

Search Strategy for the 2023 update of the WHO's Directory for integrating health in urban & territorial planning

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This search strategy was prepared by the WHO-Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion based at the Centre for Global Health at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health (University of Toronto) in collaboration with the WHO-HQ Air Quality and Health Unit. The researchers included Janna R. Mohamed (research assistant), and Losang T. Sadutshang (MPH practicum student) who worked under the guidance of the Centre's Director, Erica Di Ruggiero.

Initial Steps

The preliminary steps involved examining the following four documents to inform the search strategy:

- [Supporting a Healthy Planet, Healthy People and Health Equity through Urban and Territorial Planning](#)
- [Integrating health in urban and territorial planning: a sourcebook](#)
- [Integrating health in urban and territorial planning: the directory](#)
- [Directory for integrating health in urban & territorial planning: An overview](#)

The first document listed, by Grant et al. (2022), was used to generate search terms, identify institutional databases, and other sources of grey literature were drawn from this. In the supplemental materials attached to this paper (Appendix 1), the document includes a list of search terms used for each of the databases referenced. From this document, the databases of the following institutions were selected: WHO Iris,

UN-Habitat online publications, UNICEF publications databases, the African Population and Health Research Center publications database, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and Intra-American Development Bank publications.

As for the search terms, initially terms were taken from Grant et al (2022) Appendix 1. Search terms, such as the following were included:

- City planning, urban planning, urban development, spatial development, land-use, territorial planning, urban design, urbanization, urban*, urban plan*, planning
- Developing countries, low income*, low-income country, middle income country
- Slum upgrad*
- Health*, wellbeing
- Cities

In addition to the above, the researchers also considered the inclusion of the following:

air pollution, energy, physical activity, environmental health, natural spaces/green infrastructure/public space, transport, cities, inequalities/health equity, HIA, housing, waste management, climate change, governance, water and sanitation

These terms were not reflected in the search terms adopted by Grant et al (2022) and were considered because of their relevance to the subject area. Search terms such as the above encapsulated specific themes that were reflected in background studies conducted as part of our initial basic scans for urban planning and health resources.

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Gaps and search terms

Over the course of our search, we identified noticeable gaps, or a dearth of resources found in the databases searched. Here, it should be noted that the researchers examined a number of institutional databases (as indicated above), though the focus was particularly on the WHO Iris and UN-Habitat's online publications. After assessing the current search results, the following gaps emerged:

- Water scarcity and health in urban areas
- Health disparities and equity in urban areas
- Mental health
- One health
- Planetary health
- Noise pollution
- Microplastics and health in urban areas

Although we considered these topics in our search, it should be noted that this provided little to no results. In such cases, we used more general terms such as “urban” or “planning” along with “health”. As per discussions with the WHO team, the emphasis on “health” was a priority in all searches.

Based on consultations with the WHO team, the primary audience for the resources being compiled is urban planners.

As for the inclusion criteria, the [background document](#) on the directory was closely referred to and our search comprised of focusing on resources published post-2018. However, over the course of the resource search and the categorization of our findings, new considerations were made:

Rationale for the new categories:

An area of concern that was raised was the categories present in the current directory. We found that classifying resources at times was challenging, especially when it comes to sorting them based on the type of resource (brief or overview or network, etc.). Hence, a possible solution was to introduce higher-level categories that could help not only the contributors but also the directory users by having a more accessible resource bank.

Two new higher categories were introduced—action-oriented resources and descriptive resources:

Action-oriented resources:

These resources provide concrete steps and tools that urban planners can use to not only address health implications in the context of planning but also health-related concerns through the application of updated frameworks and tools. Action-oriented resources also explicitly consider health as a factor in designing spaces that consider well-being of urban dwellers.

For example:

- Primer for Cool Cities: Reducing Excessive Urban Heat
- Healthy Places Policy Toolkit
- Urban design for health: inspiration for the use of urban design to promote physical activity and healthy diets in the WHO European Region

Descriptive resources:

These resources provide general guidance and important background information on the relationship between planning and the health/well-being of communities. Such resources range from an overview of health implications in planning to successful examples when it comes to the incorporation of health in planning. However, such resources lack an explicit guideline to implement steps or tools that could be used to consider health in planning or address health implications via planning.

For example:

- The Built Environment: Understanding how physical environments influence the health and well-being of First Nations peoples living on-reserve
- Tracking urban health policies: a conceptual framework with special focus on air pollution in African cities
- Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future