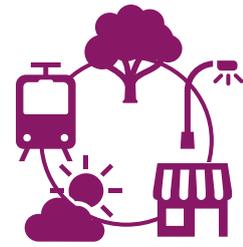


# How non-health charities address the social determinants of health



## Our surroundings

Living in areas that have less access to green space, fewer places to be physically active, higher crime and a higher number of fast food shops, can mean we are more likely to suffer from poor health.

### Evidence Summaries

Pages 71–82 of the [Evidence Review](#) discuss in detail the evidence that suggests the following:

#### Access to green and blue spaces and green infrastructure

People have a desire to connect with nature. And so, access to good quality green and blue spaces and infrastructure—parks, canals and rivers, cycle paths, and street planting—is linked to better mental health outcomes, and encourages physical activity.



*Good quality green space is linked to improved health outcomes.*

**Key evidence links to Friends and communities:** *Green infrastructure and green spaces make an area more attractive and less polluted. This encourages social interaction and community cohesion, and provides a space for community activities—and therefore improves social connections and communities. Streets that are more walkable and cycleable also provide more opportunities for social interaction in pedestrian environments.*

**Key evidence links to Education and skills:** *Green space and infrastructure aid cognitive development and result in better education outcomes for children.*

**Case study:** TCV Green Gym creates and runs free outdoor sessions where participants are guided in practical activities such as planting trees, sowing meadows and establishing wildlife ponds. Many of its training programmes are targeted at those recovering from poor mental health, although the programme impacts across a range of health issues.

TCV North Leeds and South & East Leeds Green Gym were funded by Leeds North CCG and Leeds South and East CCG for a one-year pilot project to demonstrate the potential of outdoor practical activity to improve the physical and mental well-being of priority groups.

TCV asks new starters at Green Gyms to complete [SWEMWEBS](#) and [International physical activity questionnaires \(IPAQ\)](#), and then again at set quarterly monitoring points. As part of the CCG funded project TCV also used specific additional ‘snap shot questionnaire’ on social isolation, nutrition and feeling in control.

Measuring its impact on health has enabled TCV to strengthen its case for environmental interventions to be referenced in tender documents for mental health programmes. Wider recognition of its impact on health would enable the charity to attract more members—as activities would be better recognised as successful interventions by social prescribers and wider NHS staff—and has helped diversify funding, namely 2.5 years of replacement and increased funding.

**Case Study:** [The Canal & River Trust](#) cares for 3,219 kilometres of working canals and river navigations, docks and reservoirs across England and Wales. Its vision is for living waterways that transform places and enrich lives. It partners with others (including [Public Health England](#), [Public Health Wales](#), [Sport England](#) and [Mind](#)) to support the health and wellbeing of millions of people, offering sustainable routes for walking and cycling which connect communities, whilst at the same time improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions.

The Trust has begun to build an evidence base for its impact, published in its first [outcomes report](#)<sup>1</sup>. It has found the use of waterways encourages an improvement in health and well-being—with people using the waterways to increase their daily exercise and to reduce anxiety. Its outcomes work seeks to give a more robust and rounded understanding of how our waterways touch the lives of people and communities.

## Climate

- Climate change poses a significant risk to health through increased death, disability and injury from extreme weather. A rise in surface ozone levels will increase the risk of skin cancer and cataracts, and result in an additional 1,500 deaths per year.
- Those who are already vulnerable because of the quality of their surroundings or income will have fewer resources to prepare, respond and recover from extreme weather.



*Heat-related mortality is expected to range from a 70% increase in 2020s to 540% increase in the 2080s.*

**Key evidence links to Our surroundings (transport):** Climate change is related to transport and pollution. More green infrastructure in urban areas could help mitigate the effects of climate change.

**Key evidence links to Housing, and Money and resources:** Those living in poor quality housing or a lack of money and resources will be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

## Access to shops and services

- The types of shops in our surroundings can affect health behaviours, such as what a person eats and how they spend their money. Those that are surrounded by more fast food shops and a lack of available healthy produce, have a higher risk of food poverty, obesity and malnutrition.
- Reduced access to amenities impact other determinants of health, such as employment and education services, as well as cultural, social and leisure activities.



*Over 2 million people in the UK are estimated to be malnourished, and 3 million are at risk of becoming malnourished.*

**Key evidence links to Money and resources:** Betting shops and pay day loan shops are more prevalent in deprived areas, making those living there more likely to use them. Both may increase financial difficulties.

