

## **VEAC CENTRAL WEST INVESTIGATION 2017**

Studies show that contact with nature is important for mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual wellbeing. Inclusion of the Wellsford State Forest in the Greater Bendigo National Park will not only allow for better stewardship of this public land but also increase the likelihood that the health and wellbeing of the Bendigo community and visitors will be enhanced. A literature review conducted by Australian academics (Maller et al., 2005; Maller et al., 2008) include the following points on the importance of connection with nature for human health and wellbeing:

- Access to nature plays a vital role in human health, wellbeing and development.
- Disengagement of humans from the natural environment is detrimental to health and wellbeing.
- 'Green nature' can reduce crime, foster psychological wellbeing, reduce stress, boost immunity, enhance productivity, and promote healing.
- Wilderness and related studies clearly demonstrate that people in a natural environment affects people positively, particularly in terms of psychological health.
- There are multiple benefits from even brief encounters with nature, or experiencing nature on a smaller scale.
- The number of people seeking nature-based activities is increasing.
- It is likely that human contact with nature builds social capital.
- Urban planning should ensure that communities have access to nature and parks may be the only means of accessing nature for a majority of people living in urban environments.
- The initial evidence documenting the positive effects of nature on blood pressure, cholesterol levels, stress reduction, and outlook on life warrant consideration of urban planners to include access to nature to mitigate against cardiovascular and mental illness; two of the biggest threats to population health in Australia.

In addition to the finding from the review outlined above a quick search through the empirical data shows:

- Moving to greener urban areas is associated with sustained mental health improvements, suggesting that environmental policies to increase urban green space may have sustainable public health benefits (Alcock et al., 2014).
- Walking in nature or viewing pictures of nature can improve 'directed-attention abilities ...' (Berman et al., 2003 p.1217).
- There are cognitive and affective benefits of interacting with nature to individuals with MDD and further, interacting with nature may be useful clinically as a supplement to existing treatments for MDD (Berman et al., 2012).
- Outdoor education promotes lifelong physical, emotional and spiritual well-being (Cottrell & Raadik-Cottrell 2010).
- In a greener environment people report fewer symptoms and have better perceived health. There are differences between subgroups of the population for certain health indicators. (DeVries et al., 2003).
- Nature plays a nuanced and influential role in the everyday lives of older adults. Both green and blue spaces can have a significant impact on physical, mental, and social health in later life. Landscapes embedded with therapeutic qualities included parks, gardens, street

greenery, lakes, and the ocean. These spaces are a motivator for physical activity and promote 'feelings of renewal, restoration, and rejuvenation' (p.99). They are reported as essential for social interactions (e.g. planned with family and friends, unplanned with neighbours). There is a pleasant collective experience of nature (social inclusion; community) (Findlay et al., 2015).

- Patients with a tree view have shorter postoperative hospital stays, have fewer negative evaluative comments from nurses, take fewer moderate and strong analgesic doses, and have slightly lower scores for minor postsurgical complications (Ulrich, 1984).
- Participants exposed to nature, valued intrinsic goals more and extrinsic goals less than they had before exposure. Intrinsic aspirations are defined as 'prosocial and other-focused value orientations, and extrinsic aspirations [as]... self-focused value orientations' (Weinstein et al., 2009 p.1315).

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