



## Increase in green space associated with fewer preventable deaths in most deprived neighbourhoods

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This policy briefing provides an overview of research findings published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health on 12th November 2024. <sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Urban green space (green in the sense of being predominantly covered with vegetation) can generate various health, wellbeing and environmental benefits. Investment in good quality and accessible green space in urban areas may help reduce preventable deaths.

A study led by researchers based at Queen's University Belfast, with colleagues in University of Liverpool and University of Glasgow, has examined inequalities in access to urban greens spaces and its association with preventable deaths across the UK.

The research has highlighted the ongoing importance of parks and green spaces to health. Examples of preventable deaths include some types of cancer, ischaemic heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Deprivation measures include income, employment, education, health, crime, access to services, and living environment.

### Quick summary

- Queen's researchers have led research into inequalities in access to urban green spaces and its association with preventable deaths.
- The most deprived neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland have the lowest provision of green space.
- With every 1% increase of urban green space, an annual count of preventable deaths in the most deprived neighbourhoods was lower by 37-41%.

### Key recommendation

- Increased investment in urban green space, prioritised in the most deprived neighbourhoods, focusing not only on increasing green space but improving the accessibility and quality of it. This is important for public health prevention, in light of the cost-of-living crisis and growing NHS issues in the UK.

## Key findings

- Wales have the highest percentage green space (45%), followed by NI and England (24% and 21%, respectively), and Scotland (16%). In Wales, urban green space is better distributed across neighbourhoods with different levels of deprivation.
- The amount of urban green space was lowest among the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, England and Scotland.
- In Northern Ireland and Scotland, with **every 1% increase of urban green space** in a geographic area, the 5-year accumulated count of **preventable deaths among the most deprived neighbourhoods was lower by approximately 37% and 41%**, respectively.
- In England, with every 1% increase of urban green space in a geographic area, the annual count of preventable deaths among the most deprived neighbourhoods was lower by 37%.

## Policy recommendations

- These results suggest an urgent need for **increased investment in urban green space**.
- Green space investment should be prioritised in the **most deprived neighbourhoods**, where provision is currently lowest and preventable deaths are highest.
- Investment should not solely focus on increasing existence of urban green space, but also on the **accessibility and quality** of such green space.
- Investing in urban green space in the most deprived neighbourhoods is important for public health prevention strategies, particularly in light of the **cost-of-living crisis** and **growing NHS issues** in the UK.

GroundsWell is a team of researchers, community members and policy makers working together to identify and implement actions to maximise health and wellbeing benefits from urban green and blue spaces (UGBS) such as parks, community gardens, canals and rivers.

**For more information:**  
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1 Ngan TT, Wang R, Tate C, et al. Inequality in green space distribution and its association with preventable deaths across urban neighbourhoods in the UK, stratified by Index of Multiple Deprivation. *J Epidemiol Community Health* Published Online First: 12 November 2024. doi: 10.1136/jech-2024-222485