



GREEN HEALTH PRINCIPLES & DEFINITIONS



THIS GUIDE INTRODUCES THE MEANING BEHIND SOME OF THE COMMON WORDS AND PHRASES USED WHEN TALKING ABOUT GREEN HEALTH. THERE IS NO EXPECTATION THAT COMMUNITY GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS USE THIS LANGUAGE - THE GUIDE CAN BE USED AS A REFERENCE TO HELP BUILD A SHARED UNDERSTANDING.

INTRODUCTION



“

Being in nature helps to relax and clear the mind. All the senses evoke positive feelings for me and give me strength when feeling anxious or in a low mood.

”

Our natural environment is a resource that can be used to help tackle some of our key health issues in Highland.

Connecting with nature has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, improve sleep and help with the symptoms of depression.

Activities out of doors not only encourage us to be more physically active, which has known health benefits, but they can also offer opportunities for social connection.

We can also bring elements of nature indoors and close to home so that those who are unable to venture far can feel the benefits.

UNDERSTANDING GREEN HEALTH

Green Health is about encouraging people to increase their overall health and wellbeing, through interaction with the natural environment around them.

It's all about Connection:

It is more than simply getting outdoors. It's about building a knowledge and relationship with the environment around us to maximise the health benefits. Research shows that the closer we get to nature, the happier we are, the more worthwhile life seems, and the more we are willing to take action to help our wildlife and the environment.

Types of Activities include:

- Walking, Cycling, Running & Wheeling
- Gardening, Growing & Crofting
- Outdoor Play, Learning & Bushcraft
- Outdoor Volunteering
- Creative Arts
- Relaxation & Mindfulness

“Green Health
helps us
to notice
more, listen
more, feel
more, enjoy
more, and
care more”

These activities can:

- Take place anywhere nature can be engaged with, including inside the home, garden, local park or wild spaces
- Be active - when it comes to being physically active some movement is good - more is better
- Be passive - taking time to relax in nature can help improve mental wellbeing and there are benefits even for those unable to move far or fast
- Be part of an organised group - there are many group activities available to choose from. Check out our Highland [directory](#).
- Be self-led - there are many activities available for all interests and abilities. Check out our [activities](#) page
- If targeted at a specific group should be tailored to their specific needs
- If open to all, should be inclusive and mindful of any barriers to participation
- Adhere to the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

**[The Nature Connection Handbook](#) from the University of Derby
is a useful resource to help people grow closer to nature.**

GREENSPACES

“

Greenspaces are our natural health service, our children's outdoor classrooms and town's green lungs
GreenSpace Scotland

”

Greenspaces are the places that enable us to connect with nature. They can be man-made, semi-natural or wild. They can be vegetated land or any water body (blue space) and include:

- Your home and the outdoor spaces around it
- Parks, public gardens, playing fields, children's play areas, woods and other natural areas, grassed areas, cemeteries and allotments
- Green corridors like paths, disused railway lines, rivers and canals
- Derelict or vacant land which has the potential to be transformed
- Nature reserves, wild spaces, coastal areas

Greenspaces have the ability to improve our health by:

- Reducing harm to health through ecosystem services; e.g. providing clean water for drinking and clean air to breathe; reducing noise pollution, creating shade and preventing flooding.
- Restoring capacities in those with ill health; e.g. aiding recovery, reducing stress and anxiety, increasing mobility
- Building capacities; e.g. providing places to exercise, to connect with others and to develop skills and interests



ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Ecosystem Services are the direct and indirect contributions ecosystems provide for human wellbeing and quality of life. They are at times referred to as natural capital and are one of the building blocks of human prosperity and wellbeing.

The services they provide can be broken down into four main categories:

SUPPORT SERVICES

Processes in the ecosystem help to support us through soil formation, plant growing and photosynthesis (oxygen)

REGULATION SERVICES

Ecosystem services have a role to play in regulating our environment such as controlling floodwaters, our climate or air pollution.

PROVISION SERVICES

Providing food and water and materials for housing and clothing.

CULTURAL SERVICES

Cultural aspects include reducing stress and anxiety, heritage and recreation.

Ecosystems are considered **assets** because they are the source of services that support wellbeing, health and security. Examples of ecosystem assets include forests, wetlands, agricultural areas, rivers and coral reefs.



THE BENEFITS OF GREEN HEALTH

INDIVIDUALS

There is a considerable and growing [evidence](#) base for the positive impact on people's mental and physical health from being outside and connecting with nature.

