

PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE (PROS) AND HEALTH

Parks, Recreation & Open Space Determine Health

US Public Health Service Surgeon Generalⁱ recommends a daily regimen of at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, bicycling, or even working around the house or yard. This physical activity guideline helps reduce the risks of developing coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer and diabetes.

Parks and recreation programs play a significant role in helping everyone to achieve this physical activity recommendation. There are multiple health benefits in having fair, convenient and affordable access to parks, open space and recreation opportunities.

Locating parks and walking trails within walking distance from homes offers easy access to parks for exercise and social connection; and to nature for experiencing solitude. Parks, open space and recreation services directly contribute to our physical, social, emotional and mental health, and social capital and community building.

The Logic Model

Input/ Impact Area	Strategies/ Policies	Intermediate Outcomes	Ultimate Outcomes
Access to Parks, Open Space and Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a fair level of service (LOS) for various types of parks, ranging from large regional open space to local urban parks, such as a per capita LOS, a service radius LOS or both, to ensure transparency and equity across the jurisdiction. • Invest in gap areas that are traditionally underserved. • Apply Universal Design principles in parks/plazasⁱⁱ, playgroundsⁱⁱⁱ and gardens^{iv}. • Explore funding mechanisms, such as parks impact fee, to help achieve the adopted LOS. • Explore public-private partnership to satisfy the adopted LOS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to and safety for parks and open space for all ages and abilities. • Increased physical activity for all. • Increased social interaction of all ages. • Improved equity culture in organizational planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased social and physical capitals. • Reduced health disparities. • Improved quality of life for all. • Improved physical and mental health.

Input/ Impact Area	Strategies/ Policies	Intermediate Outcomes	Ultimate Outcomes
Access to Diverse Recreation Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide scholarships to offset cost recovery of programs and encourage underserved population participation. • Offer free drop-in programming for all ages. • Provide learning and fun opportunities through arts, culture, and active lifestyle programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased program affordability for low-income populations. • Increased program participation among underserved populations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced health disparities. • Improved health and well-being outcomes of the underserved. • Increased social capital. • Increased community diversity and inclusiveness.
Park Design and Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design parks as community gathering space. • Provide green space, natural playscapes and open space for recreation. • Incorporate public arts in park design. • Adopt an equitable maintenance level of service. • Apply Universal Design and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased usage of parks for social and recreational purposes for all. • Increased park safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical health of residents in close proximity. • Improved mental and emotional health by providing access to green space. • Increased social and physical capitals. • Increased community diversity and inclusiveness. • Improved property values of nearby homes. • Improved economy. • Improved neighborhood safety.
Playground Design and Maintenance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design playground as outdoor community space for children to learn, explore, play, get physical activity and social interaction. • Ensure well-maintained and safe facilities to prevent injuries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased physical activity and social connection among children. • Improved social and cognitive behaviors for children by creating opportunities for learning and socializing. • Reduced injuries caused by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical health of children living in close proximity. • Improved quality of life. • Improved neighborhood safety.

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		unsafe equipment.	
Recreation Facilities Design and Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop recreation programs and services to meet the needs of all population segments. • Design community centers as inter-generational gathering space and opportunities for programming. • Provide safe gym and workout equipment for all ages. • Incorporate public arts in facility design. • Apply universal design and CPTED principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased recreation and social interaction opportunities for all. • Increased inter-generational interactions. • Increased continuous learning for all ages. • Increased facility safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical and mental health. • Improved neighborhood safety. • Increased social and physical capitals. • Increased community diversity and inclusiveness.
Trails and Greenspace Design and Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect on-street with off-street trails. • Provide green elements to attract physical activity. • Provide safe and well-maintained routes to parks and greenspace. • Provide equitable access to nature. • Apply CPTED best practices in trail and open space design. • Provide outdoor recreation programs for nature exploration. • Work with the county and other jurisdictions to identify safe access to salt and freshwater shorelines for low-impact recreation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased physical activity, both locally and regionally. • Increased nature appreciation. • Reduced “nature-deficit disorder^{vi}”. • Increased trail and open space safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased life expectancy. • Improved physical and mental health, particularly targeting Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder and Nature Deficit Disorder. • Improved physical, social, emotional and mental health. • Reduced crime. • Reduced injuries. • Improved property value. • Improved economy. • Improved neighborhood safety. • Increased social and environmental capitals.
Recreation Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local communities to design culturally appropriate programs that meet local needs. • Provide both indoor and outdoor recreation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased physical activity and social interaction. • Increased opportunities for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved health and well-being. • Improved quality of life.

Input/ Impact Area	Strategies/ Policies	Intermediate Outcomes	Ultimate Outcomes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop healthy lifestyle programs, such as healthy eating, cooking and community gardening, etc. • Offer creative arts program for healing and mental health. 	developing healthy behaviors and lifestyles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased social capital.
Park Prescription (Rx) Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with insurers, hospitals, and doctors to create a park prescription program^{vii} by prescribing recreation programs to patients to improve health and wellbeing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced reliance on medication to prevent multiple health conditions, such as obesity and diabetes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical and mental health of patients. • Improved patient ownership and focus on self-care. • Increased human capital.
Other Administrative Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a Healthy Food Policy: Provide healthy food options in all concessions, vending machines, programs, and other opportunities where Parks agencies distribute food. • Adopt a Food Waste Policy: Reduce food waste at all stages of the food service process. • Adopt a Smoke-Free Parks Policy: Prohibit the use of smoked or vaporized tobacco products on all parks and recreation facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced prevalence of obesity and diabetes among children. • Reduced second-hand smoke exposure on park properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical health, particularly among children. • Improved overall population health.
Health-in-All Policies and Meaningful Public Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider health impacts and outcomes in parks design and recreation programming decision-making. • Meaningfully engage local communities in needs assessment, and planning and design of facilities and programs to address the genuine needs of local populations and the underserved, avoid cookie-cutter approach, and encourage usage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased program participation and park usage. • Increased local leadership training opportunities. • Improved organizational culture by focusing on health disparities and policy impacts on health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved physical and mental health of population. • Reduced health disparities. • Increased social, human and political capitals. • Improved community diversity and inclusiveness.

Research Evidence

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ENDNOTES

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