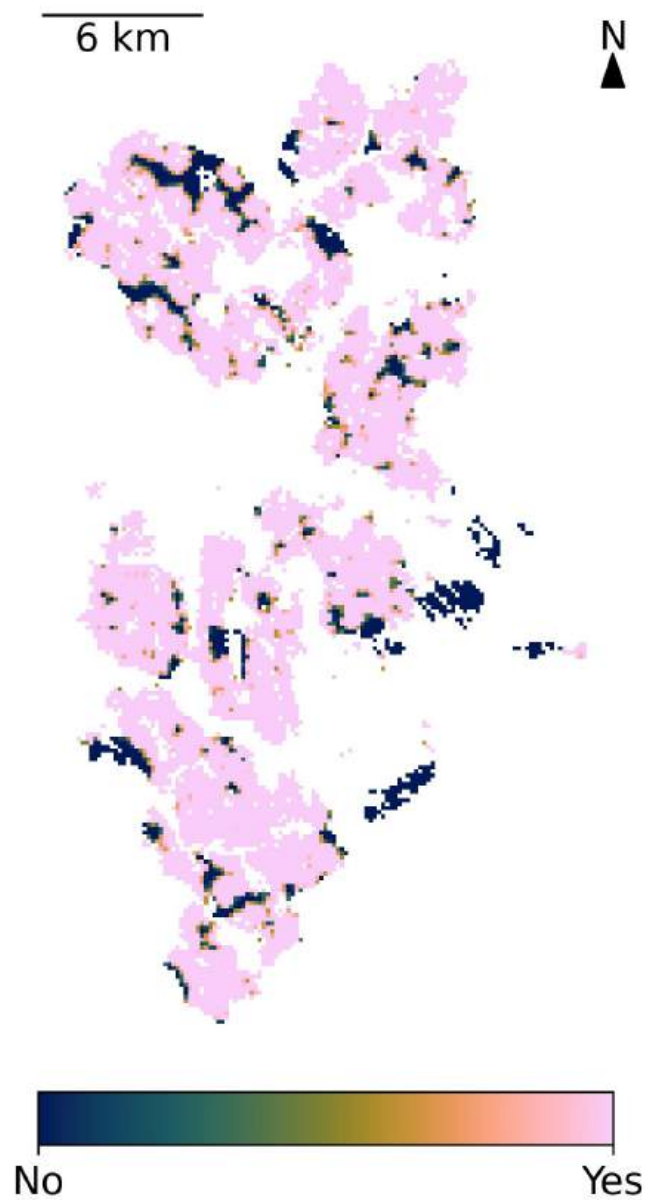
# Public open space access

Local access to high-quality public open space promotes recreational physical activity and mental health. Nearby public open space creates convivial, attractive environments, helps cool the city and protects biodiversity. As cities densify and private open space declines, providing more public open space is critical for population health. Having public open space within 400 m of homes can encourage walking. Access to larger parks may also be important.

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Minimum requirements for public open space access	✓	✓	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -





87.9% of the population in Canberra live within 500m of public open space of at least 1.5 hectares in size

## Urban air quality, and nature-based solutions

Land use and transport policies play a key role in limiting air pollution, with multiple benefits for health and sustainability. Nature-based solutions, including urban greening and urban biodiversity protection, have mental health benefits by increasing contact with nature. Green spaces and vegetation cover can cool cities and help build resilience to extreme heat.

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Transport policies to limit air pollution	✓	✓	✓
Land use policies to reduce air pollution exposure	✓	✓/✗	✓
Tree canopy and urban greening requirements	✓	✓/✗	✓
Urban biodiversity protection & promotion	✓	✓/✗	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -

# Climate disaster risk reduction

In the face of climate change, built environments need to be designed to reduce the health impacts of increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather events, such as heat waves, flooding, bushfires/wildfires and extreme storms.

	Policy identified	Aligns with healthy cities evidence	Measurable target
Adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies	✓	✓/✗	✓

Key: Yes ✓ No ✗ Mixed ✓/✗ Not applicable -



iStock - credit- DaniilcEddisonphotos, 2016

## Summary

The availability of urban and transport policies supporting health and sustainability in Canberra is above average compared with other cities studied in the 2022 Lancet Global Health Series. However, the quality of these policies is below average. Missing are measurable targets to document the impact of transport policy with health-focused actions and urban/transport policies that aim for integrated city planning. In terms of thresholds to achieve WHO targets to increase physical activity, Canberra neighbourhoods do not meet population density thresholds. Lacking are measurable targets that benchmark the provision of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and employment distribution requirements. Access to public transport with regular services within 500 metres is well below average relative to other cities; however, targets for public transport do align with healthy cities' evidence. Canberra performs well in access to public open space, with 87.9% of the population living within 500 metres of open space of at least 1.5 hectares in size. Street intersection density does support physical activity, with 79.8% of Canberra residents living in neighbourhoods that meet street connectivity thresholds. The proportion of the population in Canberra with access within 500 metres to food markets and convenience stores is well below average relative to other cities in the 2022 Lancet Global Health Series.

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## Citation

Learnihan V., Leigh G., & Farag L., 2024. 1000 Cities Challenge report: Canberra, Australia —Policy and spatial indicators for healthy and sustainable cities (English). Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities.



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