

Physical Activity in Nature

Action Plan: 2021 – 2024

A plan to guide collaborative action that encourages all people in South Australia to be physically active in nature – one of the seven focus areas set out in the Healthy Parks Healthy People SA Framework.



Government
of South Australia



Our vision

In South Australia all people can experience the health and wellbeing benefits of being physically active in nature.

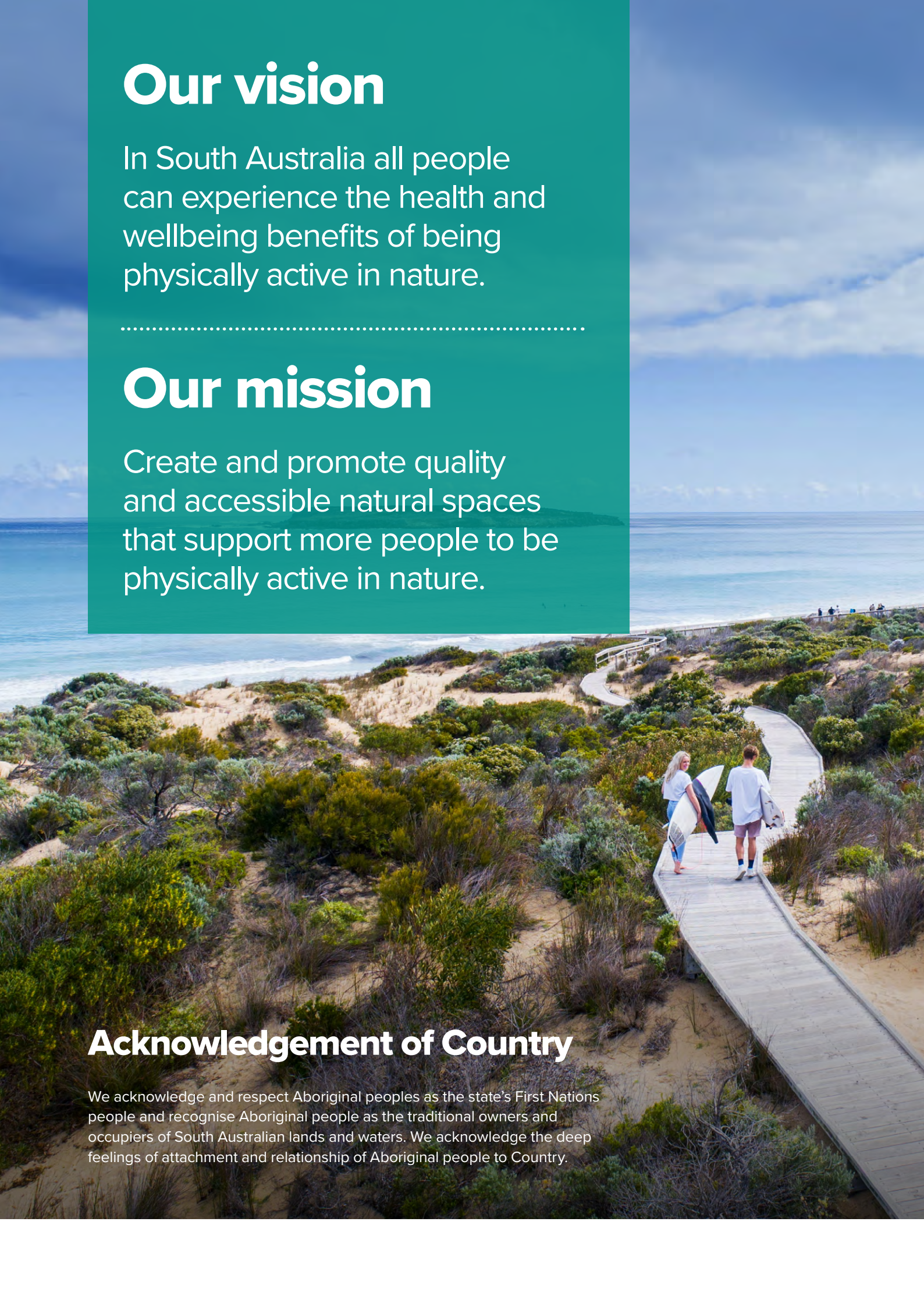
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Our mission

Create and promote quality and accessible natural spaces that support more people to be physically active in nature.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect Aboriginal peoples as the state's First Nations people and recognise Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and occupiers of South Australian lands and waters. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal people to Country.





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Commission, Yorke Peninsula.

