

HEALTH BENEFITS OF NATURE



WHO ARE WE?

This fact sheet was created by the CRD Community Health Network*. We are a multi-sectoral health network committed to **building and sustaining healthy communities** through facilitating discussion and catalyzing action around the social, economic, and environmental determinants of health and wellness.

*also known as the Regional Outcomes Monitoring Group

Connection to nature has proven to have a profound impact on health and well-being.



Humans experience **positive emotional responses** from views of nature. Other health benefits may relate to opportunities for **increased sense of belonging, social cohesion** and interaction in urban green spaces. Evidence has also shown that the presence of greenery can encourage physical activity.

Source: Baron et al., 2019



Human health depends on healthy natural ecosystems - clean **air** to breath; clean, abundant **water** to drink; healthy **soil** to grow food. There is an interdependent web of life comprising these ecosystems.

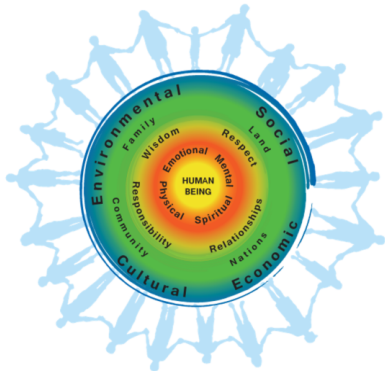
Source: CPHA, 2015



Research supports a **strong relationship between biodiversity & measures of ecosystem functioning**, such as water quality, soil health and pollination.

Source: [Healthy Built Environment Toolkit, 2018](#)

INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING



Indigenous people view both themselves and nature as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins. It is an awareness that life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin.

Source: [First Nations Health Authority, 2021](#)

Environmental determinants include the land, air, water, food, housing, and other resources that need to be cared for and considered in order to sustain healthy children, families and communities.

Source: [Salmon, 2000](#)

WATER



The **quantity and quality** of our water supply is **essential to public health** and sustainable communities.

Source: [Province of BC, 2021](#)

Water is being impacted by climate change with the following **significant consequences**:

- seasonal water shortage
- longer term water loss
- ocean acidification
- river flooding
- glacier loss
- coastal storm surge

WATER CONSERVATION & DROUGHTS

- Droughts are rare, but not unheard of on Vancouver Island. Scientists from the University of Victoria have identified **23 severe droughts** here since 1674. There's no record of a string of summer droughts like we've had in recent years.¹
- The [BC Drought Information Portal](#) provides historical data on drought events.
- Our **winter recharge** that replenishes the Sooke Lake Reservoir for use over the entire year, **will need to last for longer**.
- By **conserving water**, we can help make sure there is enough available to meet drinking water demand, for fire protection and to support fish and ecosystems, through the dry, hot months.²

Source: ¹[CBC, 2021](#); ²[CRD, Water Conservation Tips, 2020](#)

NATIVE VEGETATION



A **native plant thrives naturally** in a region, ecosystem or habitat without human introduction. Native plants are **vital components of healthy and resilient ecosystems**. They require little maintenance and little to no watering once established. They promote biodiversity and healthy ecosystems by creating habitat for local wildlife including migrating birds and pollinators.

Source: [CRD, Native Plants, 2021](#)

EXTREME HEAT & NATURAL COOLING SYSTEMS

HEAT



In Island Health, there was a **large relative increase in ambulance dispatches** connected to the **July 2021 heat dome event**.

Source: [BCCDC, 2021](#)

CONNECTION PLANTS AND NATURE



Planting trees and increases to tree canopy coverage can combat the urban heat island effect. Expanding vegetation cover by planting and maintaining trees, shrubs, and climbing plants; by creating new open spaces; and by installing green roofs.

Source: [Health Canada, 2020](#)

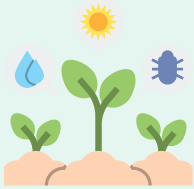
HIGHLIGHT: DISTRICT OF METCHOSIN



The District of Metchosin has passed [Bylaw No. 467](#) to protect and manage rainwater. The bylaw introduces smart practices necessary for the health, safety, and protection of persons, property, and the environment in the municipality by protecting and maintaining conditions of water bodies, watercourses, Riparian-wetland areas, drainageways, drains and sewers.

Permeable surfacing helps to address storm water on site rather discharging contaminants directly into neighbouring water bodies.

REGENERATIVE SOIL



[Healing City Soils \(HCS\)](#) is a program that **analyzes the health of the region's soils and create a virtual soil map** of the Capital Regional District highlighting areas where heavy metals may need to be addressed before growing food. This map is paired with factsheets and workshops to empower people with the knowledge and skills to grow food safely or to heal the soil with compost, plants and mushrooms, lifecycles, harvesting food.

Source: [Healing City Soils, n.d.](#)

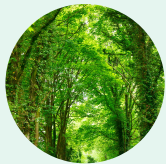
PARK SPACE



Parks have become even more **critical to health and wellbeing during COVID-19**. The CRD saw increases in visitation numbers for regional parks, between 2019 and 2021. There was a **28.7% increase** in park visits (please note: data is collected between Jan and Apr of each year).

Source: CRD Parks Data, 2021

TREE CANOPY



Urban forests increase our quality of life by **promoting mental well-being and encouraging physical activity**. They reduce air pollution, cool temperatures in the summer and protect biodiversity. Urban property values increase with more trees, and neighbourhoods benefit from increased shade and beauty.

Source: [NRCAN, 2021](#)

HIGHLIGHT: CITY OF VICTORIA



City of Victoria has a **map** showcasing areas with **tree canopy and shade**.

Source: [Tree Canopy Map, 2013 & 2019](#)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The built environment supports connection to nature and **local government play a key role here**.

Volunteer with local parks & nature programming. The CRD and several municipalities seek volunteers to support maintenance of trails and park lands. There are also non-profit organizations like The Land Conservancy and The Greater Victoria Green Team that invite volunteers.

Develop a **One Planet action plan** for your community group, business, or neighbourhood.

Develop **urban garden or micro-forest** to green home or neighborhood.

Find a hiking trail suited to your activity level or visit one of the many Nature Houses in our region's parks.

Take a Hike Foundation engages youth with intensive, continuous clinical counselling, **outdoor experiential learning**, and community. They are one of the few educational or **outdoor programs** in British Columbia that has dedicated mental health services woven into the program.

Created by: