



**HEALTHY  
PARKS  
HEALTHY  
PEOPLE  
BAY AREA**

*Our mission is to ensure the health and wellbeing of all Bay Area residents, especially those with high health needs, through regular use and enjoyment of parks and public land.*

## Overview and Background

In the past decade, rates of obesity and associated chronic diseases have skyrocketed in children and adults. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) documents that more than one-third of adults in the United States—more than 72 million people—are considered medically obese and therefore more likely to develop major chronic diseases such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These health problems are the result of the dramatic decline in physical activity. Lack of physical activity and poor diet has been established as the causes of an unhealthy, overweight nation. The CDC estimates that more than 40 percent of the U.S. population is sedentary.

The epidemics that result from an indoor, sedentary lifestyle require action from all sectors of society. Parks and public lands are an underutilized, low-cost healthcare resource that can and must be used to help solve the problem. Often available for free or low cost, **parks can provide a health resource for communities with some of the highest needs.** The odds of being healthy can depend very much on the community in which you live. The Healthy Parks Healthy People: Bay Area (HPHP: Bay Area) initiative fulfills a clear need to increase access to parks and develop them as health resources for the whole family—especially those in the highest health need communities.

Healthy Parks, Healthy People is an international initiative, founded by Parks Victoria, Australia, that has been embraced by thirty-five nations. The premise recognizes that **individual and community health are reliant on healthy parks systems** – and that healthy parks systems are integrally linked to the value placed on it by the community. Today, half of the world's population now lives in urban areas, thus it has never been more important to ensure that our connection to and contributions from the natural environment are not lost. Our health, and the health of our communities, depends on it.

In April 2012, the HPHP: Bay Area regional coalition was officially formed. **The goal of this collective impact collaborative is to coordinate programmatic efforts and raise awareness through public education about the symbiotic value of health and parks.**

Additionally, as the San Francisco Bay Area is widely seen as the incubator for innovation and trends, park and healthcare providers hope that this regional initiative can be a catalyst for broad policy change that advances the adoption of measureable recreational models to support the delivery of healthcare to improve the physical and mental health of our population.

In June 2012, East Bay Regional Park District, the Institute at the Golden Gate, and Golden Gate National Recreation Area held an invitational session to recruit a steering group to lead the formation of HPHP: Bay Area. Thirty-four representatives from sixteen Bay Area organizations attended, including doctors, public health workers, researchers, and parks professionals. Participants discussed their current



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activities in outreach to high health need communities and identified areas that would benefit most from multi-organizational collaboration.

A group of eleven leaders continued to meet monthly from July 2012 to clarify the vision and coalesce around common goals. In a continued effort to represent and reflect the Bay Area communities served by the coalition agencies, **the leadership group has grown to represent forty organizations representing nine Bay Area counties.** These contributing partners have set short-term and long-term benchmarks for the coalition through a collaborative process. From existing resources alone, the partners have pulled together a strong suite of programs that have the potential to reach over 7 million residents throughout the San Francisco Bay region.

**The collaborative aims to improve the health and well-being of all Bay Area residents, especially those with the highest health needs, through regular use and enjoyment of parks.** Goals of the collaborative include:

- Increasing access and utilization of parks by communities that are historically under-represented and/or suffering from high risk of chronic disease.
- Ensuring that park facilities and programs encourage physical activity and social connection, particularly for people who have been physically and socially inactive.

To implement long-term goals into a regional effort that will improve the health of Bay Area residents, the parks agencies proposed a multi-county program of monthly activities and outings that would introduce visitors to safe, low-impact walking, and physical activity in nature. Health and social service providers will refer their patients (particularly those who've been physically and/or socially inactive) to regularly scheduled programs in every Bay Area county. First Saturday program objectives include:

- *Enhanced Programming to Promote New Physical and Social Activity:* On the first Saturday of every month, selected parks in each county will welcome new visitors with group stretching exercises, encouragement to meet other participants, an orientation to the natural features of the trail, the health benefits of the activity, and guided group walks.
- *Simple Schedule to Encourage Initial Participation:* To encourage first-time visitors to parks, the schedule and location of the Saturday programs will be simple and consistent.
- *Regional Consistency to Maximize Support and Outreach:* A consistent regional effort would facilitate the support of organizations with a multi-county presence or collaboration, including healthcare systems, media outlets, transit authorities, and potential funders.

*For more information or to get involved contact:*

*Donna Leong, Health Program Manager, [dleong@parksconservancy.org](mailto:dleong@parksconservancy.org), 415-561-3559*