

PARKS AS A HEALTH TREATMENT: MEASURING THE DOSAGE

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1 **ABSTRACT**

Recent research confirms that parks are correlated with healthy lifestyles, and doctors are now prescribing them as treatment for a variety of ailments. The purpose of this study was to explore using validated metrics linking parks to public health goals in an index to assess the relative potential for a given site or collection of sites to produce positive public health outcomes. Health benefits are associated with exposure to and behavior within parks and greenspace. For this study the GRASP®Active Index was developed to indicate the relative potential of a given site to encourage greater use and/or physical activity. The index could be considered a measure of the relative “strength” of the park as a form of health treatment. The index combines an evaluation of park components (features that visitors go to a park to use, such as courts, fields, playgrounds, and picnic facilities) and other characteristics such as the availability of shade, seating, and drinking water, collected using the GRASP®-IT direct-observation audit tool with evidence from the literature incorporating Active Energy Expenditure (AEE) ratings system to generate an overall score for each park. The scores for individual parks can be aggregated to produce performance measurements for a collection of sites or locations, such as a park agency, planning district, or other jurisdiction. The resulting index was used to demonstrate its practicality as a way to compare the relative potential for physical activity generation between parks and to measure relative access to physical activity opportunities across a geographic area.

1.1 **Keywords**

Parks, Greenspace, Public Health, Landscape Performance