**Key evidence links to Friends and communities:** When shops and services are not accessible, people—particularly older people and those with disabilities—are put off from visiting public spaces. This reduces opportunities for social connection and interaction.

## Transport

- Walkability and cycle ability of streets and pavements affects levels of physical activity.
- Higher levels of pollution contribute to poor physical health.
- Those living in more deprived areas are more likely to be in a road traffic accident.



*In the 20% most deprived areas, rates of fatal or serious injury on the road are 9 times higher than the national average for 5–9 year olds, and 3.7 times higher than the national average for 10–14 year olds.*

**Key evidence links to Good work and Friends and communities:** Accessible, affordable and sustainable transport systems ensure that people have access to goods and services, social and leisure activities, education, employment and health, and social services. This is particularly important for those vulnerable to social exclusion.

**Case study: Sustrans** works with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in. Active travel, such as walking and cycling, is a key means by which people can build regular physical activity into their daily lives, and there is extensive evidence of the health benefits.

It has three goals that relate to health and well-being, and numerous metrics that aim to describe its impact on public health. The charity uses some elements of national data sources, and lots of published material from academic research, and is involved with the World Health Organisation in the development of HEAT (the Health Economic Assessment Tool). This has helped the charity to assign an economic value to its work. It has recently completed studies on health inequalities, air quality, transport poverty, resilience, and well-being, all of which have health-related information as an output.

Sustrans administers a part of the Scottish Government grant for investment in active travel in Scotland. Transport Scotland asks Sustrans to work with local authorities to oversee investment on a range of infrastructure and behaviour change projects. Although this is ‘transport’ funding, the health benefits of active travel have been viewed as a valuable part of the overall benefit of the investment in active travel.

However, there are many challenges for Sustrans in developing the relationships with the health sector, including for example: the relative priority of preventive medicine over primary health care; and the measurement and articulation of health savings based on population level change in physical activity. Sustrans hopes to be able to work more closely with the health sector in Scotland to reach a position whereby a contribution by the health sector to investment in active travel could more readily be recognised as a constructive option.

## Feeling safe and secure

- The impact of crime and fear of crime’s impact on our health is mediated through direct pathways—such as death and serious injury from crime—and indirect pathways—like a range of mental health issues following experience of crime, or living in an area that feels unsafe.



**Key evidence links to Friends and communities:** Crime and fear of crime can put people off visiting public spaces in communities—and therefore reduce social interaction and community cohesion.

**Key evidence links to Education and skills:** Crime and fear of crime impact children’s educational outcomes.

## Challenges

### Barriers to gathering and using evidence

- There is often a focus on behaviour change when it comes to healthy eating or gambling—rather than the impact of our surroundings. This can mean the impact of our surrounding is underestimated by some. By focusing on behaviour change without looking at what influences our behaviour—such as our surroundings—we struggle to make an impact on health.
- As many charities working in this area focus on campaigning or influencing, they may not work directly with, or only have minimal contact with their beneficiaries. This can make it particularly challenging for a charity to capture health outcomes or understand the impact it is having on health.

### Barriers within the sector and wider environment

- Many changes to our surroundings require action from the public sector—for example Local Authorities and the Police—which means that the charity sector is unlikely to be able to make a large impact without good collaboration with this sector.
- Many of the organisations in this sector are small, community organisation with limited resources to link their work to health outcomes.
- A lack of funding in this sector may mean there are limited resources available for charities to take action to link work to health outcomes.

## Opportunities

### Opportunities for gathering and using evidence

- In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the impacts of health and environment as a result of evidence about climate change—it is possible that this will generate more interest in the link between the environment and health.
- Campaigning is a key way of making change in this area. Campaigns provide a platform to make the link between health and our surroundings, and can be used to promote these messages.

### Opportunities within the sector and wider environment

- Health focused charities are already campaigning on environmental issues, for example, the [British Heart Foundation](#)'s campaign on [air pollution and heart disease](#). This could provide an opportunity for collaboration between health and non-health charities.
- Many changes to our surroundings require action from the public sector—such as Local Authorities and the Police—which provides an opportunity for the two sectors to work together.

<sup>i</sup> Canal and Rivers Trust (2017). [Waterways & well-being: Building the evidence base](#).

See more at [www.thinkNPC.org/KeepingUsWell](http://www.thinkNPC.org/KeepingUsWell)



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