

Public Health and Parks, Trails and Recreation... What is the Connection?

The data is clear - access to safe, welcoming opportunities for physical activity and recreation not only improves our physical health, but also our mental wellbeing and overall community safety. Studies show that humans are wired to benefit from exposure to greenspaces and our natural surroundings – reducing stress levels within just moments.

As humans, we are also hard wired for social connection – simply being around other people can have many of the same benefits as greenspaces, while also reducing social isolation and loneliness. Because of this, we also need to consider how we can develop our recreational spaces to include gathering spaces, in parks, trails, and indoors.

Our community’s health and well-being benefit from advancements in place-making by decreasing isolation, increasing physical activity, decreasing violence, and offering more ready access to those who may have fewer opportunities due to income, certain health conditions, mobility constraints, transportation, or location.

Relevant 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) Data



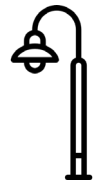
1 in 10 adults feel socially isolated

Yellowstone County’s
rate of **suicide** is
2X the national average

Just **1 in 3** area adults get
adequate physical activity
(150 minutes per week)

1 in 2 adults consume
excessive screentime – a
trend worse among seniors

15% of adults feel
unsafe walking alone in
their neighborhood



16% of adults and
10% of youth have asthma,
making **outdoor recreation dangerous**
during late summer fire season,
extreme cold, heat and allergy seasons

1 in 5 adults deal with
high impact chronic pain
&
1 in 3 adults experience
activity limitations due to a mental,
physical, or emotional problem

Studies Show:

- Recreational programming, specifically after school programs for youth, are associated with positive youth outcomes. According to a report by the National Recreation Trails Program, adolescents who do not participate in after school activities are 27% more likely to be arrested and 49% more likely to use drugs (National Recreation Trails Association, 2015).
- Regional recreation centers provide usable space for community organizations and/or residents to host community meetings, celebrations, and family-friendly events which are associated with increased social cohesion and sense of community (National Recreation Trails Association, 2015).
- Recreation centers that are connected to existing park systems are associated with increased property values and sense of community pride (University of Washington, 2018).
- Green spaces give people a place to congregate and something to take care of. With more foot traffic comes more opportunities for members of the community to be on the watch for any illicit activity, decreasing its likelihood to occur in that area. Civic pride, residential engagement, and activity in public are all key attributes of thriving communities. (Aiyer et al., 2015)
- A study out of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, found that greening previously abandoned lots not only reduced gun violence but also produced a significant positive economic impact on the criminal justice system: greening each abandoned lot yielded about \$43,000 in savings. Additionally, remediating vacant buildings in an area led to a statistically significant 39% reduction in firearm assaults. (Branas et al., 2016)

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Recreation centers that are connected to existing park systems are associated with increased property values and sense of community pride.

- University of Washington, 2018 Study



Sources: National Recreation and Park Association, 2023; University of Washington, 2018.