



Public Health Spatial Planning in Practice

Using public health spatial planning to improve health and wellbeing

OVERVIEW

The built and natural environment, as mediated through the spatial planning system, has an important impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities via a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors. For example, where homes are designed, built and located in relation to transport networks and wider health and care services has an impact on the ability of people to maintain good health.

There is already evidence from public health to guide planners on the elements of neighbourhood and community design that support improved health outcomes and to build in health considerations throughout the planning process (Commission on Creating Healthy Cities, 2022). Health inequalities exist in part because deprived neighbourhoods experience less favourable built environments (Power et al., 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this and enables spatial planning to aid recovery (Green et al. 2022) and to justify the case to invest in a competent professional workforce to deliver it (Chang et al. 2022).

'*Public Health Spatial Planning in Practice*' sets out the reasons for and the benefits which arise from a reimagined system which reunites spatial planning and public health (Chang, 2017). This book makes the case for making health and wellbeing an underpinning organising principle for spatial planning decisions. It requires an understanding of and working competency in the art of applying planning law, public health knowledge and political and social sciences to implement effective actions with a primary aim to improve public health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Cover image credit: Berkeley Homes

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IMPROVING HEALTH AND WELLBEING



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KEY FINDINGS

The spatial planning system provides a range of statutory and non-statutory plans and decision-making powers to make the most effective use of these plans to positively transform people's quality of life. This helps to promote, maintain and improve health and reduce health inequalities between communities.

The book highlights the factors which influence people's health and wellbeing and how these can be applied through the spatial planning system. It also explores how such decision making needs to be mediated through competing professional, business and political interests.

Built and natural environment and public health professionals need to develop a better understanding of what an evidence-based approach to planning for healthy places and spaces means and how it can be applied.

There are specific levers available to UK national and local governments to achieve public health outcomes and comparisons and applications can be made with other countries including Australia and the US. These include a 'Health in All Policies' approach, health impact assessments and other regulatory tools. Having strategies to deliver public health priorities such as supporting improved health and wellbeing, will only be fully realised if the planning and design of the environment are addressed as part of the wider system of legal frameworks and policy directives at the strategic and local levels.

A better-informed professional workforce should be focused on how to generate and apply the best

public health evidence on 'what works' in the context of the spatial planning system. This book points to the evidence and examples to support the breaking down of professional barriers to maximise health improvement and address health inequalities through health-informed planning policy and decisions.

The book identifies a set of trans-disciplinary skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required for the practice of 'planning for health' according to three categories: technical, context and delivery and implementation. They provide public health professionals and planners with the right knowledge and competencies to understand how to improve health through their respective responsibilities by introducing a range of learning and development avenues from tertiary education to continuing professional development.

There are multiple benefits and beneficiaries of healthy planning. For example, increasing social value to improvement in property premiums, from local authorities to local communities and developers and how such practices can enhance public-private partnerships.

The book concludes by framing the basis for future action through the lens of the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. It identifies emerging issues, trends and system changes that could influence the future development and impact of public health spatial planning.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning for health will not happen by default, there is a need to act now. The authors provide a consistent evidence-based narrative which can improve the art and science of public health spatial planning practice. The authors base this on three premises:

- that the built and natural environment matters to health,
- planning matters to health,
- and the professional workforce matters to health.

The authors also argue that meeting health and wellbeing needs to be a fundamental organising principle underpinning all planning policy and decision making, based on evidence which shows the opportunities for better health and wellbeing that can be achieved if health considerations are prioritised.

In addition, the authors argue that the need for spatial planners, public health systems and practitioners to work together is becoming ever more critical to adequately address the public health challenges facing communities and to avoid the unintended negative consequences on health and wellbeing of policies and plans.

Furthermore, adapting environmental impact and other health-related assessments to proportionally and systematically integrate a consideration of wider health can further improve both the process and outcomes in spatial planning policies and decisions made on development projects.

The authors propose an eight-stage process to help create strong policies which command authority and consensus among stakeholders, make planning policies for health effective, meaningful and impactful:

Stage 1: Establish capacity,
Stage 2: Agree vision and purpose,
Stage 3: Engage and involve,
Stage 4: Create baseline evidence,
Stage 5: Establish a healthy planning protocol,
Stage 6: Design a healthy planning framework,
Stage 7: Undertake policy monitoring and evaluation,
Stage 8: Learn, reflect and review.

Considering public health aspects in planning decisions means involving public health professionals in the process and is integral to ensuring that spatial plans, policies and decisions reflect local health and wellbeing needs.

Improving the capacity and capability of built environment and public health practitioners through educational and professional development systems is critical to sustaining a pipeline of competent professional workforce.

Understanding key decision-makers and investors interests, often not just public authorities, can help to leverage the power of the private sector to generate meaningful change in planning for health practices and outcomes. This means combining legislative and policy directives with the voluntary commitment of developers to create sustainable and healthy places and infrastructure provides a powerful partnerships and agents of change.

Spatial planning is both a technical and visioning activity. With the guidance in this book, professionals can be better supported to identify, discuss, discount or act, to realise a vision of healthy and equitable places and communities.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Health and wellbeing are significantly influenced by how professionals plan, design and manage the environment. This book supports those working in the built environment and public health sectors, with the knowledge and insight to maximise health improvement through planning and land use decisions. Supported by examples of policy and approaches, it focuses on implementation and delivery, and sets out what is needed to achieve healthier environments within the parameters of legislative and policy frameworks.

It demonstrates how when we harness the art and science of public health spatial planning, can we begin to effect changes to the policies and decisions that shape population health.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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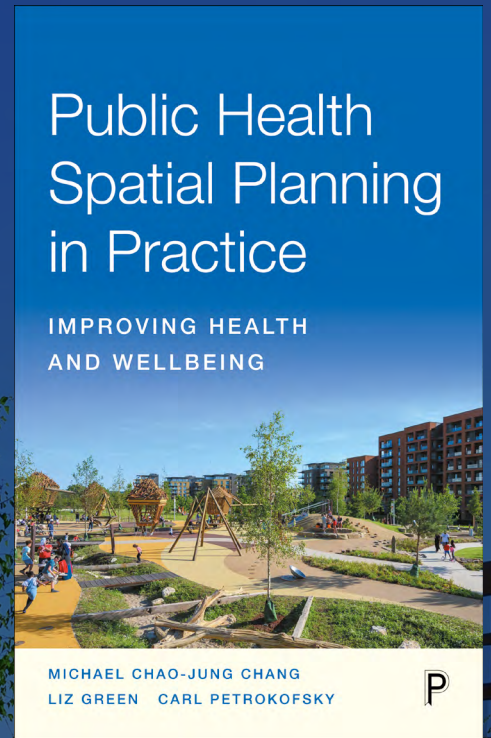
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