

# Revealing the health costs of the urban planning policy environment

## The issue

The design and quality of city development can have a positive impact on the health, wellbeing and opportunities for communities.

Current development and planning policies are not managed in a way to address and promote health issues and inequalities. Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease or asthma account for 89 per cent of deaths in England and ill-health among working-age people is estimated to cost £150 billion a year.

Making healthier urban centres requires action to support and incentivise joined-up and cross-sector working between a diverse range of stakeholders.

## Our response

We're providing new evidence and data to:

- **Demonstrate** the link between features of the urban environment and health and wellbeing outcomes.
- **Think** about preventative measures to tackle non-communicable diseases.
- **Provide** economic valuation models that can show the cost of ill health and who pays across the system.
- **Support** cross-sector working and systems thinking.
- **Incentivise** actors outside the health sector to take action.

This includes a new economic valuation tool, Health Appraisal for Urban Systems (HAUS), that shows the impacts of the urban environment on health and where in the system the costs land.

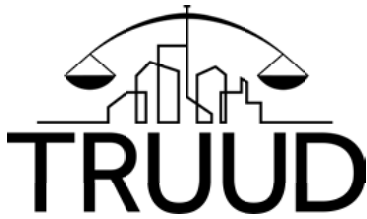


### Local authority partners



### University consortium





## The evidence

We know that poor urban development has a negative impact on population health and wellbeing and that the most disadvantaged in society often live in the worst conditions, widening inequalities.

- New evidence highlights the association between long-term air pollution in the UK with increased risk of depression and anxiety.
- Outdoor air pollution could cause 6-9 million premature deaths a year by 2060.
- Higher exposure to neighbourhood fast-food outlets is associated with increased risk of adult obesity.

We also know that:

- Greater access to green space is associated with lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- Cycling to the workplace is demonstrated to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and death from cancer.

## The policy problem

Our research finds that:

- Health and inequalities are **insufficiently included** in the objectives and outcomes of the UK government's strategic policies for urban development.
- There is a **lack of joined up working** between urban development and health teams in Whitehall. Health outcomes are commonly seen as being the remit of health officials, who have insufficient input on urban development agendas.
- While central government sets the regulatory and policy context and local authorities manage development and change, **urban development is driven by private sector interests and commercial factors**. Powerful decision-makers include developers, landowners and investors.
- Thinking about tackling wider determinants and long-term structural change is not easy, especially at a time of significant pressure on the system. **Prevention is frequently focused on more downstream areas such as on individual behaviours and the provision of health services than changing upstream determinants**.

## Policy Recommendations

Our research indicates that economic valuations that can provide data on the costs of ill health and, crucially, where those costs are incurred across the system are fundamental in persuading and incentivising critical actors to participate in co-created health solutions. Public, private and civil society sectors can be encouraged by the data to identify areas of synergy and partnership to help tackle health inequalities upstream in the development process. We know that this sort of economic valuation information can be influential because the key stakeholders are receptive to it.

### About the economic valuation tool – HAUS

HAUS identifies who gets ill and with what disease, as well as the economic cost of ill health and where these costs are incurred across the system. It provides a bank of clearly defined pathways covering a wide range of factors from air pollution to walkability and over 70 health outcomes.

We produced a short video to explain how it works and the potential applications of HAUS. Watch our short film explaining how it works and could be used by developers, planners and other decision makers. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhcJN2WKAv0&t=76s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhcJN2WKAv0&t=76s)

### About Truud

'Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development' ([TRUUD](#)) is a 5-year, £6.7m research project that aims to design policy interventions to support the development of healthier urban environments. Our research seeks to promote a fundamental shift in thinking about how to prioritise healthy urban development. We are funded by the [UK Prevention Research Partnership](#).

### Contact the authors

[Geoff Bates](#), [Andrew Barnfield](#), [Sarah Ayres](#) specialise in TRUUD on influencing the wider determinants of health in Whitehall. For general enquiries contact [truud-research@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:truud-research@bristol.ac.uk). For more information about HAUS contact [Eleanor Eaton](#), [Alistair Hunt](#), or [Daniel Black](#).