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Introduction

This Action Plan is a key initiative of Healthy Parks Healthy People SA (HPPH SA) - a nature-based approach to promoting and contributing to population health and wellbeing. It is guided by a vision and mission to ensure that all South Australians are connected to nature and recognise nature as an integral component to their health and wellbeing.

HPPH SA is governed under a Public Health Partner Authority (PHPA) agreement between the South Australian Department for Health and Wellbeing (through Wellbeing SA) and the Department for Environment and Water (through Green Adelaide). HPPH SA provides an authorising environment for action across government, and engagement with non-government organisations and other potential partners.

The HPPH SA Leadership Team, chaired by senior executives in Green Adelaide and Wellbeing SA, provide strategic oversight and endorse each of the seven focus areas below.

Key HPPH SA focus areas

1. Promoting physical activity in nature
2. Mental health benefits of contact with nature
3. Promoting the cultural value of Country for Aboriginal health and wellbeing
4. Community health and wellbeing in a changing climate
5. Nature education and childhood development
6. Green infrastructure in urban settings
7. Biodiversity, conservation and human health.

A five-year HPPH SA framework was initially developed in 2016 and has recently been refreshed (2021-2026). It includes a re-commitment to action in all the focus areas.

Sponsors of the Physical Activity in Nature Action Plan are the Chief Executive Officer of the Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA SA), the Chief Executive of the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR) and the President of Parks and Leisure Australia SA/NT (PLA SA/NT).

The HPPH SA Leadership Team recognise the contributions of several critical partners and industry stakeholders, responsible for progressing this Action Plan.

The HPPH Physical Activity in Nature Working Group comprises representatives from the HPPH SA Leadership Team (Wellbeing SA and Green Adelaide) and the sponsors of the Action Plan (LGA SA, ORSR, PLA SA/NT).

Their support, technical expertise and contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

We would also like to acknowledge the engagement of other relevant industry, research and government stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Action Plan.

COVID-19 has highlighted to Parks and Leisure Australia and the wider community how critical parks and nature are for community wellbeing. The opportunity to walk, ride a bike or play in a natural setting has been extremely important for all age groups as shown by the number of people pursuing activities in the hills, parks and beaches when lockdown was the 'norm'. We know that physical activity in natural settings contributes to physical and mental health and we are therefore pleased to have been a sponsor of this important work.

Suzanne Suter
President, Parks & Leisure Australia SA/NT

South Australian councils invest millions of dollars every year in services and facilities that improve community health and wellbeing. This includes maintaining local parks, gardens, playgrounds, footpaths and bike trails; and developing Regional Public Health Plans that support and encourage South Australians to be more

active. Being physically active in nature has numerous health, social and economic benefits and the LGA is proud to support this work on behalf of its member councils.

Matt Pinnegar
**CEO Local Government Association
of South Australia**

As the lead agency for Game On, Getting South Australia moving, the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing is pleased to sponsor this Physical Activity in Nature Action Plan. We know that people want physical activity integrated into their everyday lives and that the systemic change required to shift activity levels must involve coordinated action. This Plan identifies key actions that can be progressed by multiple organisations, government and non-government, to create programs and infrastructure that support more South Australians to be physically active in our unique and beautiful natural settings.

Kylie Taylor
CE Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing



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A snapshot of challenges and opportunities for Physical Activity in Nature in South Australia

Physical Activity



Only 22% of children and young people (aged 5 to 17) meet the physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes huff and puff activity per day.¹ Only 69% of adults meet their guidelines (150 minutes moderate-to-vigorous activity per week).²



The difference in cost of public health services used between South Australians who do 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week compared to those who do not equates to a difference of \$1393 per person per year.³

Nature



National Parks in SA cover 21.1 million hectares, an area about the size of the UK.



Walking is the most popular physical activity South Australians enjoy when visiting our National Parks.⁴

Health equity



The number and quality of neighbourhood parks are significantly higher in neighbourhoods with a higher ranking on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA index) than those with a lower SEIFA index.⁵



Socio-economic demographic factors and rural-urban differences are important mediating factors affecting physical activity levels and health.⁶

Place



People who live within 1.6 kilometres of a larger neighbourhood park are more likely to be active.⁷



Children with greater exposure and access to green spaces are likely to engage in much more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity than those with no exposure or limited access to green spaces.⁸



80% of Australians want to live close to public parks, open spaces, reserves, gardens, beaches, playgrounds, ovals, or nature that allows them to be active locally.⁹

People



People are more likely to be physically active, at a moderate intensity or higher, rather than sedentary when visiting local parks.¹⁰



People who engage in group walks in nature, regardless of frequency, can experience a reduction in perceived stress, depression and negative emotions and improvements in mental wellbeing and positive emotions.¹¹



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Aim and focus

The aim of this Action Plan is to create and promote quality and accessible natural spaces that support more people to be physically active in nature.

