



A-Z OF HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF ONTARIO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COALITION & BC HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOCIETY

N - NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

WHAT ABOUT EQUITY?

Evidence shows that individuals and groups who are socioeconomically disadvantaged tend to live in neighbourhoods that have less access to the natural environment. From a lack of street trees to greater environmental burdens, poorer communities often have less access to health-supportive environmental amenities, and have less resilience to environmental hazards. There is consistent evidence that green space provides greater health benefits to lower socioeconomically-advantaged individuals and groups than to the general population.³ Planners and public health practitioners should work hard to expand and improve diverse forms of accessible and connected green spaces in underserved and disadvantaged areas. This includes the revitalization of parks, especially those that improve travel links and connectedness through the community.

WHAT IS A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

The natural environment refers to all living and non-living things occurring naturally—meaning not because of humans. These are the natural systems that help to make our environment livable, including the trees that filter our air and the oceans that maintain life on this planet. Natural environments provide us with the air we breathe, and life-sustaining food and water. Human health is intimately connected to the natural environment. For example, green space has been shown to have beneficial effects on wellness, physical and mental health for residents of urban cities.¹

A healthy natural environment is one in which green spaces and natural elements are protected, incorporated into the built surroundings, and accessible to all people including children, low-income residents and people with chronic conditions and disabilities.²

WHY ARE NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS IMPORTANT TO A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Healthy natural environments support the overall health and well-being of a community. Research has found many strong links between human health and our ability to access natural environments. When we are able to access healthy natural environments, we experience reduced levels of stress, chronic disease, depression and anxiety, as well as improved concentration and cognitive functioning. Even a brief interaction with nature, such as a 10-minute walk or a view of green space, can have restorative effects. Natural environments are also important to a community's social health. Having the ability to access parks and green space increases our social well-being by providing places to make new connections and build relationships with friends and family.²

REFERENCES

1. Toronto Public Health. (2015). **Green City: Why nature matters to health – an evidence review.**
2. PHSA. (2018). **Healthy built environment linkages toolkit: Making the links between design, planning & health.**
3. Skinner E, Masuda JR. (2013). **Right to a healthy city? Examining the relationship between urban space and health inequity by Aboriginal youth artist-activists in Winnipeg.** Social Science & Medicine.



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des Communautés en santé de l'Ontario



BC Healthy Communities
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OHCC enables communities to create and sustain positive change through equitable community engagement, intersectoral partnerships, political commitment, healthy public policy, and asset-based community development. **BC Healthy Communities** supports multi-sectoral groups to build their capacity to create healthy communities.