



**youth affairs council**  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## Benefits of access to public exercise equipment and green spaces

Open Your World key priority focus area: Encouraging use of green spaces in recognition of the health, wellbeing and environmental benefits and promoting the opportunities and benefits of sport and physical activity.

A continually growing model of community health and wellbeing is that of public exercise equipment, outdoor gyms and green spaces. These can include parks, different and often multipurpose static and interactive pieces of exercise infrastructure, walking tracks and paths, and neighbourhood design and public transport accessibility to increase walkability for residents. For instance, 170 Brisbane City Council parks have exercise equipment installed, which you can see in more detail [here](#). The benefits of this model are two-fold; the health benefits of increased accessibility to a range of exercise and spaces for residents, and the ecological benefits of these green spaces being created and existing within urban areas and townships.

Wellbeing benefits indicated through research into green spaces and community health include improved physical health, improved mental health and increased socialisation. While most studies support the relationship between public green spaces and health benefits, [a causal relationship is difficult to define](#) because of limitations like the quality and accessibility of spaces and individual characteristics of people within the community such as age, gender and ethnicity.

A [2007 study](#) surveying individuals on how 'green' they perceive their neighbourhoods to be identified a link between the accessibility of green spaces and health benefits. It found a significant association between recreational walking and social coherence with mental health benefits but stated that these factors only partly contributed to this result, theorising that the 'restorative effects of natural environments may be involved'. It also found those participants who perceived their neighbourhood as highly green had 1.37 and 1.60 times higher odds of better physical and mental health respectively, compared with those who perceived the lower levels of greenness. There have also been studies into using greenspace activity to assist with specific disorders such as [depression](#) and [attention deficit disorder \(ADD\)](#), with mixed results.



As for physical health, exercise in greenspaces not only provides the usual benefits of exercise like improvements to cardiovascular capacity and strength but also by participating outdoors, [increased vitamin D levels from exposure to sunlight](#). Additionally, there is a growing amount of literature around the low level of physical activities in areas like [South Asia](#) with increasing urbanisation and therefore comparatively very few greenspaces.

The resounding conclusion from research in this area is that while physical benefits directly correlating to outdoor exercise is difficult to link, most generally support the relationship between the two. What is more evident is the link between mental health benefits and enhanced socialisation related to accessible greenspaces.

The other angle to look at the benefits of greenspaces from is the environmental benefits of creating and maintaining these spaces. There is a huge array of these including, [helping filter air pollution](#), reducing flooding, aiding urban biodiversity, [encouraging sustainability](#) and pride in land care.

Areas suitable for further research could include:

- Benefits of greenspaces for young people vs elderly people.
- Quality and quantity of greenspaces in different areas with socioeconomic standings.
- What aspects of greenspaces have the most impact on student's mental health?
- Do people from areas with more greenspaces exercise more?

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