



THE  
**INTER  
TWINE**

# The Health Care-Nature Connection

Expanding RxPlay  
into a Regional Program



## WHAT IS THE NEED?

People of all ages across the U.S. are less physically active, more socially isolated, and spend more time indoors than in previous generations.

This shift in lifestyle has been linked to a variety of negative physical and mental health outcomes:



In addition, a range of social factors increase barriers to healthy behaviors while reinforcing negative health outcomes among populations most vulnerable.



## WHY NATURE?

A growing body of research shows that proximity to and time spent in nature keeps people active, healthy and safe.

- Access to greenspace can play a key role in providing convenient places for physical activity and stress reduction.
- Time spent in nature improves creative and cognitive skills and social cohesion.
- Many current health challenges can be traced to our society's ever-growing separation from the natural world.
- This disconnection has been exacerbated by:
  - disappearing natural areas
  - the inequitable placement of neighborhood parks
  - societal norms that keep us highly scheduled, tightly controlling how we spend our free time

## WHAT IS RxPLAY?

RxPlay leverages the connection between patient and clinician, proactively utilizing nature, physical activity and play as key components to creating positive physical, mental and spiritual health outcomes for all ages and communities.

Prescription play programs are proliferating around the country as a cost-effective primary-care solution to dealing with a range of health ailments.

## WHY WILL IT WORK?

- Clinician-generated prescriptions for increased physical activity are shared directly with recreation providers to help participants connect to a range of local physical outdoor activities.
- The program utilizes a “warm hand-off” - a direct connection between the patient and the activity programs by a culturally relevant support person, decreasing barriers to access and creating a more sustainable relationship between the recreation provider and the participant.
- A Portland metro-based pilot RxPlay program has shown that a unique and successful partnership between several health-care entities and two recreation systems can be achieved locally. Although this pilot has met many of its objectives, the current program is limited in geographical scope, age groups served, and health challenges addressed.

## WHAT WILL THE EXPANDED PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

The Intertwine Alliance is convening local partners to expand RxPlay beyond its initial scope to include a broader range of partners and to address a wider range of health outcomes.

The new program will:

- Expand the audience served to all ages, as well as provide multi-generational opportunities
- Offer programs to impact a broader range of health outcomes—physical, mental and spiritual
- Reach more participants by expanding the number of partners and stakeholders while reaching underserved communities and increasing access
- Create a centralized infrastructure to provide sustainable leadership, consistency, training and oversight, and include a sustainable business plan
- Develop a sortable database of nature-focused opportunities, along with various communications platforms and vehicles





## WHY NOW?

This is an opportune moment in time to develop more expansive strategies to positively impact the health of more individuals, remove disparities, and find a meaningful role for the parks and natural areas sector in advancing these objectives.

- Health care is in a state of transformation, with a rising prioritization of preventative care and a search for new solutions.
- Best practices of well-documented and proven prescription-play models now exist around the U.S.
- Our region's array of parks and natural areas continues to grow and improve.
- The pilot RxPlay program created a track record of workable relationships, systems and structures.
- More than ever, area conservation and medical communities are thinking outside the box and understand that we can get more accomplished if we work together.
- We have built significant social capital between and within sectors that can now be leveraged intentionally.

## NEXT STEPS

As we develop this new paradigm, we are certain it will lead to greater health equity and well-being, less dependence on acute medical interventions, and increased community involvement with nature and physical activity.

While variations on prescription-based programs continue to be developed nationwide, we see the regional expansion of its basic tenets and objectives as an important strategic pathway to more widespread positive health outcomes for the broader community.

Details of the final plan will be developed during the second half of 2017, with the goal of launching a Phase 1 effort in 2018.

We hope you see the value in this concept and have interest in being a part of what we are trying to build.



## **CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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## **THE INTERTWINE ALLIANCE**

The Intertwine Alliance is a coalition of 165+ public, private and nonprofit organizations working to integrate nature more deeply into the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region.

We define nature broadly, as anything other than the built environment, from backyard gardens and street trees to natural areas and neighborhood parks. We recognize and honor all communities' and cultures' definitions and experiences of nature.

## **MISSION**

The mission of The Intertwine Alliance is to leverage investments in nature to create positive environmental, transportation, education, recreation, health, economic and social outcomes for our community. We do this by building connections across sectors, geographies, disciplines and racial divides, deepening the partnerships and collaborations necessary to accomplish large-scale change. We organize summits and forums; are a communications platform; help our partners build their capacity through training and education; and catalyze, nurture, facilitate and manage complex, collaborative initiatives.

[www.theintertwine.org](http://www.theintertwine.org)