Health and Well-being Specialist Group

Facilitating nature-based solutions
IUCN WCPA is actively working to advocate for greater recognition of the interdependency between healthy people and a healthy natural world. The IUCN WCPA Health and Well-being Specialist Group is a key mechanism through which experts can come together to mainstream the health and well-being benefits of nature across sectors. We invite you to join this growing network of environment, conservation, health and well-being practitioners to contribute to this important agenda.

Dr Kathy MacKinnon, Chair IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

Nature provides for the ultimate foundations of life and health.

Our parks, protected areas and green spaces are vital for accessing the health benefits of nature.

However, sprawling urbanisation and shrinking natural spaces are disconnecting much of our global population from the natural world. The loss of biodiversity and the ecosystem services provided by nature is contributing to decline in population health. This includes the acceleration of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, depression and cardiovascular diseases. As our world grapples with these challenges, the case to support nature-based solutions is compelling.

In response, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) have created a Health and Well-being Specialist Group. Our mandate is to promote the benefits of nature for human health and well-being, facilitate partnerships, influence policies and further build and report on the co-benefits across sectors.
Dr Johnathon Patz MD MPH, University of Wisconsin

As a medical doctor and public health scientist, it is in my professional opinion that conservation biologists can actually save more lives, promote more well-being and prevent more illness than the health sector.

The integral link between the natural environment and human health and well-being is now widely recognised through science and research, with mental, physical, social, spiritual and economic benefits.

What you may know

Stress related anxiety disorders are the fastest growing mental health issue.

Working hours and complexity are increasing, particularly in developed nations.

Preventative health approaches are vitally important, both at a personal level and broader scale.

In 2014, for the first time in history, more people live in urban areas than rural areas. By 2030, more than 41 cities will have over 10 million inhabitants.

What you may not know

The restorative effects of exposure to the natural environment enhances the ability to cope with and recover from stress, illness and injury.

Research indicates clear links between time spent outdoors and increased work productivity and creativity.

Parks and green space can be a highly cost-effective contributor to preventing or treating ill-health.

In urban areas, nature and parks foster social connections which are vital to community cohesion and significantly contribute to social well-being.

Biodiversity is a key environmental determinant of human health

Access to nature benefits individuals across every stage of the lifespan

Sourced from 1. Healthy Parks Healthy People: the state of the evidence 2015, Parks Victoria and Deakin University
We know from mounting evidence that our urban lifestyles are contributing to our increasing sickness and poor health, with non-communicable diseases now responsible for two-thirds of all deaths globally. Given that half of the cities that will exist in 40 years are still not built, we need to improve the cities that we have today and also create great cities for over 3.5 billion additional citizens. We must make sure that parks, nature and green spaces play a key role as they are essential to have healthy, liveable cities.

Gil (Guillermo) Penalosa, Founder & Chair World Urban Parks

Our areas of focus

Promote the health and well-being benefits of nature across the conservation, health and other sectors

Facilitate partnerships to influence policies and plans across these sectors

Build the evidence on benefits of nature for human health and well-being

Encourage the development of standard metrics to measure these multiple benefits

Momentum is growing

We connect people and organisations creating nature-based solutions for health and well-being.

Is this you? Are you working in this space? We invite you to be a part of this dynamic network.

Find out more

www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/what-we-do/health-and-well-being-0

Join us

We welcome the involvement of new members and partner organisations who can contribute to grow and promote this important agenda.

To become a member contact jo.hopkins@parks.vic.gov.au

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