



# POSITION STATEMENT ON ACTIVE OUTDOOR PLAY



Active outdoor play promotes holistic health and well-being for people of all ages, communities, and environments, and for our entire planet. It is critical given the multiple global challenges we face today (e.g., social and health inequities, climate change, and digital addiction). Together, as a collective of the outdoor play sector, we recommend increasing opportunities for active outdoor play in all settings where people live, learn, work, and play. To achieve this, it is important to collaborate across sectors, settings, and societies to preserve, promote, and value equitable access to active play outdoors and in nature.

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## Play-amble

The 2015 Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play<sup>1</sup> and its supporting evidence<sup>2,3</sup> showed the benefits of active outdoor play for children's health and well-being. Ten years later, research on this topic has increased by 10 times<sup>4,5</sup> and there has been more funding for outdoor play projects.<sup>6</sup> The 2015 Position Statement also influenced policy, research, and practice globally.<sup>6</sup> An international leadership group has come together to create the 2025 Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play to celebrate these achievements, update the evidence, and expand the scope, by encompassing all age groups and extending its reach globally.

The 2025 Position Statement envisions a world where active outdoor play contributes to addressing global challenges

such as health crises and climate change, while advancing the [United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals](#).<sup>7</sup> Together, as a collective of the outdoor play sector, we want to build healthier, more resilient communities by making active outdoor play part of daily life, ensuring that everyone has equitable access and opportunities to engage in active outdoor play.

This Position Statement calls for systemic change and offers recommendations for individuals, communities, and different sectors. These recommendations aim to make active outdoor play a fundamental right and an essential part of sustainable societies.

This Position Statement was informed by 12 systematic reviews, six global region

reviews, an environmental scan, and consultations with more than 200 global experts representing all inhabited continents.

## The Position Statement is anchored to nine key themes:

- Health and Well-being
- Movement Behaviors
- Education and Learning
- Social Capital
- Community, Connections, and Partnerships
- Nature and the Environment
- One Health
- Human Rights and Policy
- Emerging Areas

*Further details of the process and findings leading to the 2025 Position Statement are published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (see links on Page 6).*

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## Active outdoor play...

### ...helps us move more, play longer, and sleep better

When we play outdoors, we engage in more physical activity and less sedentary behavior and screen time, leading to better sleep.<sup>2,8-25</sup>

Outdoor environments can encourage individuals to engage in spontaneous, fun activities.<sup>21,25-33</sup>

### ...is a catalyst for sustaining health and well-being

Active outdoor play can enhance health and well-being (i.e., physical, mental, social, spiritual).<sup>2,3,26,34-43</sup> Playing outdoors offers an opportunity to connect, explore, and engage in healthy and enriching ways.<sup>34,36,38,39</sup>

### ...promotes confidence, naturally

Outdoor environments provide a dynamic space for playful adventures and risk-taking – an essential ingredient for healthy development<sup>3,35,44</sup> and aging.<sup>45-47</sup> Engaging in active outdoor play that is challenging helps build confidence, resilience, and problem-solving skills, while promoting agency, well-being, and physical literacy.<sup>3,35,48-52</sup>

### ...offers a pathway to a happier, healthier planet

Active outdoor play can bridge multiple sectors including public health, education, recreation, and the environment, while recognizing the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental well-being.<sup>53-57</sup> It fosters relationships with nature, contributing to healthier communities, stronger ecosystems, and a more sustainable planet.<sup>47,53,58,59</sup>

### ...builds climate resilience and stewardship for a sustainable future

Engaging in active outdoor play nurtures a deepened connection with nature and caring for our natural world.<sup>60-64</sup> Climate change may threaten opportunities for active outdoor play, but when active outdoor play is part of daily life, it can foster a culture where people of all ages play, learn, grow, and thrive together while adapting to and building resilience for climate change.<sup>54,55,57,65,66</sup>



### ...connects communities

Shared active outdoor play experiences build stronger communities, celebrate cultural traditions, and strengthen diversity while fostering a sense of belonging.<sup>27,67-71</sup> In turn, cohesive communities create safe and supportive environments that encourage citizenship, agency, and active outdoor play for all.<sup>67,68,71-75</sup>

### ...facilitates diverse learning opportunities

Active outdoor play can unlock a world of rich, hands-on learning experiences, sparking curiosity, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving.<sup>27,41,76-79</sup> It nurtures resilience and adaptability, and supports social, emotional, and cognitive growth throughout life.<sup>46,50,76,80,81</sup>

### ...can reduce excessive indoor time

Excessive indoor time can contribute to prolonged sedentary behavior, increased screen time, and exposure to indoor pollutants, allergens, and infectious diseases.<sup>82-89</sup> Active outdoor play provides a healthy balance in reducing time spent indoors.<sup>1,29,90</sup>

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## **Emerging areas: Expanding the possibilities of active outdoor play**

As we push the boundaries of what is known about active outdoor play, new and urgent questions arise that challenge conventional thinking and open doors to transformative change. The following questions probe uncharted territories where research, policy, and practice must converge to shape the future of active outdoor play.

### **>> Can active outdoor play reshape adult movement patterns?**

- How do physical activity, sedentary behavior, and sleep patterns interact with active outdoor play in adults?
- Could active outdoor play hold the key to enhancing physical and mental well-being across the lifespan?

