



MEDIA RELEASE

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Connection to nature the key to living high and healthy

Living high can be healthy provided tenants maintain a connection with nature, a Deakin University study has found.

Dr Claire Henderson-Wilson, a lecturer with Deakin's School of Health and Social Development, researched the impact of nature on the health and wellbeing of inner city high rise apartment residents for her PhD. She will reveal the findings of the study at the Asia-Pacific EcoHealth Conference* being held at Deakin University's Melbourne Campus at Burwood this weekend (30 November—3 December).

With the growing trend in high-rise living, it is more important than ever to consider the health impacts of this style of housing, Dr Henderson-Wilson said.

“Traditionally, Australians have lived in low density, detached houses with modest sized backyards. However, since 1996 the growth of apartment living has accelerated, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney. This means that some Australians now have limited opportunity to access natural environments.

“This could result in a diminished quality of life as exposure to nature has been found to enhance psychological wellbeing, increase immunity to disease and improve productivity. While isolation from nature has been linked with increases in depression.”

For the 'Living High but Healthy' study, Dr Henderson-Wilson surveyed 221 high-rise residents in inner city Melbourne, Sydney and Parramatta. The participants varied in gender, age, socio-economic status and included owner-occupiers, private tenants and public housing tenants.

“This study established that a range of factors impact on inner city high-rise residents' health and wellbeing, either directly or indirectly,” Dr Henderson-Wilson said.

“Significantly, for public housing tenants, the availability of parks, gardens and/or a body of water was found to enhance residents' quality of life, provided it was safe and easy to access.”

Dr Henderson-Wilson highlights the following factors as key to ensuring residents live high and healthy:

- Safe and easy access to natural environments, in particular, community gardens, rooftop gardens and urban parks
- Apartment views that include trees, green spaces and/or water
- Safe and easy access to inner city facilities such as bicycle networks, efficient public transport, child care facilities and health services
- Opportunities for residents to participate in environmentally sustainable practices

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- Opportunities to develop socially inclusive neighbourhoods and a strong sense of community

“Taking these factors into account when planning and building new apartment blocks will help make sure that high-rise residents can maintain a link with nature and, therefore, help ensure a good quality of life,” Dr Henderson-Wilson said.

The study was funded by the Australian Research Council and conducted in collaboration with Parks Victoria, the City of Melbourne, the Parramatta Park Trust, Centennial and Moore Park Trust and the Lort Smith Animal Hospital.

* Asia Pacific EcoHealth Conference

Unsustainable living, climate change and disassociation from nature are beginning to take their toll and disastrous repercussions for human health and survival are anticipated by researchers across the globe. The Asia Pacific EcoHealth Conference being held at Deakin University’s Melbourne Campus at Burwood this weekend (30 November—3 December) will explore some of the key issues surrounding the relationships between humans and their environments.

Keynote speakers at the conference include global environmental health expert from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Dr Jonathan Patz and key adviser to the World Health Organisation on the health risks of climate change from the Australian National University Professor Tony McMichael.

The conference program can be viewed at:
<http://www.deakin.edu.au/events/ecohealth2007/program.php>

Ends

Dr Claire Henderson-Wilson is available for comment on her study.

Dr Mardie Townsend is available to comment on the EcoHealth Conference.

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