

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

2017 NSW RURAL HEALTH AND RESEARCH CONGRESS

27 – 29 SEPTEMBER 2017, WAGGA WAGGA

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Concurrent Stream: II) Healthy Rural Communities

Keywords: Aged Health, Technology

Abstract Title: Better rural city park planning to improve older people's health and well-being

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Background: Population ageing is an important social and policy issue with the provision of social and recreational services of particular concern for local government. Research shows that access to well-planned parks as safe sites for leisure, engagement with nature and community activities will improve older people's health and well-being.

Approach: The Better Parks for People project is a collaboration between Charles Sturt University and Albury City Council. We used focus groups, surveys and park usage observations to evaluate how older people and the general public view and use parks in a rural city (Albury, NSW). We also compiled data on parks, including facilities and accessibility, and travel networks, and used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to model scenarios of how older people use parks currently and in the future.

Outcomes / Results: Preliminary analysis has found that for the older demographic, toilets, even walking surfaces, seating and shade are important facilities and that parks are primarily used by older people for walking, socialising, community events and quiet enjoyment. This information is used in the prototype tool to model park accessibility and usage by older people in Albury. This tool allows gaps to be identified in park accessibility and facilities, taking into account the demographics who live within walking distance of the parks. Analysis and scenario modelling is ongoing, and will identify gaps in provision and highlight parks where changes could have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the local aged community in a rural city.

Take Home Message: This tool has been developed specifically for rural cities, to provide rapid and robust analysis and scenario modelling of open space provision for different demographics. Without such a tool decisions are often made on an ad-hoc basis. The research carried out as part of this project also gives us valuable insights into what older people in rural cities value in parks and how they use them.