Globally, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 36 million out of the estimated 56 million annual deaths. 80% of death from NCDs can be accounted for by cardiovascular diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases and diabetes. Overweight and obesity are major risk factors to these NCDs and are preventable.

In 2016, 13% of the world’s adult population and 7% of children under the age of 19 were obese (BMI >30). The leading causes of obesity include physical inactivity, eating behavior, socio-economic status, environments and genetics. Estimates of the economic burden of obesity in Canada range from $4.6 billion to $7.1 billion annually.

In Canada, adults spend upwards of 88% of their time indoors and only 7% of children meet daily physical activity requirements. For kids, lack of time outdoors can cause, amongst other things, attention deficit issues, myopia, weakened immune systems and depression. One in five Canadians suffer a mental health issue in any given year and the economic burden is estimated at $51 billion annually. This includes health care costs, lost productivity and reductions in health-related quality of life.

Summary

Globally, there is an important rise in non-communicable diseases, obesity, physical inactivity and mental health problems. Over the coming decades, consumers, taxpayers and employers will all bear the growing economic and social burden of physical and mental illnesses, including covering drug costs, emergency room visits, hospital and long-term care and lost work productivity. Connecting with nature is a potential public health strategy that is accessible and affordable for many populations, with research demonstrating not only protective values but restorative benefits as well. People tend to be happier, healthier, more productive, creative, active and engaged in community and civic life when nature is a meaningful part of their lives. Nature-based solutions are cost-effective, high-return investments that provide direct benefits for public and community health while building resilience to climate change.

Background

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Why we should invest in nature-based solutions

**What is #NatureForAll?**

The movement was formally launched at the 2016 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in Hawai‘i.

The #NatureForAll movement is driven by over 300 IUCN-led global partners who represent a variety of sectors. It aims to build support and action for nature conservation among people from all walks of life by raising awareness and facilitating experiences and connections with the natural world.

#NatureForAll is founded on the knowledge that the more people experience and connect with nature — the more they love it and feel part of it — the more likely they are to behave in ways that are good for biodiversity conservation. It seeks to inspire a universal love for nature.

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**Time outdoors improves physical health.**

There is strong evidence that green space helps to reduce all-cause mortality, type II diabetes, cardiovascular mortality and increase good self-reported health. In other reviews, statistically significant results were shown for improved blood pressure, pulse rate, stress hormones and immune systems.

People with access to nature have an increased frequency and intensity of physical activity and have been shown to stick to exercise regimens outdoors more than they do indoors. In addition, people were more than twice as likely to use active modes of transport to commute to work if parks were in the vicinity.

**Green space improves community health and prevents crime.**

Researchers have found that nearby nature helps prevent crime and mitigates some of the psychological precursors to aggression and violence. A study of 145 public housing residents, for example, showed that those living in buildings with views of concrete and asphalt reported more aggression and violence than did their counterparts living in identical buildings with views of trees and grass.

**Green space improves community resilience to climate change.**

The impacts of nature extend beyond beautifying the scenery. Grass, trees, parks and other natural areas in cities absorb rainwater, remove pollutants from the air, buffer noise pollution, lower air temperature, and reduce urban heat islands; they provide watershed protection, flood protection, support biodiversity, and help to mitigate the effects of climate change.

**Investment in green space is a high-return public health strategy.**

According to one study in Nebraska on the cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike and pedestrian trails, every $1 investment in trails for physical activity led to $2.94 in direct medical benefit. Additional economic impacts of green space include increased tourism, property values, improved environments, reduced poverty and reduced health care costs.

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8 Home To Us All, Children and Nature Network, 2018
10 Home To Us All, Children and Nature Network, 2018
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Kuo, 2010; Kuo & Sullivan, 2001
14 Home To Us All, Children and Nature Network, 2018
15 Wang et al., 2005.

This report was prepared by #NatureForAll, March 2019