



Health and the Natural Environment

Natural England Sarah Preston : Outdoors for All Programme

25 Year Environment Plan – Government plan led by Defra

- ‘We want ours to be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it’
- Connecting people with the environment so everyone can understand, enjoy and appreciate its benefits, and spend more time in green spaces

NHS Five Years Forward View 2014

- Social prescribing - key for NHS - model that focuses on wider individual and community engagement.
- Collaboration - Health & Wellbeing Boards, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, Sustainability Transformation Plans, Local Nature Partnerships.
- Health inequalities – CCG duties under Health and Social Care Act 2012

Conservation 21 – Natural England’s Conservation Strategy for 21st century

- Putting People at the Heart.
- **Priority areas**
 - Delivering health and wellbeing benefits
 - Delivering benefits for access and recreation
 - Encouraging and helping people to take positive decisions and actions for the environment.

Outdoors for All programme – ‘fair access for all to a good quality natural environment ‘



- MENE – Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment. Annual omnibus survey of visits to natural environment – 2009 to present.
- Inequalities in social and living conditions are driving health inequalities.
- Those who could most benefit from the natural environment for their health are using it the least..
- Report - 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

- MENE analysis shows us that five social groups are visiting the natural environment far less than the rest of the population, particularly Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, people living in urban deprived areas and people from low income households (DE socio-economic groups).
 - The average adult in England visits the natural environment 65 times a year.
 - People from DE socio economic groups visit the natural environment on average 50 visits a year,
 - People living in deprived urban areas visit on average 40 times a year,
 - People from BAME communities the frequency falls to less than half the national average with only 27 visits a year.
 - People aged 65+ 55 visits per person per year
 - People with a disability or long-term illness 56 visits per person per year

Evidence* shows the health benefits of access to good quality green spaces....

Improved mental health & wellbeing



Reduced obesity



Increased longevity

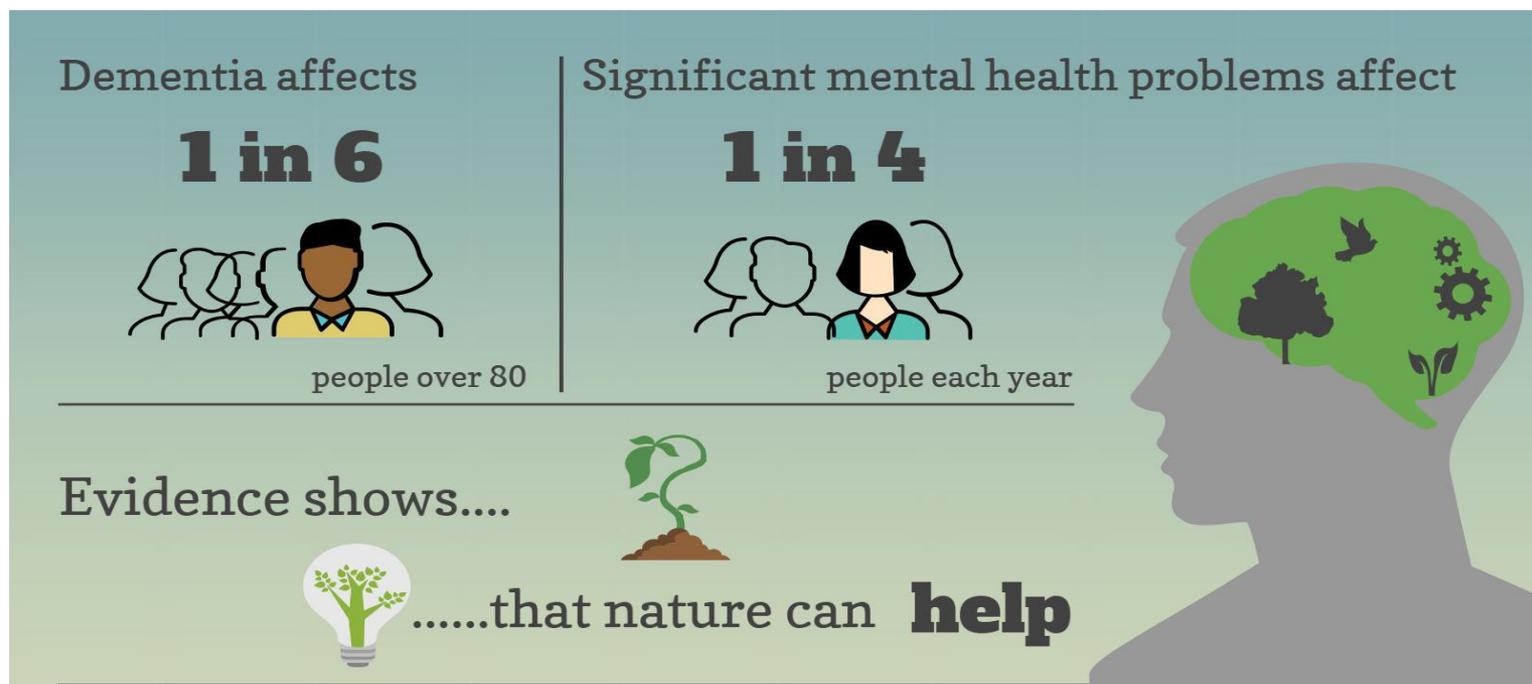


People feel healthier



Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment Conference 2016 *Ref EIN018, EIN019, EIN020, EIN021

- Key audiences are also priority concerns for government – increasing levels of incidence, are a major challenge to health service, escalating costs etc.



Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment Conference 2016

Research

- Review of nature-based interventions for mental health
 - offers participants the opportunity to undertake practical environmental activities within a social context
- Natural England - series of evidence briefings that summarise the relationships between the natural environment and a range of outcomes. These include
 - mental health and dementia
 - physical activity
 - obesity
 - physiological health

Nature based interventions for mental healthcare, such as Care Farming, have multiple benefits*:

Reduction in depression, stress & anxiety



Increased social contact, inclusion & feeling of belonging



Improved self esteem, confidence & mood



Increase in meaningful activity & personal achievement



Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment Conference 2016

*Ref NECR204

- Research report 'Greening Dementia' showed
- Multiple Benefits
 - Improved emotional state: reduced stress, agitation, anger, apathy and depression
 - Improved physical health: skin health, fitness, sleeping patterns, eating patterns
 - Improved verbal expression
 - Improved memory and attention
 - Improved awareness: multi-sensory engagement and joy
 - Improved sense of well-being, independence, self-esteem and control

The report reveals

- Motivations of people living with dementia to go outdoors
- Barriers needed to be overcome to improve access to the outdoors and maximise the benefits.
- Activities are a key motivator
- Most popular activities include wildlife or bird watching and informal walking
- Walking outdoors was seen as vitally important by carers for its calming effect.
- Water, such as lakes, rivers or the coastline were the most popular places to visit, with city parks and public gardens also popular.

- Costs UK an estimated £7.4 billion. (900 million to NHS alone)
- Evidence - use of accessible, high quality natural environments is associated with higher rates of activity.
- Chief Medical Officer (2004) At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health. DoH
- Another one in the series of evidence briefings focuses on 'connection to nature' – growing evidence that 'Nature Connection' mediates a number of health benefits, educational outcomes and pro-environmental behaviours. Different from contact/visiting the environment, but more to do with people's sense of relationship with nature.



NATURAL
ENGLAND

Other Evidence and Reports



Public Health England - Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to [greenspaces](#) 2014

NICE - [Guidelines](#) on Physical Activity and Environment

Defra and University of Exeter - [Evidence](#) Statement on the links between natural environments and human health 2017

World Health Organisation [Urban](#) Green spaces and health – A review of evidence 2017 and

[WHO Urban](#) Green Space Interventions and Health – A review of Impacts and Effectiveness 2017

- [Improving](#) the public's health: a resource for local authorities. – section on green space planning The King's Fund 2013.
- [TCPA](#) Journal 'Public health evidence to support green infrastructure planning' 2015
- [UK Parliament Office](#) of Science and Technology post note – Greenspace and Health

Transforming Mental Health & Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment Conference



Purpose

- Brought together key policy makers, researchers, service providers and decision makers from across the health, social care and natural environment sectors to:
- Built a shared understanding of what the natural environment can offer and its potential to contribute to preventative and therapeutic mental health and dementia interventions.
- Identified practical ways to enable the commissioning and delivery of nature-based solutions.
- Developed a conversation between natural environment and health and social care sectors, to ensure that nature-based health and wellbeing services can be shaped to meet potential demand.

In the context of mental health and dementia, the conference identified four key barriers:

- Need for a more consistent GP referral mechanism .
- Need for a funding mechanism so service provision can both grow and be sustainable.
- Need for robust quality assurance so GPs have greater confidence in the quality and consistency of services.
- Need to increase awareness of GPs, and health and social care commissioners, of the nature-based interventions on offer in their local area, and the health benefits these could bring.

Social Prescriptions – what are they?



- Seen by NHS as key tool to reduce the costs of primary care.
- A mechanism where GPs and other primary care professionals refer patients with health or social care needs to non-medical activities to improve their health and well-being.
- Evidence of benefits to patients of social prescription include – reduced hospital admissions, GP consultations, social isolation, reliance on medication, improved health and wellbeing.
- There is significant potential for the natural environment and nature-based interventions to be part of this offer.
- Investigating with NHS England the how to influence from a ‘green prescription perspective’ the social prescription mechanism.

- Quality Assurance - working with NHS, Defra on a QA framework for nature based services.
- Raising awareness of nature environment offer within the health sector – natural environment workshop at national Social Prescription conference. Also at regional SP networks and workshops.
- Capacity building some nature-based providers – eg care farming, social and therapeutic horticulture sector and dementia awareness training for natural environment sector.
- Other providers are increasingly their coverage such as Green Gyms WfH, Environmental conservation and green exercise.
- So with multiple activity the nature-based offer is credible and strengthening - able to address key health sector concerns.



THANK YOU
Sarah Preston

sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk

[Natural England Access to Evidence - Outdoors for all](#)