



Overview

Time spent outdoors supports and improves mental health at all ages, increasing happiness, reducing stress, [decreasing sleep deprivation](#), and reducing symptoms of [ADHD](#), [PTSD](#), [depression](#), and [anxiety](#). However, Americans spend [less than 8% of their time outdoors](#) and women, youth, and lower-income people have the [least time outdoors](#).

Climate change is also [worsening mental health](#) through extreme heat, economic instability, natural disasters, ecological grief, and climate anxiety. Restoring access to the outdoors can reduce the mental health impacts of climate change, [promote hope for the future](#), and [reduce fear and stress about climate change](#).



Everyday Wellness Policy Options

- **Greenspace Equity Program:** [1 in 3 Americans](#) lacks access to nearby outdoor spaces, and lack of green space worsens extreme heat. Maryland [S.B.923/H.B.503](#) established a program to increase equitable access to quality green spaces in overburdened & underserved areas.
- **Gardening in Housing:** Gardening is one of the [most effective](#) outdoor interventions for mental health. Illinois [H.B.3892](#) allows the housing development authority to create incentives for the affordable housing projects that incorporate urban and suburban gardening programs.
- **Healthy Childhood Task Force:** Childhood time outdoors is the single greatest predictor of lifelong time outdoors. Louisiana ([S.R.84](#)) established a task force to promote healthy childhoods, especially through time outdoors in and out of school.
- **Outdoors Rx / Outdoor-Based Therapy Programs:** Washington's successful [Parks Rx](#) pilot program ([S.B.5292](#)) and the new Illinois Outdoor Rx program ([H.B.1526](#)) provide guidance and funding to promote health through outdoor access.



State Parks Wellness Policy Options

- **Prescribe A Park:** [Vermont](#) and [South Dakota](#) empower healthcare providers to promote time outdoors by prescribing [free park passes](#).
- **State Land As a Healthcare Resource:** New York Outdoor Rx Act ([A.8094A](#)) requires a review of veterans' abilities to access state parks, lands, and facilities, especially for outdoor therapies.
- **Help State Parks Prevent Suicide:** State parks [may be higher risk areas](#) for suicide due to their remoteness, access, opportunity, and for some, lack of familiarity. States can support existing parks efforts to offer safe, welcoming facilities by [identifying higher-risk areas](#) and installing reasonable prevention solutions like [signage](#), [barriers](#), [art](#), and/or [lighting](#).
- **Support State Parks Staff After Incidents:** States can also encourage that [risk and incident management plans](#) include opportunities for staff to attend trainings on mental health as well as offer [post-incident support](#) for impacted state land and parks staff.