

# Health Professional Fact Sheet

## Parks for Health and Wellbeing – Mental Health

Contact with nature and green spaces through parks can play an important role in contributing to the optimisation of mental health and wellbeing of our community. Mental health challenges are increasingly common in our country, with studies by Beyond Blue demonstrating that one in seven Australians will experience depression in their lifetime, and 25% of Australians will experience an anxiety condition in their lifetime. Spending time in green spaces is an important contributor to good mental health and can be beneficial in supporting treatment and recovery from mental health conditions.

### Mental health in modern society

Increasing [evidence](#) suggests that access and exposure to nature and green spaces can have a positive effect on our mental health. [Studies](#) demonstrate that people living in built up environments with limited contact to nature have been found to experience higher levels of mental fatigue and stress than those who spend regular time in natural settings. [Studies](#) have also found that those who do not spend time in nature have been shown to experience higher levels of depression and anxiety, whilst those who spend time in the natural environment report alleviation from symptoms of these mental health conditions.

### Parks are part of the solution

Regular contact with nature and the outdoors can play an important role in optimising mental health and wellbeing by reducing stress and increasing quality of life. The mental health benefits of outdoor physical exercise are [well known](#) and immersion in nature provides a wide range of psychological benefits.

Increasingly healthcare providers in places such as [North America](#), [Europe](#) and [Asia](#) have begun to incorporate 'doses' of nature into the medical care of their [patients](#), either through advice or through '[green prescriptions](#)'. Doctors in Japan term this '[forest bathing](#)' - the act of immersing oneself in nature by walking in natural settings. Benefits include improvement in patients' self-esteem, relief from depression and anxiety, reduced repetitive negative thinking, as well as improving positive emotions and behaviour. Just 20 to 30 minutes of walking in nature has [been shown](#) to decrease cortisol levels by up to 21% and salivary alpha-amylase by up to 28%.

Spending time in nature can assist some of the most vulnerable members of our society, with [young people](#), those [recovering from addiction](#), those suffering from [trauma](#) and those with [dementia](#) reporting an improved sense of wellbeing, resilience and quality of life after spending time in nature.



Spending time in nature at Wilsons Promontory (photograph by Parks Victoria).

### Next steps

Victoria's national, metropolitan parks and waterways provide inspiring and relaxing settings for our community to improve their mental health and wellbeing across all life stages. Some park-based activities that should be considered include:

**Park walks:** an organised guided walk in a park is a great way to support people to spend time in nature to assist in improving both their mental and physical health. There are volunteer-led walks for all abilities on offer in locations throughout Victoria.

**Volunteering:** there are volunteer activities for every age group, skill and ability type, allowing members of the public the opportunity to experience the wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature while making a meaningful contribution to our environment.

**Organised outdoor activities:** Parks Victoria can connect you to a range of other outdoor activities such as camping, canoeing, sailing, bushwalking and more.

Visit [www.parks.vic.gov.au](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au) to find a park near you

- [Find out about guided Park walks](#)
- [Find volunteering opportunities in parks](#)
- Health professional resources and tools

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment