

# POLICY BRIEF

## What influences park use and physical activity?

Translational Behavioral Medicine

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Citation: S. Slater and N. Colabianchi (2013). Society of Behavioral Medicine Position Statement on supporting robust, well-designed, safe, and accessible community parks. [http://www.sbm.org/UserFiles/file/parks-brief\\_statement\\_for\\_website\\_updated.pdf](http://www.sbm.org/UserFiles/file/parks-brief_statement_for_website_updated.pdf)

### Policy recommendations

- Increase federal funding for community parks
- Work with local governments to require the development of parks, playgrounds, and open space in its zoning codes and/or to incentivize developers to include parks, playgrounds, and open space in future developments, particularly in rural areas
- Increase appropriation of funds to renovate multiple use parks and playgrounds in urban areas
- Work with local governments and school districts to develop community or shared use agreements to allow for the use of school playgrounds, gymnasiums, and other physical activity settings and facilities by community members
- Provide free or reduced park programming in low income communities

### Research and practice recommendations

- Take steps to increase park safety. For example, work with local governments to develop community policing partnerships targeted at parks and/or scheduling park clean up days to remove litter and graffiti from park equipment and features.
- Undertake further research on which park features have the greatest impact on physical activity behavior across all ages and what other factors will increase park utilization and park-based physical activity

*Background* Evidence shows that people of all ages and across all races and ethnicities are more active when they can access parks, and greater park use has been associated with lower body mass indices.

*Park settings* Types and conditions of park features as well as park programming influence park use and physical activity. For example, walking trails, sports fields, and courts attract visitors to parks, and parks with multiple features are associated with increased physical activity. Parks that offer more recreational programs also attract more users, but costs may hinder usage among those of lower income.

*Parks are not all equal* Public parks may be open to everyone, but there is substantial variation in availability and condition of park features across neighborhood demographics and socioeconomic status. For example, rural areas often lack publicly available parks and green space, which negatively affect options for physical activity. In contrast, urban areas have more parks per capita than rural areas; however, these parks may be less inviting due to damaged equipment, graffiti, and garbage and poor lighting. There are also significant differences in the types of park features available in lower income neighborhoods. Parks in low income urban neighborhoods often lack some of the features that are associated with increased physical activity, e.g., walking trails.

### Bottom line:

These suggested that policy, research, and practice recommendations can benefit both urban and rural areas and create safe and inviting parks that can facilitate increased physical activities and potentially influence weight management.