



Building Healthier and Better Socially Connected Communities Through Nature

RECETAS is a transdisciplinary research project uniting 13 partners across 6 pilot cities worldwide (European Horizon 2020 programme). It tests and evaluates **nature-based social prescribing (NBSP)** to reduce loneliness and improve quality of life of urban residents. Loneliness, a major public health crisis, is addressed by NBSP, which combines nature and social connection in an inclusive, adaptable approach suitable for all communities.

In Prague, a team working with older adults living in non-institutional settings implemented **Friends in Nature interventions**: structured group sessions in the city's parks and green spaces, combining peer support, guided nature activities, and social connection.

A randomised controlled trial conducted by Charles University researchers included 322 participants experiencing loneliness. The results? **Demonstrated reductions in loneliness, improved wellbeing and social connection**, and strong operational feasibility in an urban setting.

Discover evidence-based recommendations for healthier, more connected urban communities, grounded in the RECETAS project and aligned with a cross-sectoral approach linking healthcare, social services, community organisations, and urban green infrastructure.

Integrating Nature-Based Social Prescribing into the Health System

- #1 Formalise NBSP as a community health practice, complementing existing approaches with evidence-based, non-pharmacological solutions for loneliness and mental health.** The Friends in Nature model—structured group processes, co-created activities, and trained facilitators—prioritises social bonds and peer support over mere nature exposure.
- #2 Train health and social care professionals on the health-nature link, integrating Friends in Nature evidence and methods.** Focus on energising groups, fostering interaction, and building autonomy so communities sustain connections independently.
- #3 Adapt digital tools (e.g., Actius i Salut) to streamline nature-based social prescriptions.** Enable professionals to easily refer people to local activities, integrating these tools into health and social prescribing pathways for routine use.
- #4 Boost cross-sector collaboration (health, social rights, environment) through tools like green infrastructure plans, urban agendas, and Pla de Barris i Viles.** Align NBSP with these strategies to integrate social, environmental, and physical health dimensions coherently.
- #5 Secure long-term funding for third-sector organisations, vital as community connectors and NBSP providers.** Their flexibility, trust, and proximity to local needs complement public services and should be formally embedded in regional and local wellbeing strategies.

Designing Urban Environments that Reconnect People with Nature

- #6 Prioritise green spaces in vulnerable neighbourhoods.** Access to quality nature is unequal, shaped by social determinants. An intersectional approach in health and urban planning is essential to address these disparities.
- #7 Revise park design standards to prioritise social inclusion, wellbeing, and connection.** Treat green spaces as health and cohesion assets, with accessible infrastructure to support all users.

- #8 **Embed NBSP in territorial planning (Green Infrastructure Plan, Urban Agenda, Pla de Barris)** to align nature-based social interventions with urban health and sustainability strategies, recognising them as a cross-cutting priority.
- #9 **Improve public transport links between underserved neighbourhoods and natural spaces** to remove mobility and economic barriers, ensuring equitable access to urban nature and NBSP.

Building Sustainable Governance for the Effective Implementation of Nature-Based Social Prescribing

- #10 **Establish stable intersectoral working groups** (e.g., social prescribing committees) to co-create referral circuits linking nature assets with health, social, and community services. The Taula de Salut i Natura exemplifies such governance, uniting public health, environment, community action, local government, and third-sector actors. Clarify roles and ensure coherence across micro, meso, and macro levels.
- #11 **Strengthen training for NBSP professionals, integrating community health knowledge, group facilitation, and nature familiarity.** Address training gaps (per RECETAS experience) to equip health, social, and environmental sectors to identify loneliness and connect people to nature-based activities.
- #12 **Implement continuous evaluation and monitoring to assess social connection, wellbeing, participation, and nature engagement.** Use findings to adapt NBSP, embedding it as a structural policy in health, sustainability, and social cohesion strategies.

Taken together, these 12 recommendations form a coherent and actionable roadmap to make Barcelona a pioneer in nature-based public health.

By formally integrating NBSP into community health systems, guaranteeing equitable access to urban nature, embedding social connection outcomes into urban planning, and building sustainable intersectoral governance, the city has both the evidence and the institutional capacity to scale these interventions — transforming urban environments into spaces where social connection becomes a fundamental, equitable, and cost-effective component of public health policy.

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- RECETAS in Prague:
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