

# Equitable Access and Community Health



## The East Bay Regional Park District

(Park District) is a regional champion for community health. Our facilities and amenities promote health and wellness throughout 73 regional parks, 1,250 miles of trails and 125,000 acres of open space. By partnering with community leaders, the system of parklands and trails in Alameda and Contra Costa counties serve as resources for healthful outdoor activity, as well as environmental and cultural education.

The Park District is part of the Bay Area collaborative known as Healthy Parks Healthy People which highlights the proven premise that **spending time in nature supports physical and mental health**. The Park District was one of the first to adopt the international initiative in the United States and helped launch the nine-county collaboration in 2011.

The Park District is committed to increasing access to and within parks. Parks and trails play a vital role in nurturing individual well-being and community health. To ensure parks and trails are welcoming to all, the Park District invests in and maintains universally accessible visitor use facilities, as well as developing more equitable access and programming.

Walkers in Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, Oakland

Photo: Calli Godfrey

# Healthy Parks Healthy People

**H**ealthy Parks Healthy People (HPHP) is a global movement to encourage healthy active experiences in the outdoors. HPHP also acknowledges the importance of taking care of parks and open space areas.

The East Bay Regional Park District is a leader in the United States HPHP initiative, working to reintegrate human, environmental and ecological health into the mission of public

parks. Serving 2.8 million people in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the Park District works closely with the U.S. National Park Service, national and regional park industry member agencies, and other global organizers to promote the use of parks as a pathway to good health. Through the HPHP program, the Park District is working on many fronts to support public health.



## PARKS RX AND STAY HEALTHY IN NATURE EVERY DAY (SHINE)

Nature as preventative intervention for chronic illnesses is the foundation for Parks Rx and Stay Health in Nature Every day (SHINE) programs. The Park District has been providing preventative care opportunities since 1934. The Park District will continue to invest resources and develop programming that equitably supports the health of the community. Partners in the Parks Rx and SHINE programs who have helped build health and resilience in patients and members include:

- UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland
- Kaiser Permanente
- Contra Costa Health Services
- The Latina Center
- Samuel Merritt University/Ethnic Health Institute
- Highland Hospital
- East Oakland Collective
- Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and Mental Health Association for Chinese Communities (MHACC)
- The Migrant Program – New Haven Adult Education
- Roots Community Health Clinic
- Los Medanos Community Health District

**“Spending time outside in parks is both fun and vital to your health! A walk in the park really is great for your health.”**

– *Dr. Nooshin Razani, MD, MPH  
Director, Center for Nature and Health at University of California, San Francisco*

# ENSURING PARKS AND TRAILS ARE WELCOMING TO ALL

Partnering with the Regional Parks Foundation, the Park District strives to lessen barriers and increase access for all to gain the health benefits from parks and trails. This includes investments in increased access to parks and ensuring a sense of welcome, safety and belonging.

The Park District has invested in active green transportation trails and pathways, as well as partnerships with local agencies to provide public transportation connections. The Park District also operates Parks Express, which provides buses for schools and community groups serving low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities.

Welcoming new visitors and building a sense of belonging are treasured priorities for the Park District. The Annual Trails Challenge Walk Program, Multicultural Wellness Walk and the Kids Healthy Outdoor Challenge are additional ways the Park District works to reduce barriers to parks. Get involved and read more about each program below!



Photo: Michael Stern

## ANNUAL TRAILS CHALLENGE PROGRAM

A free, annual self-guided hiking and bicycling program to explore the East Bay regional parks. To complete the challenge, participants hike five of the 20 trails in the Guidebook designed for all levels of fitness with wheelchair-accessible trails, as well as trails open to dogs, cyclists and equestrians.



Photo: M. Lee

## MULTICULTURAL WELLNESS WALKS AND PUBLIC WELLNESS PROGRAMS

The Park District holds seven Multicultural Wellness Walks annually attracting an average of 140 participants, ages 2 to 80+ representing the diverse communities of Alameda and Contra Costa counties. During the walk, participants are encouraged to relax their minds and engage their five senses. It often concludes with games and a meal which encourages connecting with family, making new friends, as well as building bridges of cultural understanding and appreciation. The warm memories of connection and feeling safe in the parks have empowered many to return on their own to hike and explore the parks.



Photo: Mona Kay

## KIDS HEALTHY OUTDOOR CHALLENGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Piloted in 2012, the Park District introduces children to local parks through classroom-based activities developed with educator-contributed content. In ten lessons, 3<sup>rd</sup> graders are connected to the outdoors and recreational opportunities. The lessons promote health and well-being, physical activity and life-long park usage. This curriculum is aligned with activities in the California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights which encourage young people to explore nature and discover California's heritage. The Park District provides transportation for each participating 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom to experience a day in an East Bay Regional Park. For many, this transportation provides the first-time exposure to parks and open space.



# Critical Access

## DURING GLOBAL PANDEMIC



Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, County health departments requested the Park District remain open during the 2020 shelter-in-place orders. The health departments cited parks and trails as providing safe, equitable outdoor spaces for essential activity. During the pandemic, parks and trails have provided essential low-cost activity close to home for California's diverse residents to exercise, relieve psychological stress, as well as meet with family and friends safely by following physical distancing guidelines. Parks have even provided outdoor office space for working meetings. During shelter-in-place, park and trail usage increased by 30 percent which translates to over 7.5 million additional visits.

Access to outdoor spaces is essential for all Californians. Equitable access is especially important for families and individuals in multifamily residential and apartment

units who do not have easy access to a backyard or patio for healthful outdoor activity. During the peak of the pandemic when childcare was limited, community centers were closed, and families needed a restful and rejuvenating space, parks became a safe haven for California's communities. The pandemic established an irrefutable fact: **parks are essential.**

Parks are a critical part of emergency preparedness and emergency response protocols. Bringing park professionals' voices to the table better serves communities in their time of need by providing resources, communal spaces and expertise. Parks provide critical infrastructure for essential outdoor activity which improves physical and psychological health. Park staff continues to engage in COVID-19 preparation discussions and stand ready for future emergency preparedness. Future funding for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and protections for park staff and visitors are crucial in preparing for safe and healthy emergency response.



## Community Support for Parks as Essential to Health



Temescal Regional Recreation Area, Oakland

- In a November 2021 survey, 97 percent of respondents identified efforts to expand and maintain parks and trails for community physical and mental health to be extremely/very/somewhat important.
- 75 percent of respondents in the same survey found the following message for increased public access investments convincing: COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of parks and open space for our psychological and physical health. The Park District has approximately 36,000 acres of public lands not yet open for public use. Increased funding would enable the safe opening of additional East Bay parks and trails. Now is the time to increase accessibility to our parks.
- A July 2020 survey found regional parks and trails being open during the pandemic was important to 92 percent of respondents.
- This same survey identified 94 percent of respondents believed parks and trails will play an equal or greater role in their life after the pandemic.
- Additionally, 61 percent found access to parks to be extremely important to their quality of life, specifically health and wellbeing.

## Funding and Policy Programs

### SUPPORT PARKS AND HEALTH

- **State**

- Coastal Conservancy Explore the Coast
- Outdoor Equity Program
- Special District Covid Relief Funding
- Statewide Park Program (DPR)
- Urban Greening

- **Federal**

- Land and Water Conservation Fund – Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program

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*Our parks' health and community's health are linked now more than ever. Please do not hesitate to reach out to our staff.*

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Regional Park District

*Healthy Parks Healthy People*

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*The East Bay Regional Park District is committed to ensuring access for all to parks and trails – it's a health issue!*