The focus areas of the Action Plan are to promote and support:

- 1. More people** being active in nature
- 2. Quality spaces** that support physical activity in nature
- 3. Equitable** access to engage in physical activity in nature.

The scope of the plan is determined by the definitions of physical activity and nature outlined in this document. Both definitions are broad to highlight the potential for all people in South Australia to benefit from being physically active in nature.

Physical activity

Physical activity, as defined by the World Health Organization, is “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure.”¹² Physical activity refers to all movement; it can include organised and structured activities (e.g. club sport), unstructured activities (e.g. recreation or active play), it can be done for enjoyment, or as part of work or household chores and it can be free, fee for service or involve a membership fee.

Physical activity also occurs across a continuum of intensity from light (e.g. tai chi) through to moderate (e.g., brisk walk, cycle to work) to vigorous (e.g., skipping, gym session). Importantly physical activity can be done with or without equipment and at any level of skill.

For the purpose of this Action Plan, both organised and non-organised, free, fee for service and membership related physical activity across the entire intensity continuum will be considered. Physical activity related to workplace activities and household chores are out of scope.



Nature

Depending on the context, nature can mean many different things to different communities, organisations and individuals. In this Action Plan, nature or natural spaces refers to public spaces that incorporate natural elements, and are publicly accessible to all members of the community.

This could include but is not limited to recreation parks, linear parks, public gardens, play spaces, sporting grounds, waterways, lakes, wetlands, the ocean, national parks, conservation areas, accessible school grounds and greenways. The Action Plan relates to any nature based or natural area within South Australia that can be accessed at the local level or is a larger nature based destination.





How does being physically active in nature improve health and wellbeing?

The health and wellbeing benefits associated with physical activity participation across the lifespan are well known.

Engaging regularly in physical activity promotes improved aerobic fitness, bone health, sleep, immune responses and mental and cognitive health and wellbeing.¹³⁻¹⁷ Physical activity participation also reduces the risk of early death,¹⁸⁻¹⁹ developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some forms of cancer^{12,15,20} and other disease risk factors such as overweight and obesity, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol.^{15,16}

Despite these widely known benefits, approximately one third of South Australian adults and four out of five children and young people do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines.^{1,2}

Increased physical activity, especially for those who do none or very little, accrues vast health and wellbeing benefits (as described above) no matter

what the setting. There is also a strong evidence base that shows spending time in natural spaces, like local parks and reserves or the coastline and local creek beds, can have positive impacts on a person's health and wellbeing irrespective of what they do when they are there.²²⁻²⁶

When we then consider nature as a destination or setting for physical activity participation the evidence suggests that:

- People are more likely to be physically active, at a moderate intensity or higher, rather than sedentary when visiting local parks.²⁷
- Children and adults with greater exposure and access to green spaces are likely to engage in much more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (children and adults) and walking (adults only) than those with no exposure or limited access to green space.^{10,28}



© Local Government Association

- People who engage in group walks in nature, regardless of frequency, can experience a reduction in perceived stress, depression and negative emotions, and improvements in mental wellbeing and positive emotions.²⁹
- Physical activity participation in nature may lead to lower perceived exertion (i.e., it feels easier) and increased motivation to participate more regularly.³⁰
- Short bouts (as short as five minutes) of physical activity in both natural green and blue spaces can result in immediate improvements in mood and self-esteem.³¹
- The different types and quality-related characteristics of natural green and blue spaces can have various effects on an individual's health and wellbeing, including physical activity participation, social contact, psychological factors, exposure to air pollution and immunological function.³²

Undeniably physical activity and nature whether together or on their own are important factors that need to be prioritised for population health and wellbeing.

It is important that we support access to land and water based natural spaces, for all people to use as destinations for physical activity participation across the lifespan. These spaces must have multiple uses and require little or no cost so that all South Australians can reap the benefits of being physically active in nature.

Action Plan 2021-2024

The Physical Activity in Nature Action Plan has been developed through a consultative process involving the working group and broader reference group, comprising State and local government and other industry organisation representatives.

