In 2014, East Bay Regional Park District teamed up with UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland to launch the SHINE program to bring their patients - children with chronic illnesses such as obesity, diabetes or ADHD - to the outdoors as a way to improve their physical and mental health. Trained clinic volunteers follow up with the patients’ families to schedule their park visit upon recommendation of the doctor. On the first Saturday of every month, the Park District and Regional Parks Foundation provide free transportation, healthy snacks, and a day of fun outdoor activities led by a park staff. Over 550 children and family members, accompanied by medical and clinic staff, have participated - walking, playing games, learning about nature, making new friends, and improving their overall sense of well-being. For many of the families, this is the first time they have been to a Regional Park or an outdoor recreational environment. The Park District has also integrated the outdoors into the clinic by installing beautiful park visuals and posters throughout the clinic to inspire and educate families to use their park resources and to get active outdoors. Seven clinic rooms have been named after regional parks.

Sections of this brochure were adapted from a manual Healthy Parks Healthy People Guide for Health Care Providers prepared by Nooshin Razani, MD, MPH (Children’s Hospital & Research Center at Oakland) with invaluable assistance from Curtis Chan, MD, MPH; Dayna Long, MD; June Tester, MD, MPH. The manual is available at www.ebparks.org/hphp.

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Dear Health Care Provider,

At East Bay Regional Park District we are invested in the health of the communities we serve. Over the years, growing scientific evidence confirms what we know to be true — that being outdoors, especially in natural settings, has essential health benefits. These benefits are discussed in this brochure, and include physical and mental health benefits to individuals, families and communities, as well as to the well-being of the environment.

We have created these Park Prescriptions materials to extend a hand to you as allies in a mutual goal of nurturing a healthy and active East Bay. We hope these materials will give you tools in the very hard work you do to encourage healthy lifestyles.

In addition to the materials provided here, we offer you an opportunity to create formal partnerships with us. An example of a partnership developed through the Park Prescriptions program is with UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland Primary Care Clinic. We have had the opportunity to share with resident physicians and doctors the health benefits of nature, the park resources available in the East Bay and to provide them with materials for their patients, as well as to bring over 220 of the highest health needs community members to our Regional Parks. Dr. Kelley Meade, Medical Director, says, “Chronic health issues such as obesity, behavioral issues and stress will require interdisciplinary interventions. We are grateful to EBRPD, and see them as an integral part of our team to help patients be healthy.”

The Park District is also a leader in the Healthy Parks Healthy People Initiative, a worldwide campaign to encourage healthy, active activities in the outdoors while appreciating and taking care of parks and open space. With over 120,000 acres in 65 parks and 1,250 miles of trails, our Regional Parks offer access to wilderness that is not far from home. There are many trails for hiking or biking, picnic areas for family gatherings, playgrounds, and lakes for boating and fishing. Our free or low-cost recreational programs promote physical activity, social connection, learning and fun outdoors. And most importantly, we have a staff dedicated to collaborating with you.

We encourage you to reach out to us for more information and to establish formal partnerships. Thank you for joining us in this movement to integrate the East Bay’s natural environment with the health of our population.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Doyle, General Manager, East Bay Regional Park District
**The Health Benefits of Nature**

For children, outdoor play in a natural setting can improve motor strength, balance, and coordination. (Fjortoft, 2001)

Exercising outdoors can reduce sadness, anger and fatigue, and improve attention spans. (Bower, Boyung-Ai, Knight and Pullin, 2010)

Regular exposure to bright, natural light can increase vitamin D levels and decrease blood sugar levels among diabetics. (P.E. Xue, 2010)

Spatinc time outdoors is associated with improved distance vision. (Rose et al, 2008)

Time in nature may contribute to children’s cognitive, emotional, social and educational development. (Strife and Downey, 2009)

Positive experiences in nature can lead to a lifelong commitment to caring for and conserving natural resources. (Wels & Lekies, 2006)

**Strategies for Health Care Providers**

**What outdoor experiences has the patient had?**

**Is the patient interested in outdoor activity for health?**

- Yes
  - Assess physical and mental health benefits and potential limitations
  - Brainstorm opportunities for outdoor activities and find out what patients like to do outdoors
  - Explore barriers to outdoor activities
  - Make a specific outdoor activity goal, for example:
    - Play or explore outdoors for one hour a day
    - Visit a park or green space
    - Get active outdoors
  - Provide Healthy Parks Healthy People materials
  - Evaluate progress towards goal at next visit

- No
  - Assess physical and mental health benefits and potential limitations
  - Reassess at next visit

**Lack of Time**

- Some patients lack leisure time, while others may be juggling multiple priorities.
  - Help a patient identify a nearby Regional Park and activities that are suited for them. For those who have children or are older, the Park District offers age-specific programming including “Toddler Time” at Ardenwood, “Teen Volunteer Time” at Tilden, and the “Over the Hills Gang” for seniors. Alternatively, emphasize that being in nature can be a great family activity and discuss ways that everyone can get outdoors together.

**Lack of Transportation**

- Some patients may not know how to get to their closest park.
  - If your patient lacks transportation, help by showing them public transportation options. Resources can be found on our website: www.ebparks.org/parks/publictransit

**Lack of Comfort or Feeling of Welcome**

- Some patients lack the discretionary money that might be needed for entry fees, parking, food, and equipment.
  - The Park District offers many activities at no cost to park users, including Healthy Parks Healthy People guided hikes, Visitor Centers like Big Break in Oakley and the Tilden Environmental Education Center in Berkeley offer free hands-on fun every weekend. The “Parks Express” program partners with schools and community service groups to provide transportation for low-income students, families, seniors, or people with disabilities to experience the parks for free. Additionally, the Regional Parks Foundation offers “Camperships” so that low-income youths can attend summer camps, junior lifeguard training, and other fun programs in our Regional Parks for free.

**Financial Difficulties**

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**Obesity Alert**

Thirty percent of the world’s population is obese, and that number is expected to rise to 50 percent by 2030, according to a report by the McKinsey Global Institute. The costs associated with obesity have topped $2 trillion annually. The best way to tackle the problem is a multi-dimensional approach that involves schools, agencies, businesses, economics, transportation and policies that promote heathful living.

**Integrating the outdoors into a clinical practice**

Outdoor activity can be integrated into your practice or office by creating consistent messaging throughout the clinical visit. Engage your staff for support and input in creating this change in your clinical setting. If there is someone with interest in this area, they can serve as your nature advocate and liaison with the parks by providing resources or organizing activities.

**East Bay Regional Park District: Your Local Resource**

Resources for your waiting rooms and patient rooms are available from the Park District for free. These include:

- Park locator postcard
- A guide/map of East Bay Regional Park District parks (five languages)
- Park Prescriptions waiting room posters
- “Regional In Nature” Activity Guide
- Trails Challenge (self-guided biking) postcard
- Websites: ebparks.org, regionalparksfoundation.org
- Bay Area Open Space Council’s Transit and Trails: Transitandtrails.org

**Common reasons people don’t get outdoors as often as they’d like:**

- Lack of Time
- Lack of Comfort or Feeling of Welcome
- Financial Difficulties
- Lack of Transportation
- Common reasons people don’t get outdoors as often as they’d like:

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