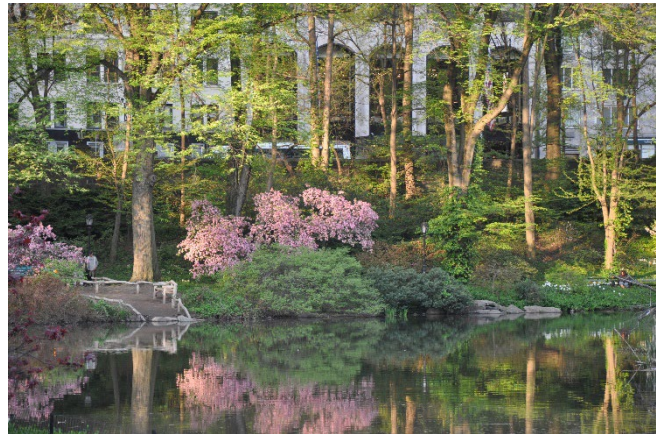


People's Health Benefits from Forests, Trees and Green Spaces in All Stages of Life, Global Report Confirms

Existing evidence strongly supports a wide range of health benefits associated with forests. These include brain development in children, mental health and wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and cardiometabolic health in adults of all ages.

Forests, trees and green spaces are also crucial in enhancing social interactions and social health and have positive effects on cognitive ageing and longevity.

The global scientific evidence of the multiple types of benefits that forests, trees and green spaces have on human health has now been comprehensively assessed by an international and interdisciplinary team of scientists.



Central Park in New York offers oases of calm amidst the hustle of the city. Photo John Parrotta (USFS), IUFRO.

The outcome is presented in a major peer-reviewed report titled **"Forests and Trees for Human Health: Pathways, Impacts, Challenges and Response Options"** by the [Global Forest Expert Panels \(GFEP\) Programme](#) of the [International Union of Forest Research Organizations](#) (IUFRO).

The report highlights the important contribution of forests and trees to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals, particularly Goal 3 (SDG 3), which aims to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

Contemporary human health challenges differ across the globe. In urban settings there is a higher dominance of non-communicable diseases such as heart diseases and diabetes. In rural and forest-dependent communities, health is mainly related to interactions with forests through food, medicinal plants, and clean water as well as infectious diseases.

"Forest-derived medicines, for example, are prominent in Indigenous health care systems. Many of the drugs upon which Western medicine depends are also derived from forest plants and were discovered as part of the traditional health systems of forest peoples," says **Expert Panel member Dr. Patricia Shanley** from People and Plants International, New Jersey, USA.

The positive impacts of exposure to forests and green spaces on mental, physical and social health are increasingly being considered. In the USA, the Nature Rx program, for example, encourages medical prescriptions on spending time in nature for health purposes. Such programs are not actually new, but a re-emergence of the therapeutic use of nature that existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. University campuses in Americas and elsewhere are also beginning to promote time spent in nature and forests as an essential antidote to the stress of college life.

While forests, trees and green spaces affect human health at all stages, from the prenatal stage to the elderly, the significant impacts on children deserve particular attention, mainly because of repercussions in later life. Forests, trees and green space may affect the health of new-born infants through similar mechanisms that influence pregnancy outcomes of the mother: reduction of stress, mitigation of exposure to air pollution, noise and heat, and increased physical activity. Multiple studies including from the USA supported a positive association between birth weight and the natural environment around a mother's home address.

There is also increasing evidence associating nature contact with improved cognitive development in children. Studies from Canada found associations between cumulative exposure to natural environments and early life development, including dimensions of social competence, emotional maturity, language development and communication skills.

However, global crises such as climate change, land-use change, and biodiversity loss endanger the important role that forests and trees play for human health, as they are among the drivers behind wildland fires, heavy storms and severe heat, for example.

“The report underpins a One Health perspective, which recognizes that the health of humans, animals, plants, and the wider environment are closely linked and interdependent. It suggests that decision-makers in forest, health and related domains should also adopt more integrative perspectives for addressing forest-human health relations. By linking forest and human health policies and strategies, new and innovative solutions for health and forest challenges can be identified“, says **Expert Panel Chair Dr. Cecil Konijnendijk**, University of British Columbia, Canada.

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FORESTS AND TREES FOR HUMAN HEALTH: PATHWAYS, IMPACTS, CHALLENGES AND RESPONSE OPTIONS. A Global Assessment Report, IUFRO World Series Volume 41, Vienna 2023

Editors: Cecil Konijnendijk, Dikshya Devkota, Stephanie Mansourian and Christoph Wildburger

Download report and Policy Brief at:

<https://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/gfep-initiative/panel-on-forests-and-human-health/>

Media Toolkit with fact sheet at: <https://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/gfep-initiative/panel-on-forests-and-human-health/outreach-and-media/>

Watch launch webinar at: https://youtu.be/vzGnD_dGkxA

About IUFRO

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations ([IUFRO](#)) is a non-profit and non-governmental worldwide network of forest scientists, who work together on a voluntary basis to enhance the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. IUFRO unites more than 15,000 scientists in more than 630 member organizations – mainly public research centers and universities – in 115 countries and is a member of the International Science Council. The organization was founded in Germany in 1892 and has been headquartered in Vienna, Austria, since 1973. The [26th IUFRO World Congress](#) will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2024.

About GFEP

IUFRO's Global Forest Expert Panels ([GFEP](#)) Programme, established in 2007, combines diverse expertise to assess scientific knowledge about the role of forests and trees in achieving global goals and inform political decision making, mainly intergovernmental conventions and agreements of the United Nations (UN). GFEP primarily produces global scientific assessments conducted by interdisciplinary expert panels that unite leading scientists from around the world. Up to 2022, eight thematic reports in the frame of the IUFRO-led Joint Initiative of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests ([CPE](#)), and several related global and regional policy briefs have been successfully completed on a wide range of topics including food security, water, and climate change mitigation.

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