### **>> Could risky outdoor play be a key ingredient for brain plasticity?**

- Could taking risks outdoors—climbing higher, moving faster, exploring the unknown—actually enhance brain plasticity, strengthening cognitive function, enabling adaptation to new environments and challenges across the lifespan, and supporting recovery from injury?

### **>> What does active outdoor play look like around the world?**

- How do different cultural, environmental, and socio-political contexts shape the ways people engage in active outdoor play?
- What can we do to learn and share best practices from different regions and cultures?

### **>> How do we bridge the gap between research and real-world play?**

- What's missing between what we study and what happens on the ground?
- How can research better inform policies and practices that support active outdoor play?

### **>> Can schools and schoolyards be redesigned and reprogrammed as playgrounds for movement, creativity, and learning?**

- How can we integrate active outdoor play into formal education systems – not just as a break from learning, but as an essential part of it?
- What would a school built for outdoor movement and play look like?
- Could schoolyards serve a greater purpose as community outdoor play spaces?



### **>> How do we design cities that invite play at every turn?**

- From biodiverse urban parks to healthy and playful streets, what urban design features make active outdoor play irresistible, accessible, and inclusive for all?

### **>> Could active outdoor play be a conduit for global sustainability?**

- What if active outdoor play held the key to tackling some of the world's biggest challenges – climate change, and health and social inequities?
- How does active outdoor play align with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#),<sup>7</sup> and what policies could amplify its impact?

### **>> With rising concerns about screen time, anxiety, and loneliness, could active outdoor play be a powerful antidote to the adverse effects of social media use?**

- How can we reintroduce movement, nature, and face-to-face connection in a digital age?

Each of these questions holds the potential to disrupt conventional wisdom and reimagine the role of outdoor play in shaping healthier, more resilient individuals and communities. The next step? Bold research, innovative policy, and a commitment to action!

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## A call to action: Recommendations to promote active outdoor play

>> **Societies:** Encourage a culture that values and prioritizes active outdoor play as part of daily life. **Create** and improve access to spaces where everyone can enjoy active outdoor play. **Advocate** for collaboration among researchers, educators, urban planners, health professionals, and policymakers to make active outdoor play a health priority.

>> **Research and surveillance:** Invest in data collection and monitoring systems to track trends in active outdoor play and to identify gaps and inequities. **Explore** the optimal quality and quantity of active outdoor play for healthy people and communities. **Establish** causal pathways between active outdoor play, and health and well-being outcomes.

>> **Policy and legislation:** **Recognize** access to active outdoor play as a fundamental right in health, education, recreation, and environmental policies. **Encourage** governments to enact and uphold policies that support active outdoor play. **Promote, protect, value, and invest** in outdoor play environments that connect neighborhoods, schools, recreational areas, and workplaces.

>> **Education and schools:** **Encourage** colleges, adult education centers, and community learning centers to integrate ongoing professional development related to active outdoor play and learning into programs. **Require** daily active outdoor playtime in early childhood education and K–12 school policies. **Integrate** outdoor classrooms and nature-based learning into education systems.

>> **Public health and healthcare:** **Educate** medical professionals, patients, and communities on the health benefits of active outdoor play. **Integrate** active outdoor play into healthcare practice and public health initiatives to reduce sedentary behavior and improve health. **Collaborate** across sectors to develop localized public health strategies that promote active outdoor play.

>> **Urban planning:** **Design** accessible, safe, and play-friendly outdoor spaces in and around neighborhoods. **Prioritize** the preservation and restoration of natural environments that encourage active outdoor play when designing or redesigning communities. **Reform** municipal policies and bylaws to actively support and enable active outdoor play.

>> **Communities:** **Support, promote, and build on** campaigns that emphasize the



importance of active outdoor play as a health-promoting habit. **Support, promote, and build on** efforts that promote benefit-risk approaches to active outdoor play. **Encourage** intergenerational active outdoor play to strengthen community connections.

>> **Families:** **Play** with others, including companion animals, to nourish a sense of community and connection to the outdoors. **Encourage** and **model** active outdoor play as a normative behavior in your neighborhood. **Support** family members' participation in active outdoor play by encouraging, facilitating, and engaging together.

>> **Individuals:** **Be respectful** stewards of the outdoor environments where play happens. **Advocate** for equitable access and preservation of green spaces and safe play-friendly environments. **Explore** and **enjoy** diverse experiences in different outdoor spaces as part of your daily routine.



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### AOP10 Executive Leadership

**Mark Tremblay**  
CHEO Research Institute  
Canada

**Eun-Young Lee**  
Queen's University, Canada  
Yonsei University, Korea

**Louise de Lannoy**  
Outdoor Play Canada  
Canada

### AOP10 Leadership Team

**Dina Adjei Boadi**  
University of Ghana, Ghana

**Maeghan James**  
CHEO Research Institute  
Canada

**Leigh Vanderloo**  
ParticipACTION, Canada

**Maria Isabel Amando de Barros**  
Alana Institute, Brazil

**Robyn Monro Miller**  
International Play Association  
Australia

**Po-Yu Wang**  
National Taiwan Normal  
University, Taiwan

**Scott Duncan**  
Auckland University of  
Technology, New Zealand

**Laerke Mygind**  
Copenhagen University  
Hospital, Denmark

### AOP10 Publications

- **2025 Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play:** <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-025-01813-9>.
- **2025 Position Statement - Process and Methodology:** <https://doi.org/10.04.162/s12966-025-01806-8>

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