

Health and Fitness

Last Revised: 7 November 2008



CAN Policy:

CAN believes that cycling should be actively encouraged by both the health and transport sectors to play a key role in New Zealand's health promotion system as well as being a sustainable means of transport that has environmental advantages.

Background:

Physical activity and physical fitness are essential for good health. They contribute to illness and disease prevention as well as recovery. Higher levels of physical activity and improved fitness will reduce the incidence of many contemporary health problems (e.g. obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardio-vascular diseases).

Historically, people were active in their everyday transport through walking and cycling. Active transport modes have considerable potential to reduce the nation's health budget.

Towards this, CAN will also work with health NGOs, so that the NGOs and CAN can supplement each others' knowledge and resources to promote cycling.

There have been numerous studies on the relationship between cycling and health. Study after study, has concluded that cycling brings along with it major health benefits. The health benefits are not just associated to one but multiple areas of the human body. While cardiovascular benefit is the first thing that comes to everyone's mind, cycling brings everyday health benefits as well.

For example, people who cycle regularly (at least 3 days a week) have been found not to fall sick so often with colds or the flu. When they do fall sick, they take less time to recover compared to those who don't follow any form of exercise routine, thereby improving their productivity. Cycling employees have also been found to have better mental alertness. Going by the same logic, children who cycle to school should perform better academically.

The other major benefit of cycling is maintaining body weight and reducing health risks from overweight and obesity.

While improved productivity adds to the wealth of the nation, reduced health risk automatically translates into a corresponding reduction in health costs to the nation – resources that can then be diverted to other purposes such as education, research and development.

CAN acknowledges that cycling is not the only form of exercise for the human body. However, cycling combines various activities into one – health & exercise, improved air

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quality, environmental benefits, transportation congestion reductions, personal savings – to name a few, without being a weight bearing exercise, so less wear and tear occurs on bone joints.

CAN believes that:

- Cycling should be made an integral part of people's daily lives.
- Cycling has all round benefits including better health through improved air quality
- Cycling delivers key health benefits that include:
 - Reduced body weight and obesity.
 - Maintenance of the cardiovascular system.
 - Preventative effects on everyday health.
 - Helping people suffering from asthma and bronchial conditions.

References:

- New Zealand evidence for health impacts of transport - background paper prepared by Prof. Tord Kjellstrom & Dr. Sarah Hill for Public Health Advisory Committee - Dec 2002.
- Cycling towards health and safety - an Oxford University Press publication of British Medical Association (BMA) journal - 1992.
- British House of Commons Health Committee's Third report of session 2003-2004 on obesity.

CAN's Vision:

Cycling is used as a means of transport by most people for some trips each month.

CAN's Objectives:

- 80% of people cycle for some trips each month by 2020.
- 20% of all trips are by cycle by 2020.
- 90% of those who cycle are satisfied with their cycling experience by 2020.
- Rates of fatality and injury for cycling are below that for cars (currently 5 per 100 million km) by 2020.
- Cycling is perceived as positive by 90% of the general population by 2020.