



ParkRx

**CONNECTING HEALTH GOALS
TO PARK PARTICIPATION**



Strategies for parks and recreation professionals & mental health professionals





Temple University
Collaborative

On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

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ParkRx: “Prescribing” parks to improve health

Nature, physical activity, socializing- All of these have beneficial impacts on health- and all of these can occur in parks. Health providers have recognized the potential impact of parks on health and have participated in park prescription or ParkRx programs. Park prescription programs, or ParkRx, are opportunities for health professionals to connect individuals to local parks with the intention to improve health. Many of these programs are targeted towards youth, as there is evidence that the lack of physical activity and lack of access to nature has a negative impact on their health (Razani et al., 2020). There are even examples of programs geared towards adults (Müller-Riemenschneider et al., 2020). The integration of these programs in health care settings highlights the important role parks play in the health of our communities.



For individuals who experience mental health conditions, parks may have an even greater impact on health. That’s because individuals diagnosed with serious mental illnesses have poorer health outcomes. Individuals with mental health conditions spend much of their time in sedentary behavior (Vancampfort et al., 2017). Conversely, simply the act of getting out of the house can reduce sedentary time and increase steps (Snethen, Brusilovskiy, et al., 2021). Going to a local park might even increase motivation to get out of the house and provide opportunity for more intentional physical activity. Parks also provide an opportunity to meet new people who share similar interests. We found that many people who identified parks as welcoming went there with

the intention to meet new people (Snethen et al., 2021). For individuals with mental health conditions, this is important as loneliness and isolation is a chronic experience (Prince et al., 2018). Loneliness (Fortuna et al., 2021) and physical inactivity (de Hert et al., 2022) can have major health implications for people with mental health diagnoses, contributing to obesity, heart disease, and early mortality.

Health behaviors work best when individuals have an interest in the activity. There is evidence that park prescriptions could be a useful tool for supporting individuals with mental health conditions to engage in their local parks. Individuals with mental health conditions identify parks and many would like to participate more often (Salzer et al., 2014). People with mental health conditions also describe parks as welcoming. Many desire to go to parks to meet people and improve health (Snethen et al., 2021).

This document is a tool that can be used when working directly with individuals as a Park Prescription (ParkRx). Below are general instructions for using the tool. Following are approaches that could be used by park professionals when working either with the general public or when connecting with community mental health centers and instructions for professionals working at community mental health centers.

Using the Tool

In general, the ParkRx form (Appendix 1) is designed to help people connect their health goals and activity interests to opportunities within the local park system. The forms could be adapted to specific communities, specifically in the park resources section. Or the form could be left as is, with specific information added when completing the ParkRx form with someone. Appendix 2 has an example of a completed form.

Health Goals. The tool is designed for individuals to share general health goals, without disclosing any personal health information. As mentioned in the introduction, the literature suggests these areas are often areas of need relevant to individuals with mental health conditions. The note section might be helpful for someone to expand on their health goals or add additional goals relevant to the conversation.

Interests. The second section focuses on an individual's interests. These are common activities that occur in parks. Of course, you can adapt the form to fit the unique opportunities in your park! Similarly, the notes section can be used to add additional information that the individual provides.

Park Resources. In this section, parks and recreation programs are encouraged to adapt the form to local parks and local programs that are available. This can be a useful tool for identifying parks or programs where individuals could engage in the activities in which they have interest. Of course, this section can also be kept blank and a staff member could fill in information from the conversation they had with the park visitor. Remember, you want people to be able to find information about the resource after the meeting is done, so make sure to include specifics!

ParkRx. Finally, in this section, write a specific "prescription!" For example, if Gerald was interested in photography in order to reduce stress, meet people, and walk more, his prescription might be: Gerald will sign up for the photography class at Town Commons Park and will walk in his local park 2x/week to take photographs.

Connecting Parks and Mental Health Agencies

A Checklist for Park Professionals

Make connections with your local mental health center

Share information about park/recreation opportunities

Share information about scholarship opportunities

Offer to meet with staff or service recipients

Continue conversations at least 2x/year!



Park Professionals: Using the Tool

Park professionals interested in using this tool could approach it from a few different directions. First, it's important to remember that interactions with the general public and typical park patrons will include individuals with a history of mental illness. Recent numbers suggest that 1 in 5 individuals experience a mental health condition (NAMI, 2020). Therefore, approaches to create welcoming and inclusive environments should be considered in all interactions, not just interactions targeted towards mental health agencies.

ParkRx with Park Patrons

Make ParkRx an event in your local park! [The National](#)

[Park Service](#) recognizes a Saturday during National Park Week in April as ParkRx day. This is a great day to schedule a community ParkRx event! Set up a booth or table to meet with park patrons. The tool could be used to support people to explore their own health goals, identify interests, and connect with local opportunities.

ParkRx with Community Mental Health Centers

Another strategy is to reach out directly to local community mental health centers. While many people receiving services and even community mental health center staff may know where the local parks are, they may not know the events that are available. There may also be an assumption that those activities or events are 'not for them.' Connecting with staff and service recipients directly is an important step in communicating, 'you're welcome here!'

The first step is to reach out to a local mental health center. If there are challenges with making the initial connections, consider reaching out your local Department of Health and Human Services. In some instances, the Parks and Recreation Department may be within the same organizational structure. Making connections with the Director or manager of adult services, or similar title, is a great step to creating an ongoing relationship with the organization.

