

America continues to feel the strain of a serious health crisis affecting adults and young alike. One in which we are plagued by poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyles, and unhealthy habits. But there is a solution with little to no cost and is available in nearly every town, city and community – local parks and recreation.

The scientific evidence is mounting that parks and recreation are building healthier communities and top health officials in the country – U.S. Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – validate that parks and recreation are a critical solution for our nation's health epidemic.

Parks and recreation are enacting strategies focused on improving access to healthy food, increasing opportunities for physical activity, decreasing tobacco consumption, and so much more.

The following support the critical role of public parks and recreation in improving health and wellness.

- Living close to parks and other recreation facilities is consistently related to higher physical activity levels for both adults and youth.
- Adolescents with easy access to multiple recreation facilities were more physically active and less likely to be overweight or obese than adolescents without access to such facilities.
- Increasing access to recreation facilities is an essential strategy for preventing childhood obesity.
- Organized park programs and supervision may increase use of parks and playgrounds and may also increase physical activity, particularly among youths.
- Park renovations can increase vigorous physical activity among children and can also increase use of certain types of facilities, including playgrounds and skate parks.
- In distressed neighborhoods of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where vacant lots were converted into small parks and community green spaces residents in those neighborhoods reported significantly less stress and more exercise, according to a study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology.
- Park and recreation agencies are the second largest public feeder of children, next to schools.
- Park and recreation agencies annually serve approximately 560 million meals to children through summer and after-school programs.
- Park and recreation agencies in 30 communities across the country distributed 2.5 million healthy meals to children of low-income families, helping to increase their nutrition levels.
- Five U.S. communities implemented tobacco bans impacting 575,000 people in 22 parks.
- Through a youth community gardening program implemented by 20 park and recreation agencies, 51 percent of participants reported eating more fruits and vegetables.
- The youth community gardening program participants also reported they work better with others on a team, care more about the environment, and make friends easier as a result of working in the gardens (more than 70 percent).

- A 2011 study conducted on Seattle's park and recreation system revealed that Seattle's residents were able to save \$64 million in medical costs as a result of getting physical activity in the parks.

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