



PARK PROGRAMMING AND BETTER HEALTH

Research shows that recreation programs in parks can change the way that people interact with their environment. By providing the community with ways to get involved and stay invested in its green spaces, effective park programming offers better health and increased well-being for residents.

THE FACTS

- » Park and recreation agencies currently provide critical services for millions of seniors. Today, 70 percent of park and recreation agencies offer programs targeted at senior citizens, and the average agency serves more than 160 seniors annually.¹
- » Park and recreation agencies currently provide millions of Americans access to healthy and nutritious food. According to PRORAGIS, more than 50 percent of agencies administer community garden programs. Almost 25 percent of agencies administer or manage farmers' markets, and 63 percent rent or permit space for people to grow their own healthy foods.²
- » When Boston made park health programming highly visible by hiring veterans to teach free health classes in 18 city parks a year, park attendance dramatically increased during summer months.³
- » In Los Angeles, 38 percent of residents said they got most of their exercise by using parks and parks programming.⁴
- » Neighborhood parks have the potential to function as a nucleus of neighborhood activity, where residents can gather for social events, recreational activities and meetings about community issues, increasing social interaction. While physical activity-related health benefits are realized at the individual level, collective efficacy could even affect individuals who are not park users themselves.⁵
- » Neighborhood parks contribute substantially to the facilitation of moderate to vigorous physical activity. This contribution may depend less on size and facilities than on "demand goods" – programming and activities – that draw users to a park.⁶



THE FACTS

- » Having events at the park, including sports competitions and other attractions, appears to be the strongest correlate of park use and community-level physical activity.⁶
- » Park use results from a complex equation that includes not only higher quality recreation facilities, but also programming, staffing, fees, hours of operation, marketing, outreach and perhaps a host of other human factors.⁷

SOURCES

- ¹ NRPA. (2014). PRORAGIS: The role of park and recreation agencies in providing important services and resources for seniors.
- ² NRPA. (2014). PRORAGIS: The role of park and recreation agencies in providing healthy food options for communities.
- ³ NRPA. (2015). NRPA's 2015 Field Report: A parks and recreation national database analysis.
- ⁴ Han B, Cohen DA, Derose KP, Marsh T, Williamson S, Raaen L. (2014). How Much Neighborhood Parks Contribute to Local Residents' Physical Activity in the City of Los Angeles. *Preventive Medicine*, 69(sp1) S106-S110.
- ⁵ Cohen DA, Sturm R, Han B, Marsh T. (2014). Quantifying the Contribution of Public Parks to Physical Activity and Health: Introducing SOPARC. RAND Corporation.
- ⁶ Cohen DA, Marsh T, Williamson S, et al. (2010). "Parks and Physical Activity: Why Are Some Parks Used More Than Others?" *Preventive Medicine*, 50(sp1):S9-S12.
- ⁷ Cohen DA, Sehgal A, Williamson S, Marsh T, Golinelli D, McKenzie TL. (2009). New Recreational Facilities for the Young and the Old in Los Angeles: Policy and Programming Implications. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 30(sp1): S248-63.

