

## Community Greenspaces Improve Health

June is the time to celebrate Parks and Recreation Month across Canada. Most of us have deeply cherished memories of play and adventure in the outdoors, both as a child and as an adult. Many of our best times happen when we are playing or simply relaxing in nature.

Connections with the natural world are critical to our health and well-being. Regular physical activity has a powerful influence on our health, both mentally and physically. Being active is recommended as a way to both prevent and treat many kinds of chronic diseases from depression to diabetes to cancer.

Health starts in our homes and our neighbourhoods. Our experiences when we are young and the lifestyle choices and habits we make as adults help keep us healthy. Access to greenspaces and recreational facilities in our neighbourhoods can make all the difference. A playground at the end of the block can allow a young family to get outside together in the evening and a flat trail with benches can help keep a senior active many months of the year.

A recent report from the Canadian Parks Council (Connecting Canadians with Nature: An Investment in the Well-Being of our Citizens) reveals that one in four Canadians are currently obese and the rates are climbing. Additionally, more than one million Canadians are at risk for serious long-term health problems due to vitamin D deficiency. A nature prescription could make a big impact here. The report also states, "Evidence is also mounting that proximity to natural environments is the best predictor of people's physical activity, more so than proximity to community centres or indoor gyms."

Infrastructure for parks and recreation can be as simple as a well-placed dock or as comprehensive as a large beach area. We often have local governments and community groups to thank for amenities that make the outdoors inviting and accessible. In my town, I enjoy a network of well-maintained mountain bike trails that stretch for hundreds of kilometers. Anyone can use them, from hikers to bikers, and they are completely free! The municipality donates money to our trail alliance every year and individuals can also donate if they wish.

Providing parks and greenspaces are not only ways to beautify communities and make life more pleasant; these spaces also play a central role in our health and well-being. For more information see [Plan H – Parks & Greenspaces](http://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments/natural-environments/page/parks-greenspace) (<http://planh.ca/take-action/healthy-environments/natural-environments/page/parks-greenspace>).

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