

COMMUNITY AMENITIES

What are Community Amenities?

Compact, diverse, mixed-use neighbourhoods allow residents to “live” within their local area. They include employment, recreation, education, retail, fresh and healthy food outlets all interwoven with cycling, walking and public transport access.

When community amenities are steps away from residents, it encourages them to engage in physical activity, community interaction and social connection. Some cities have pursued the goal of the 15-minute city,¹ which aims for each resident to access everything they need within 15 minutes from their house. These compact communities help meet people’s main daily to weekly household shopping and community needs.

How do they affect health?

Having employment, educational, retail, grocery stores and cultural options nearby make neighbourhoods walkable and promote physical activity and active transportation among residents of all ages by reducing the need to drive.

Over recent decades, as more of us moved from smaller communities to big cities, the need to accommodate more people has resulted in urban sprawl and the development of suburbs. For those who live in suburbs but work downtown, long bus or car rides are often the only option.² Commuting to work has a long-standing association with personal stress and health.³

The longer you spend commuting exposes you to greater risk of negative physical and mental health outcomes. Longer commute times are associated with fatigue, poor sleep, heart disease,⁴ high blood pressure, obesity, and more time away from work due to illness⁵.

In addition to the distance and time spent commuting, the mode of transportation has health implications too. Commuting by car has also been linked to poor sleep quality, lower levels of self-reported health and higher obesity rates. Drivers also experience more stress⁶, which is exacerbated by congestions and longer commute times⁷. The unpredictability of commute time, and the behaviour of other drivers on the road also pushes up workers’ stress levels⁸. Commuters who walk⁹, cycle¹⁰ or use public transport¹¹ have been found to have higher levels of physical activity compared to drivers.

A mix of amenities in your neighbourhood helps promote social life by attracting people of all ages and creating opportunities for casual and chance interactions with other community members, as well as providing places and spaces for them to gather, meet friends and family, and take part in social activities. The social benefits can be especially important for older adults because those who live in less walkable areas with fewer amenities are more prone to stay at home¹², increasing the risk of social isolation.

Walkable neighbourhoods that have a variety of amenities nearby also increases neighbourhood satisfaction¹³, sense of belonging, well-being, life satisfaction, and promotes better mental health by facilitating social interaction.

Shifting to neighbourhoods that enable daily or weekly community needs, such as running errands and meeting friends and family, to be completed within walking or cycling distance, gets more cars off the road and reduces emissions, and can improve air quality in cities¹⁴.

All of these shifts – increased physical activity, richer social connections and cleaner air – mean a reduced chronic disease burden, including from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and respiratory disease.

Who is affected?

A significant proportion of Canadians do not live in neighbourhoods that have features that make active transportation a convenient option. In 2011¹⁵, 62% of Canadians said there were stores within walking distance of their home; 72% had a transit stop within a 15-minute walk of their home; 70% said they lived in an attractive neighbourhood. That leaves a significant number of Canadians without neighbourhood features that enable and encourage active transportation, leaving them to rely on cars to get around.

Urban neighbourhoods can be disadvantaged if public transit does not provide sufficient access to destinations, like employment opportunities. Poor transit accessibility, combined with other forms of social and economic disadvantage, can result in transport poverty. Within Canada’s eight largest cities, 40% of all low-income residents are at risk of transport poverty, which is 5% of the overall population, and nearly one million people in total¹⁶.

COMMUNITY AMENITIES (CONT'D)

Further, it is the most vulnerable members of society who have the most to gain¹⁷ from neighbourhoods that support active transportation. People who are not drivers, such as people with lower incomes, people with disabilities, and some older adults can more easily access employment, education, health care, and community facilities through active transportation networks, which increase their mobility. These groups are also most likely to benefit the most from access to outdoor recreation opportunities yet tend not to live close to parks. Living within walking distance from a park makes people more likely to use it¹⁸ and gain the health benefits of physical activity, access to nature, outdoor recreation, and a space that creates opportunities for social connection.

By contrast, vulnerable populations often face more negative impacts of not being able to engage in active transportation. For example, recent immigrants who have a low income and live in low-walkability neighbourhoods experience three times higher diabetes incidence¹⁹ compared to individuals living in high-income, high walkability areas. Unfortunately, in Canada's largest cities, such as Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, residents with lower socioeconomic status tend to live in the least walkable neighbourhoods²⁰.

