



## URBAN GREEN CARE

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### case study

# PARK RX

Our organisation, Park Rx America, has developed an online facilitation and information hub to educate and train a diverse group of health care professionals and practitioners to incorporate nature as a therapeutic intervention.

*“We specialise in accessible and personalized nature; we aim to develop the habit of being outdoors that is comfortable and safe for each unique individual.”*

Robert Zarr, MD

## MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

- **Website**  
[www.parkrxamerica.org](http://www.parkrxamerica.org)
- **Social channels**  
[instagram.com/prx-america](https://www.instagram.com/prx-america)  
[facebook.com/nationalparkrx](https://www.facebook.com/nationalparkrx)  
[facebook.com/parkrxamerica](https://www.facebook.com/parkrxamerica)  
[twitter.com/NatlParkRx](https://twitter.com/NatlParkRx)  
[twitter.com/parkrxamerica](https://twitter.com/parkrxamerica)
- **Country**  
USA
- **Contact us through Alliance**  
[greenforcare.eu/joining4c/park-rx-america](http://greenforcare.eu/joining4c/park-rx-america)
- **Main sector**  
Voluntary
- **Specific sector**  
Health,  
Education
- **Stage of development**  
Legally incorporated  
in 2017 as a charitable  
501(c)(3) non-profit NGO
- **Our work in SDGs**



## FROM FEW TO MANY

Our project started in **2012** as a pilot project in the District of Columbia (DC) when Founder and Medical Director, Doctor Robert Zarr, a paediatrician, partnered with the US National Park Service, the DC Department of Health, the National Environmental Education Foundation, and George Washington University. The idea was to leverage the trust relationship between medical providers and their patients to get the patients outdoors to receive the **therapeutic health benefits of being in natural settings**. The project mapped all the parks in DC and provided information on available facilities and amenities. The online portal made it easy for a healthcare providers to find a location to for a prescribed visit. Positive media coverage and interest from other physicians resulted in the launch of Park Rx America as a **national NGO in 2017**.

The team now includes: John Henderson (Executive Director), Matthew Scribner (Chief Technology Officer), Dr. Stacy Beller Stryer, (M.D., Associate Medical Director), Courtney Schultz (Ph.D, Research Fellow), Derrick Faison (Nature Navigator Liaison), and an advisory board made up of 10 expert stakeholders.

We are growing rapidly. Since January 2019, **over 1000 health care professionals** (mostly physicians) have registered to prescribe on using our platform. They are located in **49 US states and 11 countries**. Each month the registrants receive a newsletter that highlights the work of a prescriber.

Our database has park information on over **10,000 parks** in all states of the US and around the world, with over 8,000 available for prescribing. From 2019 through 2020 **over 3,500 prescriptions** have been issued, over 2,300 unique park visits recorded, and over 1,300 unique parks prescribed.



## FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Starting in 2012, the trigger for this project came from what we, as health workers, experience. We see a lot of pain and hear a lot of difficult stories every day that create trauma for people working in the health sector. We are always looking for solutions - how can we do better? We need systemic change, yes, but we also need to do something here and now when patients and physicians are suffering.

Nature gives us hope, mitigates pain, rejuvenates, and helps us to see that we can change the system. We want to **understand the power of nature, capture it, and prescribe it**. For these reasons we have created **Park Rx America**.

At the moment, our business model is almost completely relying on our own elbow-grease and funding, however, we have also had some grants, donations, honoraria, and speaking fees etc. funding support in the past. Our future is looking bright and we hope to roll out **a paid premium service** with paid memberships, fees for service (primarily customization for customers), and licensing the platform for research. Also, by **integrating our prescription services into the public health records system**, we could open up a whole new level of support.

Park Rx America operates as a platform to facilitate information sharing and concerted action among park and public land agencies, healthcare providers, and community partners. It **promotes the prescription of nature** during routine delivery of healthcare by a diverse group of health care professionals. Our key activities are prescribing nature, networking, marketing, creating partnerships, research, and lobbying.

## FROM OLD TO NEW

Our idea is innovative because it unites two realities that had not been connected previously: the world of **prescriptions** and **the natural world**. Prescription provides structure and uses the trust relationship between doctors and patients to get people outdoors. At the same time, they can overcome social and cultural challenges associated with being outdoors.

We have a framework on our website that allows health professionals to prescribe nature based on individual patients' needs, situations, desires, and feelings of safety in nature. While being flexible, however, this framework also provides structure, and structure is very important for humans to carry on day by day. So, our innovation is not only to expand the concept of a prescription; it is also to codify it and hence to incorporate it in what we do.

Our aim is to give people the opportunity to **reconnect with nature when they need it most**. And we are making this behavioural change through prescriptions.



## FROM NOW TO THEN

The **next steps** for us include:

- Integrating the Park Rx America platform into **electronic health records systems**
- **Attracting healthcare providers** willing to prescribe nature, and
- **Providing education and training** on the connection between nature exposure and human health, especially for those working in the health and public lands sectors.

There will, of course, be challenges to face. Foremost is a general lack of awareness about the link between nature & well-being. The absence of a national healthcare system in the United States means it is difficult to establish overarching policy. There is over-privatisation and a lack of recognition of mental well-being as an essential element for societal health. For many people there are physical and psychological barriers to accessing nature.

To meet these challenges, we need:

- **Access to parks and nature-rich spaces** that provide opportunity for a variety of social gathering, physical activity, and contemplative experiences.
- **Healthcare providers** who will promote and offer nature prescriptions, and
- **Recognition, endorsement, and financial support** from the medical, public health, and public lands establishments for the healing power of nature.