ECOSYSTEM BENEFITS OF GREEN SPACE FOR HEALTH

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**Background**

- For many people in Ireland, economic development has come with the cost of physical activity and options to connect with nature that have been designed out of daily life.
- Spatial planning that has prioritised a range of issues above green space access and a ‘silos mentality’ which has separated health initiatives from policy interventions surrounding the natural and built environments.
- As a result, many people in Ireland now live in ‘obesogenic environments’ that hinder the integration of physical activity into daily routines and diminish the psychological well-being arising from contact with the natural world.
- However, recent years have witnessed an increasing recognition of the ecosystem services supplied by high quality green space in promoting health and well-being across all age and socio-economic cohorts.

- The link between environmental conditions and human health is well-established in the literature, with the environment viewed as one of the key determinants of health alongside inherited characteristics, lifestyle, and social and economic variables (Barton, 2009).

- While there is a longstanding recognition of the negative impacts on health of environmental ‘bads’ such as poor air quality and the distribution of various forms of pollution, more recently increasing attention has focused on the potential positive influence on health of environmental ‘goods’, such as access to ‘nature/biodiversity and the distribution of urban green space (Lake and Townsend, 2006).

- Ecosystem services and an Ecosystem Approach to policy-making have emerged as key and novel concepts to further our understanding of the relationship between health and ecological integrity, both within rural and urban environments.

**The Eco-Health Project Focus**

Eco-Health explores the health benefits of ecosystems services as a means to supply evidence and tools for developing health promoting environments or ‘healthy places’.

The project focuses on the ecosystems services provided by green spaces for health and the well-being that they provide to all socio-demographic cohorts.

**Key Project Aims and Objectives**

**Aims**

- To address the concepts of healthy places, health-promoting environments and ‘green infrastructure’ as a means to inform policy and practice for enhancing ecosystem benefits for health in urban and rural settlements.

To identify and assess the health benefits of ecosystem services in an international and national context and identify policy implementation pathways for enhancing the health benefits from a high quality environment.

**Objectives**

1. To provide a state of knowledge review of ecosystem services and health benefits;
2. To provide an understanding of the relationship of ecosystem services and health benefits across the life-course i.e. distribution of and access to health promoting environments and social equity;
3. To develop a typology of health promoting environments at a range of spatial scales based on GI assets;
4. To develop a national evidence base for ecosystem services and health benefits;
5. To develop recommendations and guidelines to enhance health promoting environments and to integrate an ecosystem approach into relevant policy streams;
6. To build capacity among key professional stakeholders to enhance and create health promoting environments.

**Work Plan**

**Dissemination**

- The principal output will be evidence-informed policy, practice and design recommendations to maximise health benefits from green space, operationalising Green Infrastructure within various policy domains.
- Commitment to knowledge transfer and engagement throughout and beyond project.

**References**

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