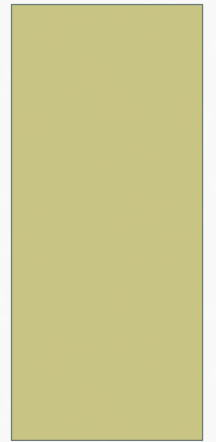


HPHP - STATE OF THE EVIDENCE 2015





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WHAT WE DID:

- A review of the current Australian & international 'parks/nature & health' literature published post-2008
- A total of 663 articles were linked to the following major categories:
 - Physical Health (including obesity)
 - Mental Health (including emotional health/wellbeing)
 - Social Health (including social values, social capital)
 - Spiritual Health (including place attachment)

Table 1: Strength of the evidence

Theme	Strength	Justification
Parks and physical health		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of empirical measurements• Focus of greater number of studies• Evidence has been subject to review (267), including in relation to obesity (268)
Parks and mental health		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes use of validated scales (i.e. anxiety, depression)• Quantitative research• Fewer studies than physical health
Parks and social health		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gaps in literature- attributed to difficulty establishing causal relationships• Reliance on qualitative research (cannot necessarily be generalised to other populations)
Parks and spiritual health		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited empirical evidence• Difficulties with measurement• Reliance on qualitative research

WHAT I'M PRESENTING TODAY:

- Some examples of the findings in relation to each of the categories
- Some key gaps in the literature
- Some of the barriers to park use
- Opportunities highlighted by this research

PHYSICAL HEALTH:

- There are clear links between the proximity of parks & the physical health of adult populations
- Parks foster physical activity:
 - Children with access to parks are less likely to be overweight or obese
- Forested parks are linked to enhanced immune functioning
- For hospital & rehab patients, green spaces reduce stress → flow-on physical health benefits
- Access to safe & appealing parks, esp. with facilities seen by adolescents as desirable, provides a physical outlet for teenagers (incl. for CALD communities)

MENTAL HEALTH:

- Exposure to parks has been shown to:
 - promote recovery from anxiety & depression;
 - alleviate chronic stress such as PTSD;
 - reduce attentional fatigue in employees;
 - attenuate hyperactivity in younger populations
- *' Respondents living more than 1 km away from a green space have 1.42 higher odds of experiencing stress than do respondents living less than 300 m from a green space '*
- Affording children opportunities to learn in outdoor settings can better engage students, particularly those who are considered to have additional needs

SOCIAL HEALTH:

- Parks & other natural environments can support social cohesion and social capital in communities:
 - Outdoor play promotes pro-social behaviour & positive social cohesion in the classroom
 - An outdoor activity program in UK with disadvantaged youth → positive changes in participants' attitudes, self-esteem & behaviour
 - Less green space in living environment is linked to loneliness & perceived lack of social support
 - The availability of trees & grass & the perceived level of greenness strongly influenced older adults' social contacts

SPIRITUAL HEALTH:

- Being in nature increases a sense of spirituality (connectedness to something greater than one's self), while spirituality influences attitudes & behaviours towards nature
- Spiritual development arising from encounters in nature with plants & animals can foster "hope, healing and growth" in children with disabilities
- "people who rate themselves higher on spirituality also tend to have better health, less illness, better treatment response, and lower mortality rates than people who rate themselves lower on spirituality".

GAPS IN THE EVIDENCE:

- While the evidence of the benefits of parks & nature for health & wellbeing is strong, there is a limited amount of research evidence concerning:
 - children, mental illness and nature;
 - adolescents, mental illness and nature;
 - nature as a source of spiritual health across all groups;
 - nature as a source of social health, particularly in relation to children; and
 - the health & wellbeing benefits of contact with nature for marginalized groups.

BARRIERS TO PARK USE:

- Lack of awareness of benefits
- Lack of access to parks
- Concerns about crime & safety
- Fear of injury
- Disability
- Gender
- Use perceptions & social/cultural norms
- Weather
- Pollution

OPPORTUNITIES :

- Consider the range of users' motivations when promoting parks & green spaces as health resources (one size \neq fit all)
- Enhance park proximity: ensure parks & green spaces are not lost in urban densification
- Ensure park quality & usability: the design and maintenance of parks can play a key role in enhancing nature contact and thus the realization of the potential health and wellbeing benefits