

## Public policies to reconnect humans with nature

The link between the environment and health manifests in multiple ways. In recent years there has been a focus on zoonotic diseases and the impact of forest clearing on outbreaks of zoonoses<sup>1</sup> transmitted by wild animals, yet this is far from the beginning and end of this story. The positive impact of nature on humans must seem obvious to the vast numbers of people on the planet who encounter it on a daily basis. However, growing urbanisation around the world has gradually meant that others are cut off from this reality, to the point that we need to call science into service to put this issue back at the centre of public policy.

Urban green spaces are important for supporting both biodiversity and human health, a clear indicator that this subject falls within the concept of "One Health". Nature in urban areas must allow biodiversity to flourish and provide animals with corridors so they can move between the natural areas on the outskirts of cities. Nature helps combat the effects of climate change by cooling down heat islands. Unsealing urban soils and encouraging their renaturing boosts the natural process of water infiltration to avoid flooding. Finally, our inner voice tells us and science shows us that nature in urban areas is also good for physical and mental health. Humans are not made to live without the presence of nature.

This may explain why, out of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework of December 2022, the first to be unanimously adopted was precisely the one that aims to: *"Significantly increase the area and quality, and connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas, by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and improving human health and well-being and connection to nature, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization and to the provision of ecosystem functions and services"*.

In December 2023, France published its National Biodiversity Strategy, which adapts this framework to a national level. Measure 21 aims to *"Bring nature back into cities to help with adaptation to the impacts of climate change and improve the well-being of residents"*. It sets out the funding available for urban renaturing projects, giving priority to the most deprived neighbourhoods. In a situation where budgets are limited, the studies conducted by Santé publique France contribute to a better understanding of the multiple health benefits provided by nature. If these benefits can be translated into economic terms, as with a preventive measure, we can hope that they will be given fair consideration when assessing the costs associated with urban greening projects.

Sylvie Lemmet, Ambassador for the Environment,  
Chair of the Board of Directors of Santé publique France.

1. Infectious diseases that pass from animals to humans.



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**Santé publique France**  
12, rue du Val d'Osne  
94415 Saint-Maurice Cedex – France  
Tél. : 01 41 79 67 00  
Fax : 01 41 79 67 67  
[www.santepubliquefrance.fr](http://www.santepubliquefrance.fr)

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Director of publication:  
**Caroline Semaille**

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Editorial assistant:  
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#### ADMINISTRATION

Subscriptions:  
**Christelle Lernet**  
(01 71 80 16 40)  
[sante-action-abo@santepubliquefrance.fr](mailto:sante-action-abo@santepubliquefrance.fr)  
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