- Reduces the experience of pain.
- Improves immune function
- Improves self- esteem
- Speeds up recovery from illness or injury
- Combats fatigue
- Benefits those suffering depression/anxiety
- Helps to tackle loneliness through social connection
- Improves concentration
- Promotes physical activity which can help to prevent hypertension and heart disease and assist with weight loss
- Supports self-management of long term conditions
- Encourages pro-environmental behaviour

“ Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health ”

COMMUNITIES

Communities involved in green health action can benefit from:

- Local investment in greenspaces and infrastructure
- Community engagement
- Collaboration between groups
- Increased understanding of nature
- Increased value placed on local spaces
- Provision of activities that are accessible and mostly free
- Reduced inequalities

Check out some [Case Studies](#) from Highland

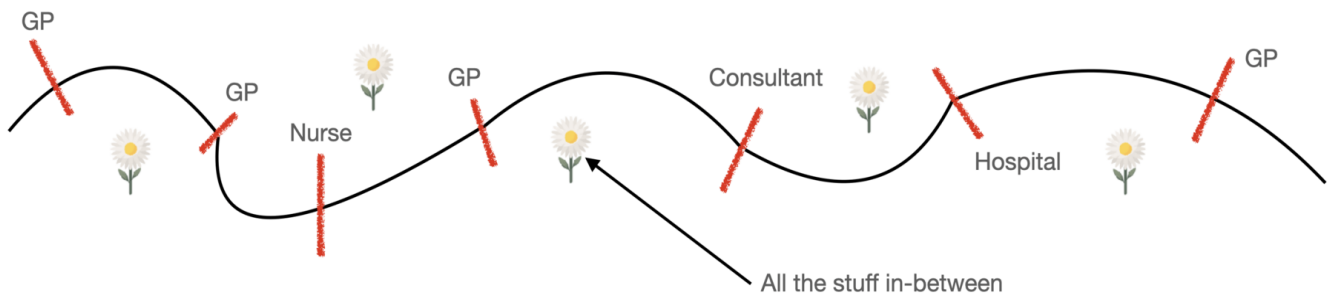


HEALTH SERVICE

Increased provision of, and participation in, green health activities has the potential to reduce the pressure on NHS services. It can assist in keeping people healthier for longer, building healthy lifestyle practices as well as being effective the treatment and recovery from illness and injury.

Green Health Interventions can be used in place of, or alongside pharmaceuticals, which in turn can reduce, postpone or remove the need for expensive medicines.

Green health activities can be used as an effective self-management tool for those with long term conditions helping them with better quality of life outwith health care appointments. An average person spends just 3 hours a year with a health professional.



OUR PLANET

Reducing or avoiding medications also helps to cut down on the packaging, waste and pollution generated by the pharmaceutical industry.

The environment is a health asset however, it is not a resource to be exploited. There are opportunities through Green Health activities to promote and encourage pro-environmental behaviours to enhance our natural environment. Actions to tackle climate change and enhance biodiversity have co-benefits for human health. The environment can harm our health if not safeguarded.

We have produced guidance on the link between climate, nature and health which can be viewed [here](#).

We also encourage individuals, community groups and organisations to sign up to the [Highland Climate Nature and Health Charter](#)



BLUE HEALTH

Increasingly you may hear people refer to the term Blue Health or Blue Spaces. Blue Health activities are those that take place on or near our rivers, lochs, coasts and sea.

Blue Health Activities may include:

- Wild Swimming
- Sailing, Surfing & Paddle Boarding
- Kayaking & Canoeing
- Beach & River Walks
- Canyoning
- Fishing

Evidence shows us that the positive health benefits of being in nature are further enhanced by being close to water. In addition to the benefits listed above, blue health activities are known to:

- Aid in relaxation through movement, sound and reflection of light.
- Increase opportunities to see nature, as wet environments are rich in wildlife.
- Assist with pain management and improve mental health through cold water immersion.
- Get people outside physically active increasing levels of Vitamin D.
- Provide fresh air and better sleep - sea air is often less polluted.

In Highland we are never far from a body of water with so many rivers and lochs, and an expansive coastline. At Think Health Think Nature we don't differentiate between green and blue health, Instead, when we refer to green health, we mean any activity that brings you closer to nature on land **or** water.

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I am very lucky to live by the sea and the constant movement is very calming

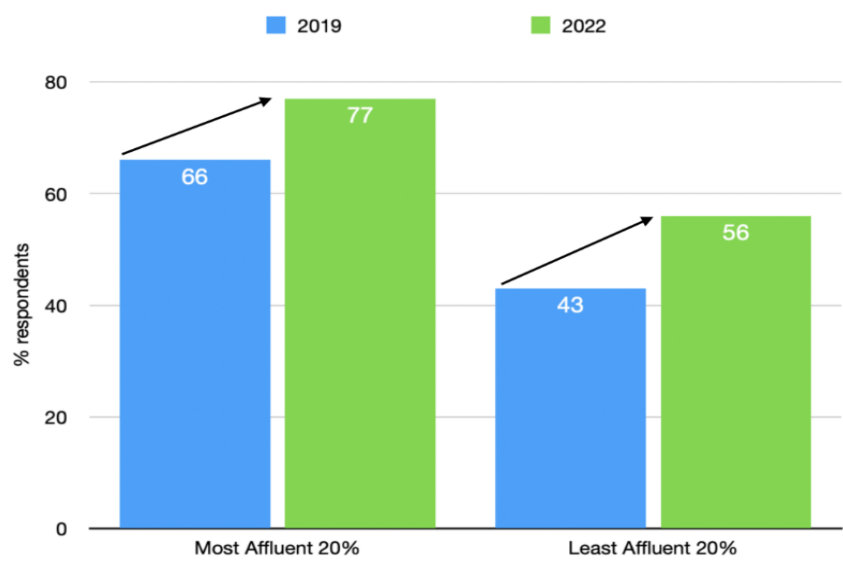
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WHO IS GREEN HEALTH FOR?

