

Briefing

Green Health Prescribing: its role in Lothian's COVID recovery

This briefing shares the findings of Lothian's Green Health Prescribing development project. The project was designed to explore green health prescribing in Lothian: raise its profile, understand barriers and enablers, share success stories and identify what needs to be in place to embed it across the health and care system.

What is Green Health Prescribing?

The benefits of connecting to nature for people's mental and physical health are widely understood. However, those who could most benefit are less likely to have the opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic has both exacerbated this inequality and increased the need for that connection.

Green health prescribing uses the interaction between people and health and care services to identify those who could benefit most and connect them with nature.

Encouraging that connection with nature can occur in a wide range of ways from suggesting a walk in the park, to signposting to local walking and gardening groups, to referral to a formal therapeutic programme. It can take place in blue as well as green spaces.

Our shared vision is for green health prescribing embedded across the system, targeted at people who can most benefit, resulting in reduced health inequalities, stronger communities and more valued greenspace.

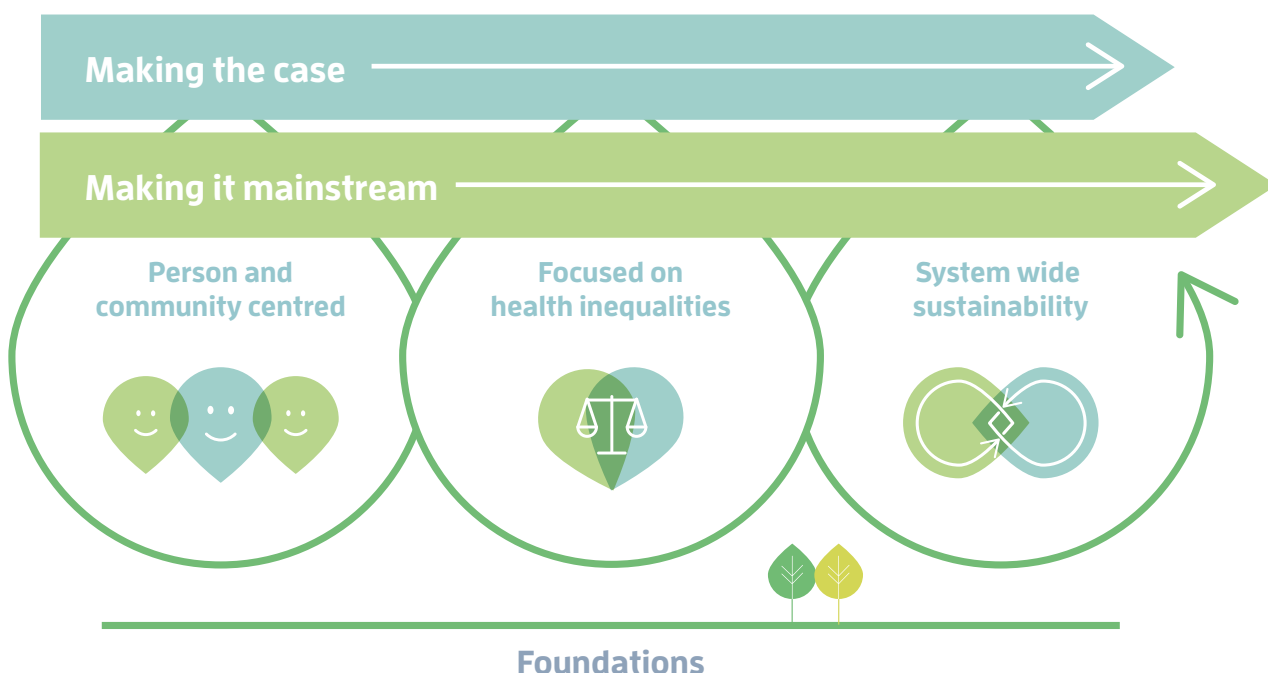
Our approach

Using a collaborative outcome mapping approach, 200 people from across Lothian and beyond joined the discussions over the seven months of the project. We heard from people with lived experience, a wide range of providers of green and blue health activities, potential prescribers, strategic and policy leads and people responsible for greenspace in meetings, interviews and a series of interactive workshops.

Golden Threads for Green Health Prescribing

We found huge enthusiasm for the potential of green health prescribing across the health and care system in Lothian and strong consensus around what needed to be in place which was summarised into five *Golden Threads*.

Pathways



There are three underpinning foundations:

- **Person and community centred** – like all social prescribing, green health prescribing will work best when based around good conversations which focus on what matters to the person, and the activities are embedded in the community and make the most of local knowledge, connections and partnerships.
- **Focussed on health inequalities** – we need to think about who could benefit most, and the potential for inequalities from the first interaction, to accessibility, to provision of appropriate activities. Barriers at individual, social and material levels need to be identified and addressed using creative solutions.
- **System wide sustainability** – acknowledging the issues arising from short term funding and pockets of good practice, we need to engage with strategic and policy leads to identify the potential for green health prescribing across the system, and work with champions at all levels and from all sectors to develop sustainable models of provision.

There are two inter-connected pathways which need to progress in parallel:

- **Making the case** – this pathway is about ensuring that a wide range of people develop a shared understanding of what green health activities are currently provided, what the potential of green health prescribing is (particularly for addressing health inequalities), champion it, and work in partnership to develop sustainable approaches to delivery.
- **Making it mainstream** – this pathway is about building momentum using a growing network of people who are connecting with each other, sharing resources and ideas, and building partnerships across sectors. We are seeing this already through the connections people have made during the project and the nearly 100 people who have joined our MS Team. Using these connections we need to identify barriers, and explore solutions. People from across the health and care system need to see themselves as potential prescribers.

Based on the consensus that has emerged during the project, the two pathways set out what needs to happen to achieve the shared vision. They can be adapted for local use and include suggestions for measuring progress.

Call to action

Here are the actions we think everyone can take to help deliver the vision:

1. Reflect

on your own experience of connecting to nature and use this as a hook to start a conversation about green health prescribing with your peers, using the five *Golden Threads* to help share the learning from this project.

2. Join

the Lothian Green Health Prescribing Network and help it grow and mature into an active and supportive space for collaboration and learning.

3. Connect

with other people and organisations to develop local action plans using the Making the Case and Making it Mainstream pathways as frameworks.

4. Reflect

continually on and measure your progress using the suggested approaches outlined in this report as a starting point, and share learning with the Network.

Champions are needed at every level:

if you feel passionately about the benefits of nature and their potential in addressing health inequalities, please respond to our call to action. To join the Lothian Network, go to www.elhf.co.uk/what-we-do/greenspace/sign-up-for-our-greenspace-networks, and for more information, please email ian.mackenzie@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

