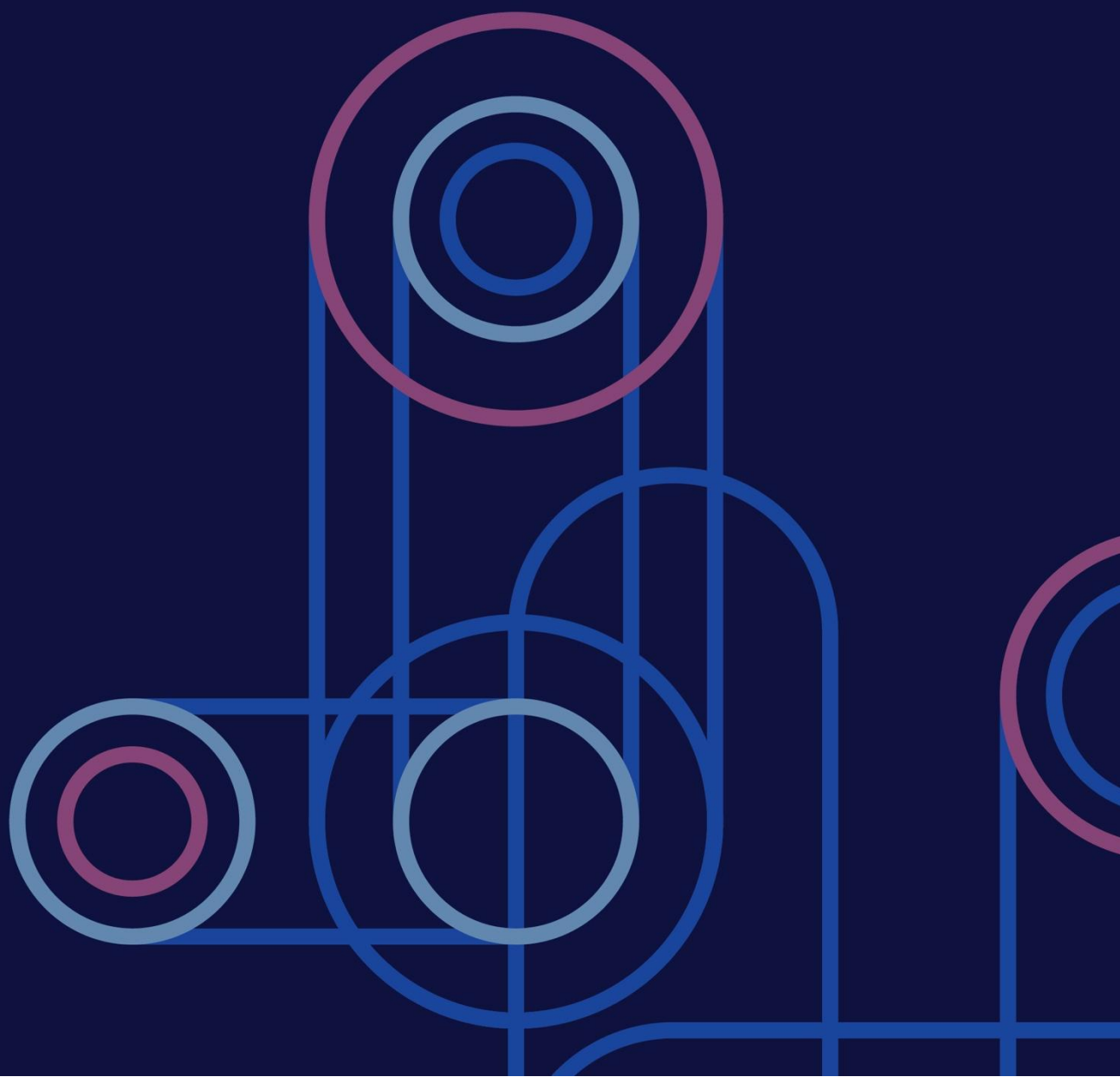


CASE STUDY

*Utrecht's Healthy Urban Living Team (GLO Team -  
Gezonde leefomgeving)*

2025



Basic information	
<b>WHO Region</b>	EURO
<b>City or Country</b>	Utrecht, the Netherlands
<b>Timeline</b>	2015 – ongoing
<b>Type of intervention</b>	Governance; planning
<b>Primary level of implementation</b>	City
<b>Primary sectors involved</b>	Urban planning; public health; transport; housing; green space/nature; environment
<b>Primary health outcomes or challenges</b>	Health inequalities; environmental exposures; physical activity; social cohesion

## Case description

Utrecht's Healthy Urban Living Team (Gezonde leefomgeving – GLO) works to embed health systematically into the city's spatial planning processes. Created in 2015 during a reorganization that transferred responsibilities from the regional public health service to the municipality, the team sits within the Public Health Department and advances the Health in All Policies (HiAP) framework adopted by Utrecht's government. Consisting of five professionals who provide health advice on all significant planning, policy, and development proposals, its objective is to reduce health inequalities by shaping the urban physical and social environment to foster healthy behavior and protect residents from environmental harms.

