

POLICY BRIEF

Greenspace



Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a healthy, full life — but not everyone in our country has an equal opportunity to achieve this. CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, promotes a package of tried and tested policies that ensure all people in our largest cities have access to healthy choices.

Together, with visionary city leaders, we can make sure that all people have access to a safe place to live, a healthy body and mind, and a thriving environment. Policy solutions like Greenspace can help make communities healthier and resolve critical health disparities — now and decades down the road.

Public greenspaces, from parks to trails to public commons, help families be healthier in body and mind and keep our environment thriving. Simply walking or sitting for about 15 minutes in a park can significantly improve daily mental health. Greenspace policies ensure all families, not just a few, have access to public land, nature, and their benefits.

THE GREENSPACE CHALLENGE

- Access to greenspace, including community schoolyards, public parks, walking trails, and other open spaces, is associated with improved mental health and sense of well-being among city residents.
- Other benefits associated with Greenspace include reduced violence, decreased mortality, lower heart rate, improved attention and mood, and a higher likelihood of physical activity.
- Neighborhoods that were historically subjected to redlining, the systematic practice of denying loans and other resources to people based on their race or ethnicity, tend to have significantly less tree cover and experience hotter temperatures than non-redlined neighborhoods.

A HEALTHY SOLUTION: GREENSPACE

- **Improves Mental Health** — Parks help everyone have a healthier mind and body. When a Philadelphia project turned vacant lots into “pocket parks,” feelings of depression decreased among residents in those neighborhoods compared to residents in other neighborhoods.
- **Helps the Environment Thrive** — Tree coverage helps cool neighborhoods and reduce heat-related illnesses for residents — benefits that can extend as far as a half-mile from park boundaries.
- **Cuts Pollution** — Green infrastructure can reduce runoff and filter out up to 95% of stormwater pollutants.
- **Saves Lives** — A \$100 increase in county-level per capita investment in parks and recreation was associated with 3.4 fewer deaths per year per 100,000 people from 1980-2010.















AN INITIATIVE OF

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Going For Gold

CityHealth annually rates Greenspace policies in cities with criteria that set the “gold standard” in each policy area. These criteria were developed with input from national experts, are backed by evidence, and work to reduce or remove systemic barriers to health equity. Medals are awarded to cities that meet the elements necessary for the best quality policy (gold), a good quality policy (silver), and a passable quality policy (bronze). Cities with no policy, or that don’t meet the minimum threshold for a bronze medal, receive no medal.

GREENSPACE MEDAL CRITERIA			
			
1. The city council has adopted or ratified a policy or formalized planning goal either to a) achieve 100% park access within a 10-minute walk for all residents by 2040 or b) increase tree canopy coverage, with a specific measurable goal and time frame.			
2. The city’s public spending on parks and greenspace is at or above the national median per capita, and the city maintains that level of spending within \$10.*			
3. Either the city’s 10-minute walk policy or its tree canopy goal clearly prioritizes underserved and disinvested neighborhoods, based on racial and/or economic equity, and/or data-driven park need.			

* The public funding data used for the Greenspace medals do not include programmatic investments. These measures are adjusted for local cost of living and inflation. These funding data are derived from the annual City Park Facts survey conducted by the Trust for Public Land.

PITTSBURGH’S GREENSPACE PLAN

Although 91 percent of Pittsburghers live within a 10-minute walk of a park, more than 28,000 residents still don’t have ready access to greenspace. In 2018, the city unveiled its OnePGH plan, Pittsburgh’s first comprehensive resiliency strategy, which included a commitment that every resident would be just a 10-minute walk from a park. The city also aims to stabilize its tree canopy by planting 100,000 trees by 2030. Pittsburgh’s plan is supported by a fund that blends public, private, and philanthropic dollars.