

Outdoor Recreation's Public Health Benefits

Nationwide, the outdoor recreation economy accounts for **\$1.1 trillion** in annual economic impact and 5 million jobs. But more importantly, investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure and access have proven to generate wide ranging **public health benefits** for communities, especially for those who have historically lacked convenient access to the outdoors.

A [growing body of research](#) has shown that “while the quantity and quality of evidence varies across outcomes, living in greener urban areas is **associated with lower probabilities of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, asthma hospitalization, mental distress, and ultimately mortality, among adults; and lower risks of obesity and myopia in children.**” [Source](#)



To take advantage of this momentum, hundreds of rural and urban places across the United States are investing in outdoor recreation infrastructure and access to help build healthier communities, including [“ParkRx” programs](#) to connect traditional healthcare to time outside.

- **Siskiyou County, California**, is [building a multi-use trail system](#) to link four communities without getting into a car to promote healthy communities and active transportation outdoors.
- **Louisville, Kentucky** is [investing in the West Louisville Outdoor Recreation Initiative \(WLORI\)](#) to provide thousands of lower-income children and young adults with annual outdoor experiences.
- **Michigan State Parks** established a program to [make electric wheelchairs accessible](#) for users with physical disabilities across the state.
- **OhioHealth provided a \$100,000 grant to Athens County, Ohio** and the Baileys Trail System to expand access to multi-use trail access and related public health benefits for the surrounding community.
- **Henderson County Public Health in North Carolina** is [partnering with Kids in Parks and TRACK Trails](#) with the goal of increasing families’ use of trails.

According to researchers, outdoor recreation:

Reduces risk of Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature death, preterm birth, and stress.	Helps address mental health challenges, particularly for youth made more difficult by social media and bullying.	Increases children’s ability to socialize, explore, and relieve stress.	Improves memory, fights depression, and lowers blood pressure.
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