References

- Duany, A. and Steuteville, R. Defining the 15-minute city. February 8, 2021. <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2021/02/08/defining-15-minute-city>
- Ewing, R., Meakins, G., Hamidi, S., Nelson, A.C. Relationship between urban sprawl and physical activity, obesity, and morbidity – Update and refinement, *Health & Place*, Volume 26, 2014, Pages 118-126, ISSN 1353-8292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2013.12.008>.
- Chatterjee, K., Chng, S., Clark, B., Davis, A., De Vos, J., Ettema, D., Handy, S., Martin, A. & Reardon, L. (2020) Commuting and wellbeing: a critical overview of the literature with implications for policy and future research, *Transport Reviews*, 40:1, 5-34, DOI: 10.1080/01441647.2019.1649317
- Chatterjee, K., Chng, S., Clark, B., Davis, A., De Vos, J., Ettema, D., Handy, S., Martin, A. & Reardon, L. (2020) Commuting and wellbeing: a critical overview of the literature with implications for policy and future research, *Transport Reviews*, 40:1, 5-34, DOI: 10.1080/01441647.2019.1649317
- Hilbrecht, M., Smale, B. & Mock, S.E. (2014) Highway to health? Commute time and well-being among Canadian adults, *World Leisure Journal*, 56:2, 151-163, DOI: 10.1080/16078055.2014.903723
- Wener, R.E., Evans, G.W. Comparing stress of car and train commuters, *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour*, Volume 14, Issue 2, 2011, Pages 111-116, ISSN 1369-8478, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trf.2010.11.008>.
- Statistics Canada, "Commuting to work: Results of the 2010 General Social Survey," 2010, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-008-x/2011002/article/11531-eng.htm>
- Gottholmseder, G., Nowotny, K., Pruckner, G.J. and Theurl, E. (2009), Stress perception and commuting. *Health Econ.*, 18: 559-576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.1389>
- Audrey, S., Procter, S. & Cooper, A.R. The contribution of walking to work to adult physical activity levels: a cross sectional study. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 11, 37 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-11-37>
- Donaire-Gonzalez D, de Nazelle A, Cole-Hunter T, Curto A, Rodriguez DA, Mendez MA, Garcia-Aymerich J, Basagaña X, Ambros A, Jerrett M, Nieuwenhuijsen MJ. The Added Benefit of Bicycle Commuting on the Regular Amount of Physical Activity Performed. *Am J Prev Med*. 2015 Dec;49(6):842-9. DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2015.03.036. Epub 2015 Jul 27. PMID: 26228005.
- MacDonald JM, Stokes RJ, Cohen DA, Kofner A, Ridgeway GK. The effect of light rail transit on body mass index and physical activity. *Am J Prev Med*. 2010 Aug;39(2):105-12. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2010.03.016. PMID: 20621257; PMCID: PMC2919301.
- Kerr J, Rosenberg D, Frank L, The Role of the Built Environment in Healthy Aging: Community Design, Physical Activity, and Health among Older Adults. *Journal of Planning Literature* 27(1) 43-60, DOI: 10.1177/0885412211415283.
- Talen, E. & Koschinsky, J. (2014) Compact, Walkable, Diverse Neighborhoods: Assessing Effects on Residents, *Housing Policy Debate*, 24:4, 717-750, DOI:10.1080/10511482.2014.900102
- Kang JE, Yoon DK, Bae H-J. Evaluating the effect of compact urban form on air quality in Korea. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*. 2019;46(1):179-200. doi:10.1177/2399808317705880
- Public Health Agency of Canada. Fast facts about Canada's neighbourhoods and physical activity, 2011. <https://healthydesign.city/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/fast-facts-faits-rapid-esv2-eng.pdf>
- Allen, J., Farber, S. Sizing up transport poverty: A national scale accounting of low-income households suffering from inaccessibility in Canada, and what to do about it, *Transport Policy*, Volume 74, 2019, Pages 214-223, ISSN 0967-070X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2018.11.018>.
- Active Transportation. BC Healthy Communities. <https://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments/built-environments/page/active-transportation>
- Toronto Public Health. The Walkable City: Neighbourhood Design and Preferences, *Travel Choices and Health*. April 2012
- Booth GL, Creatore MI, Moineddin R, Gozdyra P, Weyman JT, Matheson FI, Glazier RH. Unwalkable neighborhoods, poverty, and the risk of diabetes among recent immigrants to Canada compared with long-term residents. *Diabetes Care*. 2013 Feb;36(2):302-8. doi: 10.2337/dc12-0777. Epub 2012 Sep 17. PMID: 22988302; PMCID: PMC3554289.
- Doiron, D., Setton, E.M., Shairsingh, K., Brauer, M., Hystad, P., Ross, N.A., Brook, J.R. Healthy built environment: Spatial patterns and relationships of multiple exposures and deprivation in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, *Environment International*. Volume 143, 2020, 106003, ISSN 0160-4120, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.106003>.