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jhv@markallengroup.com  
SALES EXECUTIVE: Frankie Bramble  
frankie.bramble@markallengroup.com  
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# Climate change and health outcomes

A survey conducted by conservation charity the Woodland Trust has revealed 96% of GPs questioned want the government to take action to combat health threats from climate change and extreme weather. They say policymakers must prioritise the environment to improve the health of the nation and ease pressure on the NHS. Around 70% also believe they should be able to prescribe time out in nature to ensure the health of future generations.

In terms of climate change and sustainability targets for the health service, the NHS outlined two 'clear and feasible' targets in its Delivering a Net Zero National Health Service report (NHS, 2022):

- ◆ The NHS Carbon Footprint: for the emissions we control directly, net zero by 2040
- ◆ The NHS Carbon Footprint Plus: for the emissions we can influence, net zero by 2045.

The Greener NHS National Programme was established to deliver the changes needed while delivering against 'broader environmental health priorities'. It adds that since the publication of the strategy, the NHS has made progress on its work, including 'embedding the response to climate change into the governance and strategy of every Trust, and investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy'.

As outlined on page 57 of this issue, a review has found that there are links between child health outcomes and climate change worldwide. Forty-nine studies were included in the review and the authors conclude that children will have increased prevalence of disease due to anthropogenic climate change, with effects on perinatal outcomes and respiratory disease.

For communities, the benefits of time in nature are clear. A 2021 review by Jimenez et al assessed a range of experimental and observational studies, and found evidence for associations between exposure to nature and improved cognitive function, brain activity, blood pressure, mental health, physical activity, and sleep. The authors concluded that observational studies are starting to assess the long-term effects of exposure to nature on depression, anxiety, cognitive function, and chronic disease, and recommend that future research should investigate the underlying mechanisms of the association between green space and health.



Jimenez MP, DeVille NV, Elliott EG et al. Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 May; 18(9): 4790. [https://doi: 10.3390/ijerph18094790](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094790)  
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**Polly Moffat**  
Editor, *JHV*  
[jhv@markallengroup.com](mailto:jhv@markallengroup.com)