The Action Plan includes objectives and action topics for each of the following areas of focus:

- **More people** being active in nature.
- Quality **spaces** that support physical activity in nature.
- **Equitable** access to engage in physical activity in nature.

The strategic actions are purposely high level, acknowledging that more specific actions and

initiatives will be developed as a ‘next step’ by reference group members, local councils and other industry partners and organisations that are committed to achieving the Physical Activity in Nature objectives and strategic actions.

The Action Plan provides a strategic framework to guide future initiatives or work. How the strategic actions will be delivered and the allocation of resources directed to each action will be dependent on who drives the action.

The main emphasis of the Action Plan is to support and encourage all people in South Australia to participate in physical activity in natural areas more often.

This includes all age groups, cultural groups and levels of ability; as well as visitors to South Australia.

More people being active in nature

OBJECTIVE	ACTION TOPICS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
Increase the number of people in South Australia who pursue physical activity in nature.	Awareness and motivation	1.1. Co-design a long-term communication strategy that aims to encourage more people to pursue physical activity in nature.
		1.2. Investigate innovations in digital technology to increase awareness and motivation to be physically active in nature.
		1.3. Review findings of Green Adelaide’s Nature Prescription Trial once complete.
	Confidence and competency	1.4. Review the evidence available regarding why some people do not utilise nature for physical activity and develop appropriate responses and promotions to address this.
		1.5. Establish initiatives that build confidence and competency of people of different ages, abilities and cultural groups to be physically active in nature.
		1.6. Identify the shared interests of agencies and organisations and potential joint project opportunities regarding outdoor education.
	Activity opportunities that lead to habit forming	1.7. Develop inclusive strategies that improve the promotion of nature-based activity opportunities to local community groups.
		1.8. Encourage local government and community organisations to identify activities and events that could be adapted to increase opportunities for physical activity in nature.



Case study: Park of the Month

The Department for Environment and Water's (DEW) Park of the Month (PotM) program has grown steadily in popularity over the last five years. It aims to promote South Australian national parks, encourage visitation, foster advocacy and educate the public in areas such as conservation values and visitor behaviour.

Each calendar year a new PotM program is developed, identifying specific parks to be showcased each month. For that month, a program of events is hosted in the park with assistance from regional Ranger staff, volunteer rangers, Friends of Parks groups, not-for-profit community groups and commercial operators.

Most of the events are free to the public or are offered at a significantly subsidised price. The events focus on core themes including conservation, recreation, cultural connections and health and wellbeing.

Over the years, the PotM program has built considerable community awareness. This has recently been recognised with the Parks and Leisure Australia 2020 Award for Best Community Based Initiative in South Australia/Northern Territory.

Evidence strongly supports park-based and greenway trail interventions employing multifaceted approaches.³³

Changes to the physical environment (place) should be coordinated with a mix of activities or strategies that create opportunities for people to participate.

This is particularly recommended for interventions designed to increase park use and physical activity. Park-based or greenway trail interventions that did not do this are largely ineffective.³³

Park of the Month provides a great avenue and opportunity for people to get out and get active in nature.

Many of the activities that are on offer involve being active including ranger guided walks, kayaking, yoga, rock climbing, mountain biking, snorkelling and even forest bathing.

For more information parks.sa.gov.au/get-inspired/park-of-the-month

Quality spaces that support physical activity in nature

OBJECTIVE	ACTION TOPICS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
Enhance the quality and availability of public spaces that support physical activity in nature.	Provision and distribution	2.1. Undertake an analysis of the provision of parks and spaces that support physical activity in nature and address gaps over time.
		2.2. Advance opportunities for significant natural spaces to be more accessible to the public for physical activity.
	Achieving quality accessible spaces	2.3. Review and develop guidelines and checklists to assist open space providers achieve well designed, accessible spaces with natural elements and infrastructure; that support all people to be physically active in nature.
		2.4. Investigate how to best enable funding opportunities to support projects that aim to enhance the quality, function, accessibility and value of open spaces that support physical activity in nature.
	Achieving partnerships	2.5. Establish partnerships linked to funding and resource programs that encourage governments, schools, developers, communities and other organisations to work together on Physical Activity in Nature initiatives.



South Australian Tourism Commission, Clare Valley

© Parkrun

Case study: Riesling Trail

Based in the Clare and Gilbert Valley, less than two hours north of Adelaide, the Riesling Trail has fulfilled its purpose as a key piece of community infrastructure that both encourages physical activity, community connectedness and provides an economic stimulus for the region.

