

## Health Professional Fact Sheet

### Parks for Health and Wellbeing – Green Social Prescribing

In society today, grappling with mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, and loneliness has become increasingly prevalent. Social Prescribing, where health practitioners prescribe group activities such as walking, art activities, choir groups and gardening highlights a shift towards holistic wellbeing to support mental health. Parks play a vital role in providing green open spaces for the community to connect socially and participate in outdoor activities. This community approach is beneficial in supporting the prevention, treatment, and recovery from mental health conditions.

#### Mental health in modern society

The demands of modern society have led to an increase in busy lifestyles, with a [significant](#) percentage of the population spending large portions of the day in front of screens for work and leisure. [Studies](#) indicate that people living in built up environments with limited contact to nature, often experience higher levels of mental fatigue, stress, and social isolation than those who regularly engage in natural settings. Furthermore, [research](#) illustrates the lack of time spent in nature is likely to increase feelings of depression and anxiety. While on the other hand, those who regularly spend time in nature report alleviation from symptoms of these mental health conditions. Increasing [evidence](#) strongly suggests that access and exposure to nature and green spaces can positively influence our mental wellbeing.

#### Green Social Prescribing as part of the solution

The mental health benefits of outdoor physical activity are [well established](#), and supported by a wide range of psychological benefits gained from immersion in nature. Globally, healthcare providers are incorporating ‘[doses](#)’ of nature into medical care, either through professional advice or ‘[green prescriptions](#)’. In Japan, the act of immersing oneself in nature by mindful slow walking, and sitting in nature is referred to as ‘[forest bathing](#)’. This approach has shown benefits including improvement in patients’ self-esteem, relief from depression and anxiety, reduced repetitive negative thinking, and improving positive emotions and behaviour.

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



Participants at one of the many locations Parks Victoria guided Park Walk sites (photograph by Parks Victoria).

#### Next steps

Victoria's parks and waterways provide inspiring and relaxing settings for our community to improve their mental health and wellbeing across all life stages. Consider recommending park-based activities such as:

**Park Walks:** an organised guided group walk in a park is a great way to encourage physical activity while meeting new people. There are volunteer-led walks for all abilities on offer in many parks.

**Volunteering:** there are volunteer activities for every age group, skill and ability type. Most volunteer activities are group based and all are free.

**Organised outdoor activities:** Parks Victoria offer a range of outdoor activities for the community to become involved and enjoy the outdoors 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.