

# The benefits of nature for health and wellbeing



**Sarah Preston**  
Senior Adviser  
Outdoors for All Programme

# The challenge – Physical inactivity



- Physical activity in the UK has fallen by 25% since 1960.
- Today 50% of adults and 25% of children are obese or overweight.
- Physical inactivity is now the 4<sup>th</sup> highest cause of disease and disability in the UK (= smoking)
- Directly contributes to 1:6 deaths
- Persuading inactive people to become more active could prevent 1:10 cases of stroke and heart disease.

**Physical inactivity costs the UK £7.4bn a year**

# The Challenge – mental health



- People who are inactive have 3 times the rate of moderate to severe depression compared to people who are active.

Source: [Everybody Active Every Day](#) The national physical activity framework consultation – Public Health England

- Dementia affects 850,000 people in the UK (650,000 carers) and will double in the next 30 years.
- Dementia costs £23bn a year, more than cancer and heart disease **combined**. Costs will **treble** in next 25 years.

Source: [Greening Dementia](#) - a literature review of the benefits and barriers facing individuals living with dementia in accessing the natural environment and local greenspace (NECR137)

In 2009-10, the cost of mental illness in England was estimated at £105bn.

Source: Natural Solutions for Tackling Health Inequalities [facts sheet](#) – National Outdoors for all Working Group 2013

# Health outcomes linked to the Natural Environment



People who live close to green space experience better health outcomes and live longer, regardless of socio-economic status.

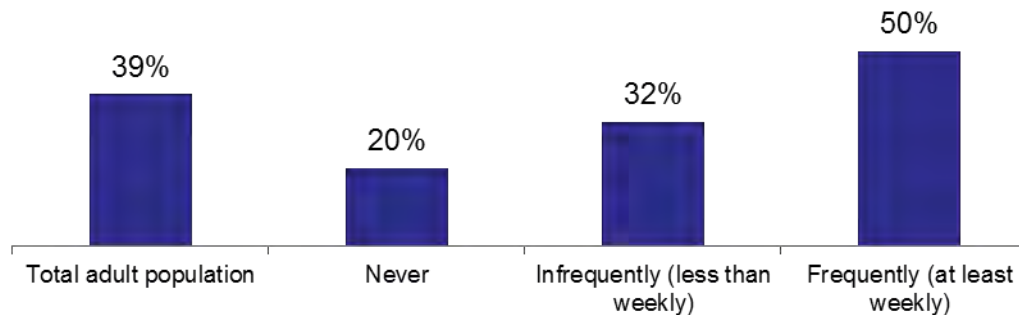
- Older people live longer in areas where there is more green space close to their homes.
- Children who live close to green spaces have higher levels of physical activity and are less likely to experience an increase in BMI over time.
- Living closer to green spaces is associated with lower mental distress.

# Link between the natural environment and physical activity



The more you visit the natural environment the more physically active you tend to be:

**Proportion of population taking part in 30 mins+ physical activity on 3 days or more per week**



Source: Hunt, A. Rickinson, M., Burt, J., Andrews, R., Wilson, V. and Stewart, D.; Visits to the natural environment in East London: analysis of data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment survey (2009-2013) ( in press)

# Visits to greenspace varies between social groups



- Millions of people in the English adult population visit the natural environment less than once a week.
- 5 million people (12%) visit once a fortnight (BAME population) – nearly 60% less than the average for the English adult population.

Source:19. BURT, J., STEWART, D., PRESTON, S. & COSTLEY, T. 2013. Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment Survey (2009 -2012): Difference in access to the natural environment between social groups within the adult English population. Natural England Data Reports, Number DAT003

	Average annual visits to the natural environment	Numbers (%) millions
English adult population	64	42 (100%)
BAME population	27	5.4 (13%)
Urban Deprived	40	4.2 (10%)
DE socio-economic group	50	11.5 (28%)
Aged 65+	55	8.1 (19%)
People with disabilities	56	7.4 (18%)

# Inequalities



- People living in the least prosperous areas are **TWICE** as likely to be physically inactive compared to those living in prosperous areas.
- Disabled people are half as likely as non-disabled people to be active
- 25% of people with learning difficulties take part in physical activity each month compared to 50% of people without a disability.

Source: PHE Everybody Active Everyday

## **Access to greenspace is NOT available to all:**

1. The most affluent 20% of wards in England have 5 times the amount of green space compared with the most deprived 10%.
2. Children living in deprived areas are 9 times less likely than those living in affluent areas to have access to green space.
3. Children in the lowest socio-economic groups are half as likely to visit the natural environment with their school as those in the highest.
4. Use of greenspace is lowest in those groups where health needs are often the greatest.

**Health inequality in England is estimated to cost £70bn a year.**

Source: Natural Solutions Fact Sheet 2013 and Institute of Health Equity ([Natural Solutions Report](#) 2014)

## The NHS Five Year Forward View

Projected funding gap of £30bn a year by 2020:

- Radical upgrade in prevention and public health
- Greater local provision and integration of health and social care services
- Greater collaboration with voluntary organisations and local communities
- Stronger public health-related powers for local Gov't
- Greater focus on services to children, mental health and the elderly



# Scaling up provision



Recent research into Care Farms found

1. Most farms cater for a range of vulnerable groups: people with learning difficulties (93%), autism spectrum disorders (84%), mental ill-health (75%) and young people at risk (64%).
2. Most care farms (82%) provide sessions lasting a full day, and the average care farm programme last for 30 weeks.
3. 7,000 people per week participate in care farming services
4. Majority of care farms (76%) are not currently running at full capacity.
5. Full capacity estimated to be 11,000 people per week in England and more than 13,000 across the UK

Potential for growth:

Currently 200 Care Farms in England out of a total of over 200,000 farms

Source: Care Farming defining the offer in England NECR 155

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6186330996342784>

# Conclusions



Farm-based Green Care or 'nature-based services', such as Let Nature Feed Your Senses, can be part of a low cost package of locally delivered services, provided by the community which address health inequality, improve health outcomes and deliver other social, educational and environmental benefits.

**There is also significant capacity for growth of Green Care services**

**However to achieve this outcome we must:**

1. be ambitious and scale up our activities to meet rising demand
2. provide a more coherent set of services by working together and being responsive to the users/commissioners of our services
3. provide better access to those services for both users and commissioners of health and social services
4. be creative in our solutions, and
5. fearless in our outreach to new audiences.



## For more information:

Published MENE Reports and NE Commissioned Reports and more details on the survey methods are on the Natural England website: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/61004>.

Other Outdoors for All information can be found on

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605090108/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/outdoorsforall/default.aspx>

Contact: Sarah Preston, Senior Adviser, Outdoors for All.  
[sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk). Tel 0300 060 0523



# Where Nature Feeds the Senses in Sandwell – a View from Public Health

Angela Blair, Public Health Sandwell



Supported by

