

Nature for Health

A review of resources for healthcare sites

This project aimed to better understand the resource needs of the health sector to support the integration of nature into healthcare sites across England.

Enhancing nature on healthcare sites can serve a range of purposes, including:



Creating healthy outdoor spaces for the hospital community to enjoy.



Building a climate-resilient estate through nature-based solutions.



Embedding nature into hospital care and rehabilitation.



Supporting local wildlife to thrive through creation and connectivity of habitats.



Wildlife at Southmead Hospital - Kate Mainprice

The findings and recommendations summarised here were drawn from a mixed methods study, combining desk-based research, stakeholder interviews and a targeted survey of healthcare professionals. The project considered the needs of a range of health sector roles including: estates and facilities maintenance teams, sustainability teams, clinicians and allied health professionals.

This project also collated existing resources to create an accessible resource hub for healthcare sites. Use the QR code to access the hub:



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NHS Forest
Green space for health



Findings - challenges for the health sector

1

Technical guides for implementing biodiversity and climate adaptation projects are often lengthy and generic. This creates a challenge in adapting them to the operational realities of an NHS estate or care setting.

2

There is a lack of tailored resources on the use of nature-based interventions in clinical settings and how to adapt them for diverse patient groups and needs.

3

It can be difficult to identify and access reputable resources.

4

Lack of time and competing priorities mean that NHS staff are under ever-increasing pressure. Any new resource or programme must be designed to save time or fit into existing duties, rather than feel like an added burden.

5

Research on nature-based interventions is often dispersed across public health, psychology, and environmental science literature. It can therefore be difficult to find and is not always distilled into a format that aligns with conventional medical decision-making.

6

There is a need for high-level leadership. When NHS executives and managers prioritise nature recovery, it filters down as an organisational priority.

7

The policy landscape is complex and it can be challenging to align siloed initiatives for achieving health, environmental and nature recovery outcomes.

8

There are limited policy hooks and oversight mechanisms to promote nature positive actions within the health sector.

Findings - resource need

Themes where tailored resources are sought:

- Greenspace management
- Nature connection
- Biodiversity
- Climate resilience
- Health and wellbeing

Suggested topics for new resources:

- Using nature-based solutions to create a climate-resilient estate
- Guidance to promote co-design with diverse patient groups to ensure cultural relevance, inclusivity, and accessibility of greenspaces and nature-based interventions
- Nature-based rehabilitation plans
- Creating ward gardens
- Monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity on NHS land, including citizen science approaches
- Compliance and implementation of statutory requirements such as Biodiversity Net Gain

Tailored information to include:

- Funding and budgeting through NHS processes and grants
- Upkeep and maintenance
- Working in partnership with the environment sector and through volunteers
- Accessibility of spaces and ensuring patient safety
- Infection controls

Diversity of formats

- Step-by-step instructions
- Quick reference formats i.e. summary checklists, infographics, short how-to videos
- Practical workshops
- Real-world case studies
- Clear and practical frameworks

Recommendations

1

Develop tailored guidance for healthcare settings, in a variety of formats, through collaboration between technical experts and NHS staff.

2

Centralise hosting and improve accessibility of resources.

Strengthen training and evidence

3

Information on nature-based solutions and nature-based interventions should be integrated into NHS training programmes.

4

Partner with educational institutions to integrate nature-based solutions and nature-based interventions into materials across disciplines and to support student projects and placements on NHS sites.

5

Collaborate with professional bodies and training providers to integrate nature-based interventions into clinical guidelines and training.

6

Develop succinct, medically-framed evidence summaries on nature-based interventions.

Engagement and capacity building

7

Strengthen connections between NHS and the environmental sector.

8

Strengthen peer learning networks to share lessons through regular webinars, Q&A and online discussion forums.

9

Support estates, sustainability and clinical teams to work together.

10

Develop a mentorship programme to transfer practical knowledge between sites and trusts.