



EMBARGOED UNTIL 6:00 AM ADT, APRIL 22, 2022

NATIONAL NATURE PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM, PaRx, LAUNCHES IN THE MARITIMES

Halifax, April 22, 2022 —

Growing up in rural Prince Edward Island, Emma McDermott always took access to nature for granted. Watching the sunset over the fields from her living room window was a favourite pastime, and days spent playing outside deepened her love for the rolling hills and seascapes of her home.

McDermott now attends Dalhousie Medical School, and her passion for nature is leading her to promote its health benefits. Along with New Brunswick-based medical student Jacquie Mincer, the two have been working steadily for almost a year with a local team of health professionals to gain over a dozen endorsements from prominent health organizations across Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Today, on Earth Day, [PaRx, Canada's national nature prescription program](#), officially launches in the Maritimes. Health professionals across the region can now formally prescribe nature to their patients as part of their personal health care plans.

“During my training and time in the city, I’ve realized that many Canadians aren’t spending enough time experiencing the health benefits of nature. And one of my favourite things about nature prescribing is that it’s so accessible—participants of all ages and abilities can spend time in all kinds of outdoor spaces,” says McDermott.

For Mincer, working to launch PaRx was a natural continuation of her prior training in global and environmental health, and was further inspired by the time she spent in nature during the COVID-19 pandemic. “The concept of one prescription having the power to improve the health of patients *and* the planet is very exciting,” offers Mincer. “For myself, a quick trip to the water or a nearby trail helps me unwind after a stressful day, in ways that Netflix never could. No matter what cognitive or mental burden I carry with me to the beach, I always leave feeling lighter and more grounded.”

Dr. Shannon Johnson, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at Dalhousie University and a key Maritimes PaRx launch coordinator, looks forward to seeing her colleagues across health disciplines connecting their patients to nature. Says Dr. Johnson, “We all need nature in our lives, especially given the past two years and the toll it has taken on many people’s mental health. PaRx can play an important role in our collective mental health recovery.”

The Maritimes PaRx program is endorsed by [a diverse group of health professionals](#), from the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island and Nurse Practitioners of New Brunswick, to the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia and Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia.



Nature prescriptions were named one of the [top eight global wellness trends](#) in 2019 and are being implemented around the world. The UK and other countries have invested in park prescription pilots to help address mental and physical health problems and the resulting strain on their health-care systems and economies.

The BC Parks Foundation launched PaRx in November 2020, starting in British Columbia, and since then expanding to Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta. Winning a prestigious Joule Innovation prize from the Canadian Medical Association and [recognized by the World Health Organization at COP26](#) for its unique approach to addressing both the health of people and the planet, PaRx now has over 5,000 prescribers across Canada.

With the launch, any licensed health-care professional can prescribe PaRx. After registering at www.parkprescriptions.ca, once verified they will receive a nature prescription file customized with a unique provider code and instructions for how to prescribe and log prescriptions.

Featuring practical, evidence-based [online resources](#) like quick prescribing tips and printable fact sheets, as well as an achievable green-time target of “2 hours per week, 20+ minutes each time,” PaRx aims to make nature prescriptions easy and effective for both prescribers and patients.

“It’s incredibly gratifying to see support for PaRx reaching the east coast,” says Dr. Melissa Lem, a family physician and Director of PaRx. She prescribed nature for the first time to a student battling Attention Deficit Disorder over a decade ago, and since then has become an internationally recognized advocate for the nature-health connection, championing it in her practice, at medical conferences, and through guided tours in parks.

“There’s a strong and growing body of research on the health benefits of nature time, from better immune function and life expectancy to reduced risk of heart disease, depression and anxiety,” states Dr. Lem, who believes governments should designate parks an essential part of the health care system.

Dr. Mark MacMillan, President of the New Brunswick Medical Society (NBMS) and an Internal Medicine physician in Fredericton, is likewise thrilled to see the program arrive in his province. “The NBMS is pleased to welcome Parks Prescription, Canada’s first national, evidence-based nature prescription program to New Brunswick,” says Dr. MacMillan. “Regularly spending time in nature has many physical and mental health benefits. We are fortunate in this province to have convenient access to a variety of inspiring natural environments including beautiful parks, beaches and trail systems. The potential for these settings to have positive effects on your health is added encouragement to get outside and experience all that New Brunswick has to offer.”

Meanwhile, Prince County Hospital physiotherapist Sheila MacMurdo, President of the PEI Physiotherapy Association (PEIPA), can’t wait to see patients across PEI connect to nature, saying, “Taking advantage of our stunning natural environment and exercising outdoors affords us the



benefits of increased enjoyment and adherence to an active, healthy lifestyle. PEIPA is delighted to endorse the PaRx initiative to improve the health and wellness of Islanders."

PaRx also announced a new [partnering agreement with Parks Canada](#) in January. Licensed health-care professionals registered in the PaRx program can now help reduce barriers to accessing nature for their patients by prescribing an Adult Parks Canada Discovery Pass. They are asked to prioritize those who live close to national parks, national historic sites, or national marine conservation areas, and who could benefit from the pass the most. Each registered prescriber can prescribe up to one Adult Discovery Pass per month.

As spring arrives in the Maritimes, it's the ideal time for health-care professionals to promote the mental and physical health benefits of heading outdoors—for both their patients' and their own health. That's why the BC Parks Foundation is offering free guided remote nature therapy sessions to prescribers to support their own wellbeing. "Out of gratitude for the extraordinary care health-care workers have been giving Canadians, we are offering them a rejuvenating chance to connect with nature in a deep, consistent and meaningful way," says Andy Day, CEO of the BC Parks Foundation.

The BC Parks Foundation invites other partners, governments, and funders to engage and collaborate with PaRx as it rolls out across the Maritimes and Canada.

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The BC Parks Foundation inspires people to enhance their health and parks through a spirit of gratitude and well-being. For more info visit bcparksfoundation.ca