



Media release

INNOVATIVE PARK REFURBSHMENT MORE THAN DOUBLES PARK VISITS

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Installing an innovative play-scape in a local Melbourne park resulted in more than double the number of park visitors engaging in physical activity at the park.

Published recently in [The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity](#), the REVAMP (Recording and Evaluating Activity in a Modified Park) study provides clear evidence that playground refurbishment can have a big impact on park visitation and park-based physical activity.

Lead author, Dr Jenny Veitch, from the Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) at Deakin University, said despite considerable investment in park renovations, few studies have examined the impact of improving park amenities on people's physical activity and visits to parks.

"When Parks Victoria were planning to install a new play-scape at Brimbank Park, we seized the opportunity to conduct a natural experiment and evaluate the effectiveness of 'real world' changes in the physical environment," Dr Veitch said.

"An innovative play-scape was installed that included a maze, nature play area, climbing equipment and various sculptures, designed to encourage visitors, in particular children, to connect with both the natural environment and the significant Indigenous cultural heritage of the region.

"We were able to examine the impact of the Brimbank Park improvement on children, parents, adults and seniors over two years and compare it with a control park that had similar infrastructure prior to the refurbishment."

The REVAMP study found that as a result of the refurbishment:

- Brimbank Park had over two and a half times more park visitors, relative to the control park
- Brimbank Park had more than double the amount of park visitors observed engaging in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA), relative to the control park
- Visitors to the new play-scape area increased more than seven times at Brimbank Park, whereas visitor counts at the playground at the control park decreased slightly over the same period.

Dr Veitch said that previous IPAN research had found that parks in socio-economically disadvantaged areas like Brimbank are more likely to be of poorer quality than parks in wealthier areas.

"Attracting people to visit and be physically active in parks is very important to their health and wellbeing and with significant population growth in urban areas and increases in mid and high density living, the availability of high quality parks is critical for future generations.

“These findings confirm that well-designed play-scape refurbishments have the potential to increase park visitation and encourage visitors to use these spaces to be physically active.

“This evidence is important for policy and decision makers, urban planning, and future park developments, to ensure our parks are designed to support local communities to lead healthy and active lives,” she said.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said lifestyles were becoming increasingly sedentary and less than a third of Australians were getting enough physical activity to benefit their health.

“We know there are many barriers preventing Victorians from increasing their level of physical activity - including access to local opportunities, cost or simply a lack of motivation,” Ms Rechter said.

“This project shows if we make physical activity an easy and attractive part of people’s daily lives they are more likely to do it. Projects like this improve people’s health and prevent chronic disease.”

Matthew Jackson, Parks Victoria Chief Executive Officer said; “A big focus for Parks Victoria is to help people of all ages and abilities gain the health benefits of being in nature and our parks.”

“We have been delighted to watch the playscape become a popular place for children and their families, and these research findings from IPAN at Deakin University are very welcome news,” he said.

Brimbank City Council Mayor Cr Margaret Giudice added: “The results of this study provide further validation of the significant investment Brimbank City Council has made into upgrading parks and playgrounds across the municipality in recent years.

“Up until now, we’ve known anecdotally the positive impact properly designed, attractive and accessible parks and playgrounds have had on the community, but this study provides clear evidence of the benefit of this investment,” she said.

The paper can be found at: <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-017-0625-5>

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