

# HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2016-2021

## WHAT IS HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE SA?

*Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* is a nature-based approach to population health. It aims to ensure that all South Australians are connected to nature and recognise it as an integral component to their health and well-being.

The links between the natural environment and our own physical, psychological, social and spiritual health and wellbeing have been understood for a long time. It is only relatively recently, however, that park and health authorities have joined together to translate this knowledge into practical health initiatives, in particular preventing illness and promoting good health.

While all forms of the natural environment provide health and wellbeing benefits, parks provide an accessible means for people, especially those living in urban areas, to have contact with nature. Therefore conserving, protecting and promoting the benefits of nature, and especially parks, is a central goal of the *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* approach.

*Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* is supported by a Public Health Partner Authority Agreement between the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources and the Department for Health and Ageing.

## THE HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE CHALLENGE

In 2015, seven out of ten South Australians visited parks annually. Approximately half of these people visited parks less than three times per year; the other half visited parks between four and twelve times per year.

The challenge for *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* is to:

1. Help the proportion of South Australians who don't visit parks overcome whatever is holding them back from doing so.
2. Encourage South Australians who already use parks to become more regular visitors to gain further health and wellbeing benefits.

## A MULTI-SECTORAL AND EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

*Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* is an approach that envisages many sectors – environment, health, primary industries, Aboriginal affairs, social inclusion, education and urban planning – working together to maximise the untapped resources that nature provides; interdisciplinary collaboration will be a major key to success.

*Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* is also underpinned by a strong evidence base gathered from around the world that unequivocally shows that spending time in nature is good for us.

## WHAT WILL BE DELIVERED?

The *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* approach aims to demonstrate that by increasing our connection with nature through our unique and wonderful parks, South Australians will be provided with world-class nature-based solutions to population health that will:

- build safe, healthy and connected neighbourhoods
- provide the best outdoor opportunities for developing happy and healthy children
- contribute to the state's economic agenda
- preserve and promote Aboriginal culture
- support the recovery of people who experience mental health problems
- address some of the preventable causes of obesity and other chronic diseases
- reduce costs to the health system through prevention and early intervention.

In the longer term, *Healthy People Healthy Parks SA* aims to improve our understanding of:

- what is influencing South Australians' personal relationship to nature
- park visitor needs and expectations
- the needs of economically, socially and mobility disadvantaged groups
- the cost and consequences of inaction, in terms of the impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and the economy.

## THE SEVEN FOCUS AREAS

*Healthy People Healthy Parks SA* identifies seven focus areas for action. Over the framework's five-year timeframe, action plans will be developed and implemented across each focus area. Opportunities will build on existing policy or strategic opportunities, require collaborative action across multiple focus areas, and aim to contribute to new or existing evidence. The process will be undertaken in partnership with relevant stakeholders who will be invited to participate in a co-design process to develop and deliver the plans. The seven focus areas are:

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. Childhood development and nature
6. Green infrastructure in urban settings
7. Biodiversity, conservation and human health.

### 1. PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN NATURE

The health benefits of participating in regular physical activity are well documented. Regular activity helps prevent chronic diseases and promotes healthy weight. Evidence shows that parks foster participation in physical activity. From a population health perspective, parks therefore offer a significant opportunity to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for all South Australians. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to find new opportunities to encourage more people to be more active in parks.

### 2. MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF CONTACT WITH NATURE

Almost half of all Australians are diagnosed with a mental health condition at some point during their life. The restorative effects of exposure to parks and green open spaces is well documented including reduced chronic stress, assisting in recovery from depression and anxiety, and promoting a sense of wellbeing and an increased feeling of individual resilience. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to reinforce the role of nature in mental health promotion strategies.

### 3. PROMOTING THE CULTURAL VALUE OF COUNTRY

Connection to Country is a critical component of Aboriginal culture and is recognised as an important determinant of Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Evidence shows a positive association between caring for Country activities and physical and mental health outcomes. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to support on-Country initiatives that will help Aboriginal people connect with their traditional lands.

### 4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

All South Australians will experience some level of impact on their health and wellbeing from climate change. Farming communities are particularly at risk given the dependence of farming on the weather. The elderly, very young, people with a disability and those living in remote or coastal communities are also vulnerable. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to promote a nature-based approach for increasing resilience and adaptation to climate change.

### 5. CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND NATURE

Evidence demonstrates that giving children opportunities to learn, live and play in natural spaces is associated with good physical, mental, social and spiritual health in adult years. Benefits include enhanced cognition, improved physical development, reduced stress and improved academic performance. *Healthy People Healthy Parks SA* aims to help translate academic research into on-ground improvements that bring children closer to nature.

### 6. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN URBAN SETTINGS

There is strong evidence that green infrastructure, such as parks, gardens, street verges and sports ovals, contributes positively to physical and mental health. As urban areas become more developed it is important to ensure there is high quality, green open space to protect and promote population health and the natural environment. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to influence the quality of green open space in the Greater Adelaide area over the coming decades.

### 7. BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND HUMAN HEALTH

Human health and biodiversity are inextricably linked. We rely on healthy, natural ecosystems to provide us with food sources, clean water and soil, medicines, timber, fuel and fibre. There is also an increasing body of evidence that contact with the natural environment improves the functioning of our immune system. *Healthy Parks Healthy People SA* aims to provide on-ground opportunities for increasing people's exposure to healthy, green environments.

*Healthy Parks Healthy People SA is overseen by a high level leadership group which provides expert knowledge and advice to guide implementation. The group is co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources and the Deputy Chief Executive of the Department for Health and Ageing.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources  
P (08) 8463 6987  
Department for Health and the Ageing  
P (08) 8226 6227