

HEALTH BENEFITS AND ASSOCIATED ECONOMIC VALUE OF PARKS AND PARK USE IN AUSTRALIA

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BACKGROUND

- The health and economic benefits of parks are not well understood
- As Nielsen and Hansen note (2007, p 849), further research is needed, especially Australian research, if the health sector is **'to fully exploit the beneficial effects of access to green areas'**

- The aim of this pilot study was to directly **estimate the health and wellbeing benefits** attained from parks and the **economic value assigned to parks** by park users in Victoria



METHODS

Surveys completed by 140 park users:

- level and extent of user's engagement with the park;
- attitudes and perceptions of park users about use and enjoyment of parks and the link to improved health outcomes;
- importance of parks to users;
- mental health and wellbeing (measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al, 1983) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Tennant et al, 2007))



Economic value assigned to parks:

- respondents were asked to imagine a hypothetical scenario where an annual levy is collected into a funding pool to maintain and provide access to parks in Victoria
- ten 'willingness to pay' (WTP) interval bids (\$0 to \$100) to choose from, including an "other amount" open-ended bid

17 respondents were interviewed:

- to describe how they feel about 'access' to parks
- to describe how they feel about the 'benefits' parks may/may not provide them



KEY FINDINGS

Demographics:

- majority of respondents were female
- aged 35-64 years
- working full-time, with a weekly income of more than \$1000
- they also tended to have children
- own a dog
- have 'very good' health



KEY FINDINGS

Value of parks:

- (39%) of park users visit parks to walk for exercise or to walk their dog (14%)
- They tend to visit parks with their partner (40%) or children (25%) or to socialise with friends (27%)
- **The findings also suggest that participants tend to visit parks for about 30-60 minutes, 2-3 times a week to participate in light (51%) to moderate (36%) physical activity**
- Additionally, they would 'very much' miss the park if it was not around



KEY FINDINGS

Use of parks:

- 84% of respondents “strongly agree” to the importance of having access to a park and even the future value of parks and its amenities
- **Most respondents indicated that they used parks for physical activities (89%)**
- visiting parks helped them to improve their feelings of wellness (98%)
- A high proportion also “strongly agree” or “agree” to the environmental benefits of parks as well as the value of parks in facilitating social interactions



KEY FINDINGS

Willingness to Pay (WTP):

- 82% of respondents were willing to pay some annual dollar amount to keep parks
- Including those with zero WTP, the overall **mean annual amount park users were willing to pay was \$45.40** to maintain and provide access to parks

- respondents who would **miss the park 'very much'** if it was not around had a higher WTP at **\$48.30**.
- most respondents considered the provision of parks to be 'most important' or 'just as important' as other local services and were **willing to pay higher amounts to keep parks**.



CONCLUSION

Caution when interpreting our findings:

- from a pilot sample of parks users
- biased towards park visitation

- **Park users are willing to pay for parks** as they highly value them as places for socialising, exercising and relaxing
- Importantly, **most people would miss parks if they did not exist** (76% of respondents mentioned that they would 'very much' miss a park if it was not around)



THANKS TO THE TEAM!

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Please Note: these data are currently unpublished so please seek approval from Claire Henderson-Wilson (claireh@deakin.edu.au) if you wish to quote them.

