



Freeway Park in Seattle. / Freeway Park Association



WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

Seattle

Health and Outdoors Opportunities Assessment

More Access to Green Space, Better Health

Did you know your zip code determines more of your health than your genetic code? Where and how we live in and around Seattle makes a difference in how long we live and the cost of our healthcare. When more people have access to trees, trails, parks, and other natural areas, there are measurable improvements in mental health, physical activity, social cohesion, air quality and other social determinants of health (See Fig. 1). **Below are some ideas on how partners in Seattle can plan, build, and maintain green spaces in way that promote better health. A more detailed report is available on Willamette Partnership’s website.**

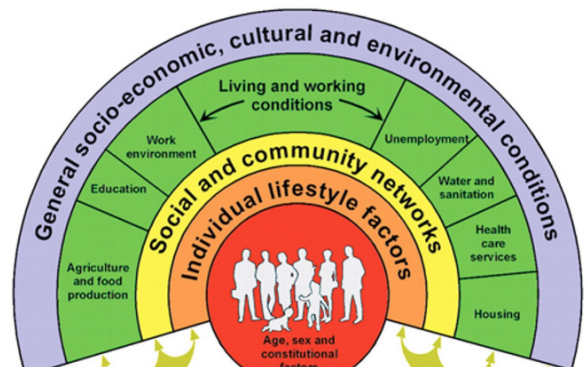
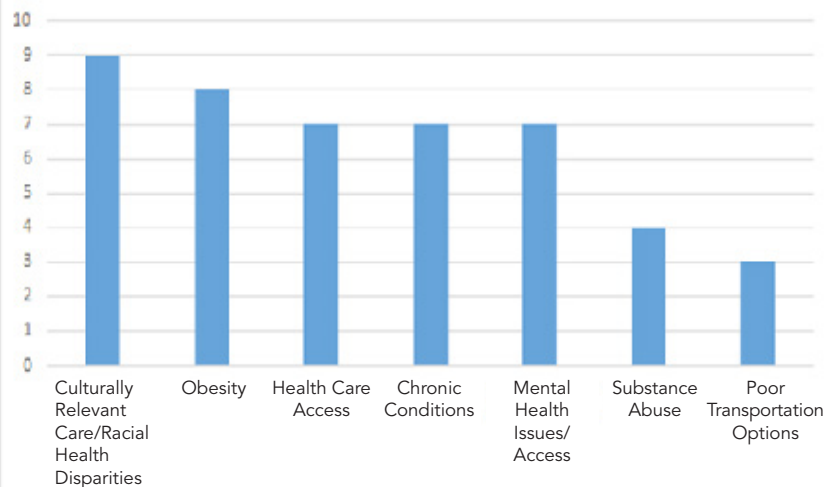


Figure 1. Social determinants of health refer to the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, and work. Health organizations are increasingly looking upstream to these determinants to create community wellness, prevent chronic disease, and increase health care effectiveness.

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS FOR SEATTLE

Thirteen hospitals and King County defined community health needs for the Seattle area shown in the chart to the right.

Common Health Priorities - City of Seattle Hospitals



OPPORTUNITIES TO LINK GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE TO HEALTH

In 2015, Seattle's nonprofit hospitals¹ spent an estimated \$41 million on community health improvement. Many area hospitals currently focus the community health spending on diabetes prevention and culturally-relevant access to healthcare. Hospitals and the county health department are already spending money on activities such as:

- Group Health collaboratives with the Cascade Bicycle Club, YMCA, and Providence Health on getting people out biking and running.
- Seattle Children's runs healthy eating and active living programs.
- Highline invests in walkability and exercise-focused programs.
- Seattle Cancer Care is working to engage with Latino and immigrant communities.

With slight adjustments, more and better access to green space could create even better health outcomes. Some recommended actions could include:

- Ask questions about who benefits and who is burdened by infrastructure investments early on in planning, and with an eye toward health outcomes;
- Map, plan for, and realize the multiple benefits of green infrastructure (e.g., King County and Seattle Foundation's Communities of Opportunity project is taking a holistic approach to health in specific parts of the City);
- Homelessness and rapid growth/displacement are two health crises that cannot be ignored. Need to link green space opportunities into those conversations;
- Keep up the work to connect the various interdisciplinary efforts underway in the City (e.g., Equity and Environment Agenda, Outside Citywide, King County's Land Conservation Initiative, Accountable Communities of Health, Communities of Opportunity, etc.);
- Root the work in community leadership, and use the community and in-house expertise available in Seattle; and
- Engage with schools to link green space, food, and community engagement.

¹ Only 8 of Seattle's 13 hospitals broke out community benefit spending by category. All community benefit spending for all hospitals totalled \$577 million in 2015.

CONTACTS

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