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Global research suggests forests and green spaces have a positive effect on people's health

CHAMPAIGN, III., U.S. – The urban forest is increasingly being recognized for its benefits to public health and wellbeing. As a result, more European cities are including green spaces in their community health policies and promoting trees in their climate-change agendas.

[The International Society of Arboriculture \(ISA\)](#) credits partnerships between medical professionals and tree experts for making headway on today's global health-challenges, including obesity, heart disease, and nutrition.

"Research shows that the presence of trees in a community can encourage people to be more physically active and positively affects their attitudes and behaviors," says Jim Skiera, Executive Director of ISA. "We are just beginning to establish relationships between public health experts and urban forestry, but we know much more about the positive link between health and nature today, so there has been tremendous progress."

Currently, tree experts are working with the [World Health Organization](#) to develop guidelines for improving human access to green space in urban areas. The [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#) also include making more green space available, especially for young people and the elderly.

"In Canada, urban foresters have been part of a policy to fight skin cancer and in Sweden, a regional government has partnered with a university to treat people with burnout in therapeutic gardens," says Dr. Cecil Konijnendijk, a noted expert on urban forestry and urban greening in the department of landscape architecture, planning and management at Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. "A colleague of mine in the Netherlands has partnered with a health insurance company for a program to take people out on nature walks to help alleviate stress."

Among the ways trees improve public health:

- ◆ A national study in the United Kingdom showed that people exposed to the greenest environments have lowest levels of health inequality related to income deprivation. Physical environments that promote good health are important to reduce socioeconomic health inequalities. (Mitchell and Popham, 2008)
- ◆ Residents in the Netherlands with only 10% green space within 1km of their home had a 25% greater risk of depression and a 30% greater risk of anxiety disorders than those with the highest degree of green space nearby. (Maas et al., 2009)
- ◆ A worldwide review of scientific literature showed that an urban park was on average 0.94 °C cooler in the day than the surrounding urban area, making warm days more tolerable. (Bowler et al., 2010)

Dr. Konijnendijk adds, "When asked how they feel after spending time in green spaces, volunteering for tree work, or in a community garden, people are consistently telling us that they are in better health and less stressed compared to the time before they engaged in these activities."

Mark Hartley, an ISA Certified Arborist and tree consultant in Penrith, Australia, believes planting more trees—when appropriate—is a way to keep the momentum going worldwide in support of tree benefits on human health.

“As the pressures of urbanization increase, we need to place a far greater value on the urban forest,” says Hartley. “Our front line workers need to better understand the benefits of trees to help make decisions before they consider tree removal. We need to keep conveying this message to our policymakers in order for the number of trees to increase.”

For more information on the health benefits of trees, visit www.treesaregood.org.

ABOUT ISA

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Champaign, Ill., U.S., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world. To promote the importance of arboriculture, ISA manages the consumer education website, www.treesaregood.org, which fulfills the association’s mission to help educate the public about the importance and value of proper tree care. Also, as part of ISA’s dedication to the care and preservation of shade and ornamental trees, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry. For more information on ISA and Certified Arborists, visit www.isa-arbor.com.

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