



Nature in the City: A Vector for Healthier, More United, and Better Connected Communities

RECETAS, a European Horizon 2020 program, is a transdisciplinary research project bringing together 13 partners across 6 pilot cities worldwide. It tests and evaluates Nature-Based Social Prescribing (NBSP) to reduce loneliness and improve quality of life for city residents. Loneliness, a genuine public health issue, is addressed by NBSP, which combines nature and social connection in an inclusive approach adaptable to diverse contexts and communities.

In Marseille, a team from AP-HM (Marseille Public Hospitals) implemented the "Friends in Nature" intervention: 8 to 11 weekly group sessions centered on nature-related activities, involving 60 participants. The results are striking: -25% loneliness, +11% psychological wellbeing, +23% connection to nature. Discover 12 recommendations based on the scientific evidence from the study, aligned with the One Health approach.

- #1 Institutionalize NBSP as a prevention tool, integrated into the One Health approach.** This approach recognizes the interconnections between human health, animal health, and ecosystems. NBSP (gardening, forest walks, meditation in parks) offers a concrete way to translate this ambition into local policy, building a bridge between health prevention, social justice, and reconnection with nearby natural environments.

Establishing Governance for NBSP Implementation

- #2 Support the structuring of a civil society organization network engaged in promoting access to nature for health purposes.** Shared governance represents a strategic lever for strengthening collective advocacy in this area. Establishing a common narrative and shared governance framework would allow these organizations to pool their skills and technical capacities while fostering partnerships between complementary profiles.
- #3 Create a territorial network for NBSP, bringing together public authorities, medico-social professionals, and associations offering suitable activities.** This network should organize training events, pilot NBSP at the local level, and evaluate it in terms of impact, implementation, and health costs. The Adapted Physical Activity (APA) model, in place since 2016, offers a proven governance and evaluation framework to follow.

Strengthening Health Systems with NBSP: A Policy Action

- #4 Implement local NBSP pilot projects through the creation of "Territorial Coordinators."** These roles aim to connect prescribing professionals, beneficiaries, and activity providers. Their positions could be funded by Regional Health Agencies (ARS) or local authorities. In parallel, public authorities must ensure free or low-cost access to all these activities. This territorial experimentation could be led within the framework of Local Health Contracts (Contrats Locaux de Santé).
- #5 Train professionals in social prescribing and the health benefits of nature-based activities.** Modules on the links between health, social connection, and nature should be integrated into training programs for future medico-social professionals. The "Training Facilitators" manual, a deliverable of the RECETAS project, serves as an operational resource for this purpose.
- #6 Create a digital platform to connect activity providers, prescribers, and beneficiaries.** The platform gives prescribing professionals real-time visibility into local activities, simplifying referrals for beneficiaries, and allowing facilitators to manage enrollments, communicate with participants, and generate impact reports from collected data.

Designing Urban Environments that Strengthen Territorial and Community Belonging

- #7 Develop a cross-cutting "One Health" roadmap within local authorities.** While recommendation #1 lays the groundwork for institutional recognition of NBSP, this roadmap operationalizes the One Health approach across all areas of local authority. It will enable smooth coordination between health policy, urban planning, and social policy.
- #8 Guarantee universal and inclusive access to public natural spaces.** Governance must rest on close coordination between different services, with municipalities playing a leading role and regions providing overall strategic direction. Connecting public transport to major natural infrastructure — particularly from disadvantaged neighborhoods — is a key lever for equity.
- #9 Promote living environments that foster social cohesion.** Housing models that encourage social connection — such as co-housing, shared living arrangements, or schemes fostering intergenerational interaction — deserve active support and development. Public spaces should allow for community gardens and urban amenities that promote sharing and encounter.

Integrating Nature into Local Social Policy Agendas

- #10 Prioritize socially and economically vulnerable populations in NBSP pilot projects and in implementing the One Health roadmap.** With 25% of Marseille's population living below the poverty line, NBSP pilot projects must explicitly target priority neighborhoods under urban policy (QPV), through structured collaboration with CCAS (Municipal Social Action Centers), associations, and medico-social centers.
- #11 Implement mediation strategies to lift the "invisible barriers" to accessing natural and social spaces.** Symbolic barriers linked to stigmatization or a sense of not belonging to a territory prevent the most precarious populations from accessing shared spaces (urban nature, cultural spaces). Public policy must fund community mediation programs and educational pathways specifically designed to foster civic belonging and a genuine sense of legitimacy in public spaces.
- #12 Implement psychosocial workshops to promote wellbeing and social connection.** These workshops would benefit from being integrated into projects targeting vulnerable groups, building on existing structures and initiatives such as women's shelters, schools, after-school programs, or community centers.

In summary, these 12 recommendations form an operationalizable roadmap to make Marseille a pioneer in nature-based health prevention and promotion.

By integrating NBSP into the "One Health" framework, strengthening health systems, rethinking urban environments, and prioritizing the most vulnerable, the city has the scientific evidence and local network needed to scale up these interventions.



More Information



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