Once you've made connections, share resources! As mentioned previously, staff and service recipients may be familiar with the physical park locations but may not be aware of opportunities at the park. You should also share information about scholarship opportunities that are available. Many individuals receiving services from the mental health center will be living on a low or fixed income. Knowing that there are scholarship or waiver opportunities available may help to encourage participation.

Sharing information with staff is great. Sharing information with service recipients directly may increase the likelihood that someone will act on the suggestion to participate in their local park. Consider offering to have a staff member present at a community meeting. Offer to have staff and volunteers work with service recipients to complete the ParkRx form. This is a great way to help service recipients make a meaningful connection to the park system. It may also be the 'invitation' needed to facilitate participation.

Finally, continue the conversation! Don't simply make a one-time connection and assume participation will follow. Make a concentrated effort to reach out at least two times a year. These interactions could include updates on new opportunities and/or gathering information about park participation and participation needs of individuals with mental health conditions. Whatever the focus of the meeting, these interactions are an important step in communicating a welcoming environment and opening your parks to the full community, including those living with mental health conditions.

Mental Health Professionals: Using the Tool



Connecting with Local Parks

Encouraging Park Participation

- Learn about park and recreation opportunities in your community
- Make connections with your local parks and recreation department
- Support individuals to find nearby parks
- Invite parks and recreation staff to share information with staff and service recipients
- Talk to service recipients about health goals and park opportunities

 Temple University Collaborative

The ParkRx form is a great way to support people with mental health conditions to explore their own health goals and activities they would like to do. Beyond that, it is designed to connect these goals and interests to real opportunities in the community. One important step for mental health professionals is to increase your own awareness of parks and recreation opportunities in your own community. Look up what is available in your community. Be familiar with parks and recreation activities in different neighborhoods, so that you can make suggestions based on where people live. Better yet! Support people to explore their communities and find parks and recreation resources nearby.

The previous section suggested park professionals reach out to local community mental health centers. Mental health center staff can also take the initiative to make connections with parks and recreation professionals. Reach out to your community parks and recreation department. Ask if there is someone who can meet with you or present information to service recipients.



Create a ParkRx group!

The first part of the group could involve completing the ParkRx form. This will help identify interests and health goals. If participants aren't yet aware of park resources, that's ok! Take time to explore what resources are near the agency and near where participants live.

Explore parks and recreation opportunities in the community! This could be done by using online resources to see what opportunities are available and by visiting different parks in the area to explore resources in person. Sometimes visiting a park is an important step to increasing confidence to participate independently.

Explore individual barriers and facilitators of park participation! What are the things that prevent participation? Do people have access to transportation? Do they know what bus to take? Is personal scheduling a challenge? Would inviting a friend make someone more likely to go? Identifying potential barriers and developing strategies to navigate them using one's resources helps to encourage sustainable and independent participation.

Use the group as social support! Now there are a group of people who have a park prescription! This is powerful! The group can help connect individuals with similar interests and goals. Participants can commit to 'filling their prescription' together or can use the group to check in on their progress.

Additional Resources

Interested in developing a full ParkRx program? Check out these ParkRx [toolkits](#) developed by the Institute at the Golden Gate, which is a program of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and is in partnership with the National Park Service.

Want to learn more about the Healthy Parks Healthy People initiative? Check out this [eGuide](#) from the National Park Services!

Are you interested in making your park or recreation center more welcoming? Check out our resource, [Creating Welcoming Parks and Recreation Environments!](#) This training guide is designed to help park professionals intentionally create more welcoming and inclusive environments.

Appendix 1

ParkRx

Health Goals

- Reduce stress
- Improve mood
- Socialize
- Increase physical activity
- Other _____

Notes

Interests

- Nature
- Sports
- Fitness classes
- Photography
- Mindfulness
- Other _____

Notes

Park Resources

In this section, add resources that support the individual's interests and health goals. Add specific information about opportunities offered.

ParkRx

Include the location, activity, frequency, and duration.

Appendix 2

ParkRx for Patty

Health Goals

- Reduce stress (x)
- Improve mood (x)
- Socialize
- Increase physical activity (x)
- Other: More Vitamin D

Notes- Getting outside helps her mood. She is 'always looking for ways to reduce stress and knows she should be more active.

Interests

- Nature (x)
- Sports
- Fitness classes (x)
- Photography
- Mindfulness (x)
- Other: Performances

Notes- Nature is important to Patty, as is spending time with her pet. She like movies, plays, and art. She isn't looking for big group interactive activities at this time

Park Resources

Cooper River Park: <https://www.camdencounty.com/service/parks/cooper-river-park/>

- Walking trails, waterfront, dog park

Collingswood River Park:

- Weekly movies in the park during the summer (Tues/Thursday nights)
http://www.collingswood.com/things_to_do/parks_and_recreation/movies_in_knight_park.php

ParkRx

To reduce stress and improve mood, Patty will attend Movie night at Knight Park once a month for 3 months.

For increased physical activity and more Vitamin D, Patty will take her dog for a 15-minute walk 3 times per week for one month at Cooper River Park, which is in walking distance to where she lives. After the month, Patty will increase her walks to 4 times per week.

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