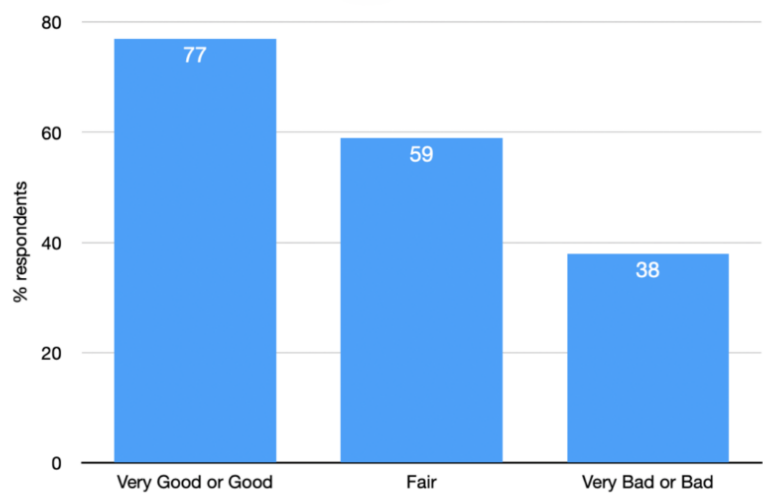
Over the past few years, the numbers of people engaging with the outdoors once per week or more has been increasing for both our most affluent and least affluent members of the population. This shows that regardless of wealth, people are realising the benefits of getting outside.

Frequency of visits to the outdoors by deprivation index, Scotland
Once Per Week (Scottish Household Survey 2019-2022)



It is not surprising to learn that people in poorer health visit the outdoors less often. Green Health is for **EVERYBODY** but there are some groups and individuals who may find it harder to engage with nature.

% visiting the outdoors weekly, Scotland, by health perception and disability
(Scottish Household Survey 2019-2022)





BARRIERS TO GREEN HEALTH

There can be many barriers preventing access to green health activities or the implementation of any green health programmes. Such barriers will vary between localities and between different user groups.

Barriers can be divided into four categories. There can be overlap and interconnection between the categories:

Behavioural barriers involve the individuals cultures, beliefs, perceptions and personalities. They are not static, and may change at different stages within an individuals lifetime. They are often influenced by external factors.

Physical barriers involve the location, topography and infrastructure within a service or a greenspace. Physical barriers will usually differ dependent on the user group. Even universal barriers, such as the weather, will adversely impact upon certain groups, more than others

Administrative barriers are concerned with the processes that need to be put in place to safeguard an individual being referred to a green health activity. They require staff time to develop, implement and monitor. They can also be a barrier to a participant signing up to an activity if overly complicated or if there are language or reading barriers.

Financial Barriers are concerned with the costs of delivering a successful green health programme; or the cost of transport, childcare or equipment to enable the participant to take part.

OPPORTUNITIES

Communities can also offer opportunities for Green Health activity through their people, places, infrastructure and support networks.

Behavioural opportunities

- Existing information channels for communication
- Local people with local knowledge
- Trust
- Sense of belonging & identity

Physical opportunities

- Greenspace - opportunity to cultivate and enhance
- Natural and cultural heritage unique to an area
- Schools & Nurseries
- Active Travel Infrastructure
- Toilets
- Existing Green & Blue Health activity providers

Administrative opportunities

- Collaboration between Groups
- Sharing of skills
- Volunteers
- Joint Promotion

Financial opportunities

- Collaborative funding applications between groups
- Community-led funding applications co-designed with service users.
- Sharing of Resources, venues and volunteers



SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Think Health Think Nature have a useful website filled with guidance and resources to promote and encourage green health activity. There is a searchable directory of activities in Highland as well as a ideas and inspiration for things to do yourself, close to home.

We have a number of resources available to order in print form or to download, as well as tools and online training available to communities and health practitioners.

You can sign-up to our monthly [e-newsletter](#) to be kept up to date on news, events and funding opportunities.

We can be contacted at: info@thinkhealththinknature.scot or fill on our [contact form](#).



www.thinkhealththinknature.scot

Think Health Think Nature is the work programme of the Highland Green Health Partnership which is part of "[Our Natural Health Service](#)", a national initiative being led by NatureScot.