The team operates as an advisory hub. All formal urban planning documents requiring approval by the city council – including design briefs, spatial visions, and permits – are required to include a paragraph summarizing the GLO's advice. Advisors work across all ten neighbourhoods of the city and participate in multidisciplinary planning teams; for developments with substantial health impacts – as in the case of some housing or public spaces projects – they sometimes join project teams directly. Their guidance covers both protective measures (e.g. noise reduction, air-quality improvement, heat-stress mitigation) and health promotion (e.g. green space, opportunities for exercise, accessibility, and social cohesion).



Newly built neighbourhood in Nieuwe Defensie, Utrecht.

The Netherlands: 2025. © Miriam Weber.

The creation of the GLO team reshaped working relationships among government departments that once operated in isolation. Health and planning professionals previously ‘spoke different languages’ – a cultural divide that the team has helped to bridge through joint processes, shared standards, and everyday collaboration. The municipal reorganization and supporting policies created a durable structure and incentives for cooperation, making integrated health considerations the norm rather than an exception. Each four-year public health policy plan renews the team’s activities, ambitions, and budget, reinforcing a long-standing institutional commitment.

Key enablers for the GLO include strong political backing for HiAP, the structural reorganization of public health functions, and the city’s steady growth, which has permitted more ambitious standards for urban development. Significant barriers have included competing urban priorities – climate adaptation, affordable housing, demographic ageing, and others – along with high planning costs, limited space, pressure for rapid construction, gaps in technical knowledge among important stakeholders, and an initial absence of clear norms and standards for healthy



development. Despite these constraints, after nearly a decade of practice, Healthy Urban Living principles have become standard in planning processes, and other departments now routinely apply the same goals.

Looking forward, Utrecht aims to further mainstream the practice of Healthy Urban Living by formalizing stronger norms, standards, and design principles, and to secure expanded budgets to allow for health investment across a wider range of developments. It also seeks to address health equity by improving conditions in existing neighbourhoods. The team's approach is fully aligned with the city's Spatial Strategy Utrecht 2040, which envisions a 'ten-minute city' – embracing densification, greening, and proximity to everyday services. By integrating health objectives into high-level planning and governance, Utrecht has created an enabling framework for turning health aspirations into concrete urban-development practice.

## Strategic Highlight

Utrecht's experience illustrates how institutionalized processes can anchor urban health action across municipal systems, moving beyond integration within individual projects. Indeed, the GLO team embodies the procedural and cultural elements that underpin successful health integration, incorporating mechanisms for cross-sectoral participation, standardized review, and shared accountability.

Several features underpin this success. For example:

- Embedding the team's mandate within the city's administrative structure ensures that health input is procedurally required for every spatial planning proposal. It likewise shifts how health integration is perceived, from an aspect of discretionary advocacy around one-off projects to an established part of routine governance.
- The advisors' cross-cutting participation in multidisciplinary teams bridges technical and professional divides, supporting communication and building shared vocabulary between the health and planning sectors.
- The recurrent inclusion of Healthy Urban Living objectives in four-year municipal policy cycles maintains continuity and resources beyond electoral terms.

These arrangements are evidence of a systems approach in which policy instruments, administrative routines, and knowledge flows are deliberately aligned to enable joint problem-solving. These features have helped operationalize Utrecht's commitment to Health in All Policies, transforming it from a statement of intent into a living process.

The city's broader, long-term vision reinforces day-to-day procedural integration by embedding health within long-range land-use, transport, and environmental planning frameworks. By requiring collaboration among sectors to deliver on linked targets –

housing, mobility, climate resilience, and equity – the 2040 Spatial Strategy creates a governance environment that will sustain the GLO team’s work over time.

Utrecht’s case thus highlights the importance of process design as a foundation for integrated urban health action. Formal procedures, institutional continuity, and interdepartmental capacity are prerequisites for translating the ideals of strategic, cross-sectoral urban health into daily municipal operations. Other cities seeking to operationalize Health in All Policies can learn from Utrecht’s emphasis on routine mechanisms that make integration inevitable and sustainable.

## Further Information

- [Healthy Urban Living Utrecht](#)
- [Our Vision for Utrecht in 2040](#)
- [Ruimtelijke Strategie Utrecht 2040 \[Spatial Strategy Utrecht 2040\]](#)
- [Gemeente Utrecht: Gezondheidsbeleid \[health policy\]](#)
- [Gemeente Utrecht: Gezonde leefomgeving \[healthy living environment\]](#)