

Shaping the use of health impact evidence in government appraisals and decision-making

The issue

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.

One way to improve and protect public health and reduce this economic burden is through the design and quality of city development. However, current development and planning policies are not managed in a way to address and promote health issues.

Our research has identified a strong receptiveness among officials in the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the wider urban development system for greater inclusion of the health impacts of urban development in their decision-making. It revealed that key factors preventing this currently include the lack of health outcomes within current economic, funding and appraisal tools, and the lack of accessible evidence on the health impacts of development decisions. This restricts how health benefits or costs can be accounted for in funding decisions and development evaluations.

Our response

In our research programme, [Tackling the root causes upstream of unhealthy urban development. \(TRUUD\)](#) we have developed an economic valuation tool to show the impact of the urban environment on a wide range of health conditions, and precisely where in the system the associated societal costs land.

The Health Appraisal of Urban Systems (HAUS) tool provides a unique bank of clearly defined pathways covering a wide and comprehensive range of factors from air pollution to walkability and more than 70 health outcomes.

For example, in a recent application we were able to show that increased green space for one urban area could lead to improvements in activity and mental health, reductions in diabetes, cancer and childhood obesity, and could even reduce premature mortality. Over 25 years these benefits could save this community between £20-35 million through averted health costs.

Our [briefing note](#) and [short film](#) explain how HAUS works and could be used by decision-makers, developers and planners. We are collaborating with policy makers and economists in DLUHC on a program of work to integrate HAUS into DLUHC's economic appraisal guidance.

Integrating the HAUS tool in appraisal guidance

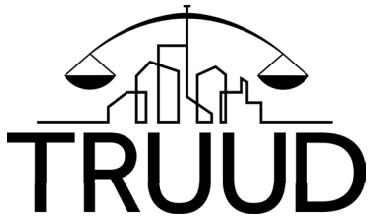
We are collaborating with policy makers and economists in DLUHC on a program of work to integrate HAUS into DLUHC's economic appraisal guidance. If successful, this work will increase capacity in DLUHC and those that use its appraisal guidance to include health outcomes in appraisals and funding decisions. It will also raise the visibility of health impacts in policy making and strategic priority setting.



Local authority partners



University consortium



TRUUD held discussions with a wide range of stakeholders interested in creating healthier urban environments to discuss how we could utilise the HAUS tool. These discussions provided important insights that shaped the decision to focus on DLUHC appraisals, and highlighted how this work could be useful for stakeholders throughout the system. For example, to inform local-level development decisions, to demonstrate health and economic outcomes in funding bids, and for agenda setting.

Next steps

National government processes do not take place in isolation. They affect, and are affected by, the needs and resources of organisations across sectors and levels of government. Therefore, if work to address these issues at national level is to be effective it must be informed by stakeholders throughout the system as part of a joined-up approach.

TRUUD and our partners in DLUHC are committed to continue taking a systems approach. The team will engage with a range of stakeholders in Spring-Summer 2024 to shape how HAUS is utilised in DLUHC appraisals to ensure that this work has the best possible impact across the system.

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](#). To find out more please [visit our website](#).

Contact the authors

This work in TRUUD is led by Prof Sarah Ayres (University of Bristol), Dr Geoff Bates, Dr Eleanor Eaton and Dr Alistair Hunt (University of Bath). We welcome opportunities to discuss this work. To get in touch, please contact the team at truud-policy@bristol.ac.uk.

