

**OREGON ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS  
CONGRESS OF THE MEMBERS  
77th ANNUAL MEETING  
April 13, 2024  
Resolution #3**

**Introduced by Jonathan Sisley, MS-3**

**Subject: Affirming Creation and Maintenance of Urban Green Spaces as a Public Health Need**

1 **WHEREAS** the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) currently recognizes the impact  
2 of neighborhoods and surrounding environment as a component of social determinants of  
3 health<sup>1</sup>, stating that “physical features like air and water quality, climate, as well as housing,  
4 parks, and other recreation areas all play a part in physical activity and life expectancy”. Where  
5 “life expectancy gaps of up to 25 years have also been identified between different  
6 neighborhoods within the same city”, the AAFP acknowledges improving the local  
7 environment—such as increasing density of parks—is associated with greater levels of physical  
8 activity in both children and adults, and

9 **WHEREAS** the World Health Organization (WHO) reports the need for interventions to improve  
10 urban green space implementation and evaluation<sup>2</sup>. The WHO report includes a thorough  
11 literature review of 6997 studies of which 38 were closely analyzed and demonstrated  
12 promising evidence for park-based interventions, “greening of vacant lots, provision of urban  
13 street trees, and green infrastructure for storm management”. While greenways and trails  
14 showed inconclusive evidence, the WHO recognizes that “robust evaluation of urban green  
15 space interventions are urgently needed”, and

16 **WHEREAS** green spaces contribute to physical and mental well-being by providing opportunities  
17 for recreation, exercise, and relaxation.<sup>3-5</sup> There is evidence showing cognitive benefits of green  
18 space both in children and middle-aged/older adults. In children, green space plays a “crucial  
19 and irreplaceable role in brain development”, whereas in adults, studies suggest that green  
20 space “has significant benefits for lowering the risk of psychiatric disorders”. A meta-analysis of  
21 143 studies detailed the wide range of statistically significant benefits including “reductions in  
22 diastolic blood pressure, salivary cortisol, heart rate, diabetes incidence and reduced all-cause  
23 and cardiovascular mortality”, and

24 **WHEREAS** urban green spaces contribute to mitigation of air pollution and the promotion of  
25 environmental sustainability.<sup>6</sup> A study conducted by the United States Department of  
26 Agriculture Forest Service estimated the financial benefit of pollution removal for major cities in  
27 America, which ranged from \$116,000 [Bridgeport, CT] to \$60.7 million [Jacksonville, FL] largely  
28 due to existing pollution concentration, in-leaf season, amount of precipitation, and other

29 meteorological variables. The study illustrates that increasing green space can improve air  
30 pollution which has both financial incentives and health benefits, and

31 **WHEREAS** access to green spaces has been linked to improved community cohesion, reduced,  
32 stress, and enhanced quality of life. Green spaces serve purposes beyond aesthetic purposes,  
33 and “research has shown that exposure to natural systems, even relatively simple ones, hastens  
34 recovery from stress”. Conservation scientists have identified the need to participate in broad  
35 partnerships, and health professionals are vital stakeholders in promoting green space  
36 creation.<sup>7,8</sup> **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

37 **RESOLVED** the AAFP develop a position paper on the importance of green spaces in improving  
38 physical and mental well-being, and be it further

39 **RESOLVED** the AAFP develop and distribute legislative talking points highlighting the importance  
40 of green spaces in fostering community well-being, addressing social determinants of health,  
41 and contributing to sustainable environments.

## References

<sup>1</sup>American Academy of Family Physicians. Advancing Health Equity by Addressing the Social Determinants of Health in Family Medicine (Position Paper). 4/10/2023.

<sup>2</sup>Hunter R, Cleary A, Cleland C. An evidence review on the environmental, health and equity effects of urban green space interventions. World Health Organization *Urban green space interventions and health: A review of impacts and effectiveness*. 10/01/2017.

<sup>3</sup>Dadvand P, Nieuwenhuijsen MJ, Esnaola M, Fornes J, Basagaña X, Alvarez-Pedrerol M, Rivas I, López-Vicente M, Pascual M, Su J, Jerrett M, Querol X, Sunyer J. Green spaces and cognitive development in primary schoolchildren. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 2016. 113(45), 12585-12590.

<sup>4</sup>Twohig-Bennett C, Jones A. The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes. *Environmental Research*. 2018. 166, 628-637.

<sup>5</sup>Liu BP, Huxley RR, Schikowski T, Hu KJ, Zhao Q, Jia CX. Exposure to residential green and blue space and the natural environment is associated with a lower incidence of psychiatric disorders in middle-aged and older adults: findings from the UK Biobank. *BMC Med*. 2024 Jan 15;22(1):15.

<sup>6</sup>Nowak DJ, Crane DE, Stevens JC. Air pollution removal by urban trees and shrubs in the United States. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*. 2006. 4(3-4), 115-123.

<sup>7</sup>Fuller RA, Irvine KN, Devine-Wright P, Warren PH, Gaston KJ. Psychological benefits of greenspace increase with biodiversity. *Biology Letters*. 2007. 3(4), 390-394.

<sup>8</sup> Miller JR. Biodiversity conservation and the extinction of experience. *Trends Ecol Evol*. 2005 Aug;20(8):430-4. doi: 10.1016/j.tree.2005.05.013. Epub 2005 Jun 13. PMID: 16701413.