

Briefing Note

Commercial Determinants of Health in Urban Settings

Audience: City/Municipal Governments, Provincial Health Offices, Health inspectors, Market Authorities, Urban Planning Agencies, Civil Society Organizations

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Purpose

To generate understanding on how **commercial determinants of health (CDoH)** influence population health in cities and emphasizes that **healthy markets and public spaces** should serve as the central platform for action. This brief demonstrates how policies addressing tobacco consumption, road safety, and irrational use of medicines and supplements can collectively create healthier, safer, and more equitable urban environments.



Key Message

Placing Healthy Markets and Public Spaces at the Center of Urban Health Action

Cities are increasingly shaped by commercial actors whose products, marketing practices, and business models influence what people eat, drink, buy, consume, and how they move through urban environments. The infographic argues that:

Healthy markets and public spaces are not just outcomes of good policy—they are the foundation upon which healthier urban populations are built.

By strengthening public markets, community spaces, streets, parks, and other shared urban environments, governments can simultaneously advance multiple public health goals.

Central Concept: Healthy Markets and Public Spaces

At the center of the infographic is a vision of:

- Affordable access to healthy foods
- Safe and inclusive public spaces
- Walkable and bicycle-friendly communities
- Environments free from harmful commercial influences
- Equitable opportunities for social interaction, recreation, and economic participation

Healthy markets and public spaces are presented as the point where several health policy interventions converge and reinforce each other.

Strategic Action Area 1: Tobacco Control

Commercial tobacco interests often target urban populations through marketing, product visibility, sponsorship, and retail presence.

Key actions include:

- Enforcing smoke-free public spaces
- Restricting tobacco advertising and promotion
- Increasing tobacco taxation
- Implementing plain packaging and health warnings
- Supporting cessation services

Link to Healthy Public Spaces

When public spaces are smoke-free and protected from tobacco marketing, cities become safer and healthier, especially for children, adolescents, and vulnerable populations.

Goal: A tobacco-free city and a smoke-free generation.

Strategic Action Area 2: Road Safety

Urban mobility systems are influenced by commercial interests related to vehicle sales, transport infrastructure, advertising, and land use.

Key actions include:

- Safe street design for all road users
- Speed management and enforcement
- Strong vehicle safety standards
- Restrictions on harmful marketing and risky driving behaviors
- Enhanced emergency response systems

Link to Healthy Public Spaces

Safer roads encourage walking, cycling, and active transport, making markets and public spaces more accessible and vibrant.

Goal: Zero preventable deaths and serious injuries on roads.

Strategic Action Area 3: Rational Use of Medicines and Supplements

Commercial promotion can encourage overuse, misuse, and inappropriate consumption of medicines and health supplements.

Key actions include:

- Prescription-only controls where appropriate
- Regulation of marketing and advertising
- Product quality and safety assurance

- Public education and stewardship
- Monitoring misinformation and false health claims

Link to Healthy Public Spaces

Healthy communities require informed consumers protected from aggressive or misleading commercial practices.

Goal: Safe, effective, and appropriate use of medicines and supplements.

Strategic Action Area 4: Healthy Markets and Public Spaces

This pillar directly addresses urban commercial environments.

Key actions include:

- Supporting local healthy food systems
- Restricting marketing of unhealthy products to children
- Promoting inclusive urban design
- Protecting community spaces from harmful commercial encroachment
- Investing in public spaces for recreation, culture, and social interaction

Goal: Equitable access to healthy food and welcoming public spaces for all residents.

Cross-Cutting Enablers: Five enabling conditions required across all action areas:

1. **Health in All Policies:** Integrating health considerations into transport, planning, trade, and economic policies.
2. **Community Participation and Equity:** Ensuring that residents, especially vulnerable populations, shape decisions affecting their environments.
3. **Data, Transparency, and Accountability:** Monitoring commercial influences and evaluating policy impacts.
4. **Strong Regulation and Enforcement:** Implementing and enforcing public-interest regulations.
5. **Protection from Commercial Interference:** Safeguarding public policy from undue influence by commercial actors.

Policy Implications for Cities. City governments can use this framework to:

- A. Design healthier urban marketplaces.
- B. Strengthen smoke-free public environments.
- C. Reduce road traffic injuries.
- D. Regulate misleading health product marketing.
- E. Promote active mobility and healthy food access.
- F. Advance health equity through urban planning.

Conclusion

Healthy markets and public spaces are the common platform through which cities can address multiple commercial determinants of health simultaneously.

By placing people's health and wellbeing at the center of commercial, transport, and urban planning decisions, cities can become healthier, safer, more equitable, and more resilient for current and future generations.

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