The high-quality trail surface caters for walking and cycling and is suitable for wheelchairs and pushers. It passes through picturesque countryside with spectacular views of the Valley’s vineyards and rolling hillsides, presenting a tranquil and safe thoroughfare with a gentle gradient.

The Riesling Trail has good supporting infrastructure including camping grounds, toilets and car parking and is pet friendly. The Trail is well marked with direction and distance indications as well as prominent signage highlighting natural features, Aboriginal history as well as recent local history and points of interest. There are numerous rest facilities including shelter, seating and picnic areas as well as prominent art installations along the Trail.

This has provided a great base from which to build new economic activity for the region, attracting visitors, encouraging and enhancing longer stays and supporting new business opportunities, such as the numerous bike hire businesses along the Trail. The Trail also provides a base for sporting, recreation and

community events, such as the Clare Classic in the tradition of a Gran Fondo cycling event and Parkrun, a free weekly community run event that is positive, welcoming and inclusive.

One of the keys to the success of the trail is the Riesling Trail Management Committee, a committed community group that actively encourages investment and involvement through Friends groups and business partnerships, identifies and supports maintenance and upgrades, and is an effective advocate across Federal, State and Local government.

The Riesling Trail has demonstrated steady increases in usage year on year, with almost 100,000 users in 2020. It is an exemplar of how the right infrastructure, a variety of activities and strong inclusion focus can support more South Australians to enjoy physical activity in natural environments.

Riesling Trail Key Facts:

Length: 33km plus loop trails

Townships: Clare, Leasingham, Watervale, Penwortham, Sevenhill.

Accessibility: walking, cycling, wheelchairs, pushers

More Information:

www.southaustraliantrails.com/trails/riesling-trail/

Equitable access to engage in physical activity in nature

OBJECTIVE	ACTION TOPICS	STRATEGIC ACTIONS
To increase the opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged communities to experience and be physically active in nature.	Advocate for equity	3.1. Embed equity principles and strategies in Physical Activity in Nature related actions, plans, policies and resource allocation decisions.
		3.2. Develop equity indicators to identify and prioritise inclusive features in natural spaces that facilitate physical activity.
	Research and evidence	3.3. Develop a program of work and/or research that explores opportunities to achieve equity in physical activity in nature. This could include developing a set of equity-based indicators.
	Equity capacity building	3.4. Develop and implement community capacity building frameworks and initiatives that reinforce and achieve equity practices.
		3.5. Establish design, planning and management policies and processes that ensure natural spaces support equitable access and experiences.



© City of Salisbury



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Case study: Little Para River and Trail

Background

A hidden gem of Northern Adelaide is the Little Para River and Trail (16.5 km). It is part of an extensive 103 km network of walking and cycling trails located in the City of Salisbury (City).

Features

The Little Para Trail is the most significant in the City. It passes through several reserves with a variety of recreation destinations such as playgrounds, outdoor fitness stations, tennis courts and dog parks; as well as supporting infrastructure such as seating, barbecues and drinking fountains.

A beautiful and easy section of the trail is from Happy Home Reserve in Salisbury to Port Wakefield Road, Parafield Gardens.

This section has an all-weather bitumen surface, so it is suitable for walking, dog walking, jogging, cycling and is accessible for wheelchairs and prams. Shade is provided by the ancient river red gums all along the way, which attract a variety of bird life and other native animals.

Cycle Salisbury Social rides are regular users of the Little Para Trail and new riders are always welcome regardless of experience or ability. The Salisbury Council promotes a monthly program of upcoming social rides to encourage

participation and use of the trail. Portions of the trail are also used by several Heart Foundation walking groups throughout the week.

Happy Home Reserve is a 700 metre walk from the Salisbury train station and 200 metres walk from bus stop 50A Waterloo Corner Road, Salisbury.

For more information

[salisbury.sa.gov.au/Activities/
Walking and Cycling Trails](https://salisbury.sa.gov.au/Activities/Walking_and_Cycling_Trails)

[www.salisbury.sa.gov.au/Community/
Healthy Living/Living Well/Cycle Salisbury](https://www.salisbury.sa.gov.au/Community/Healthy_Living/Living_Well/Cycle_Salisbury)

[https://walking.heartfoundation.
org.au/walking/](https://walking.heartfoundation.org.au/walking/)

People living in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods are significantly less likely to meet physical activity guidelines and more likely to be sedentary than more advantaged individuals.

Evidence suggests that improving physical activity opportunities at the neighbourhood level through the built and social environments are most likely to reduce the physical activity 'gap'.³⁴

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