



Overview

Time outdoors can lead to many positive benefits for human [physical health](#), including reducing heart rate and blood pressure, lowering stress hormone levels, reducing inflammation, improving immune function, improving [sleep quality](#), reducing risk of [vision loss](#), and much more. State outdoor policy is [uniquely positioned](#) to address challenging public health crises through access to parks, green spaces, and active transportation by promoting physical well-being through connection with the outdoors.

Policy Options

- **Prescribe a Park:** [Vermont](#) and [South Dakota](#) empower healthcare providers to promote time outdoors by prescribing free park passes, and Maine [LD 1317](#) studies the use of state land in healthcare.
- **Outdoor Rx Grant Programs:** Washington's [successful](#) Parks Rx pilot program ([SB 5292](#)), the new Illinois Outdoor Rx program ([HB 1526](#)), and the proposed Arizona Outdoor Rx Program ([S.B.1552](#)) provide guidance and funding to promote health through outdoor access.
- **Encourage Active Transportation:** [Nearly 50% of Americans](#) would commute by bike if protected bike lanes were available. Washington [SB 5975](#) is investing \$1.3 billion in non-motorist safety with [bicycle-friendly federal funds](#), Tennessee [HB 685/SB 728](#) identifies roads endangering cyclists and pedestrians, and Maine [LD 1674](#) requires large construction projects to protect cyclists.
- **Link Active Transportation to Recreation:** Alabama [S.B.298](#) is strategically linking and improving existing trails and Illinois [H.B.5277](#) would establish a need-based Transit-to-Trails grant program to link public transportation to public outdoor recreation sites. Transportation is one of the [most significant barriers](#) to outdoor recreation.
- **Share Schoolyards With the Public:** Opening up schoolyards as public space in off-hours would connect [millions of Americans](#) to nearby greenspace and quality exercise facilities. Hawaii [H.C.R. 90/S.C.R. 30](#) would request for the Department of Education to offer access to school recreational facilities during off-school hours and non-school days.

CASE STUDY



Disabled people, [13% of all Americans](#), also need outdoor access and the benefits of quality time outdoors. Unfortunately, outdoor recreation sites often aren't required by federal law to be accessible, so outdoor resources are rarely designed with disabled people in mind. Building on Colorado [HB23-1296](#) (2023) studying the rights and needs of disabled communities accessing state outdoor spaces, Iowa [H.F. 2364](#) studies disability access in state parks. Similarly, Virginia [H.B.1186](#) established a two year all-terrain power wheelchair pilot program to develop guidelines and processes for providing all-terrain power wheelchairs in state parks.

Other Resources

- [Outdoor Wellness: Mental Health Factsheet - NCEL](#)
- [A Policy Framework For Joint Use: Enabling and Supporting Community Use of K-12 Public School Facilities](#) - U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 21st Century School Fund
- [U.S. DOT: Bicycles and Transit Funding Fact Sheet](#) - U.S. Department of Transportation
- [Physical Activity-Friendly Policies and Community Design Features in the US](#) - CDC

