

## Ecosystem services and human health - awareness and attitudes

First report of analysis of results from the 2014 survey by the Ecosystem Service Partnership's Thematic Working Group on Health.



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We present you the first results from our analysis of responses, for which we very much thank all contributors! The analysis was severely delayed due to technical difficulties in the organization of the analytical work. We apologize for this. We will here only briefly present you part of the results. More in depth analytical findings will be part of a scientific publication which we are working on. We will inform you about this publication once it is published. First we will briefly re-introduce the aims of the survey and the outline of questions. After that we will present you some first results.

The aim of this survey was to gain a clearer view of where and how human health perspectives are addressed by people working in the field of ecosystem services research, policy and practice (what we call the "ecosystem services community"). We hoped to gauge the degree of awareness and interest in the topic, and to better understand the needs of those who aim to address links between ecosystems and human health within their fields of work. We also wished to gain information on the main opportunities and barriers / needs and challenges.

We looked for perspectives from anyone within the ecosystem services community, not just those who work on health issues. All responses are treated confidentially and will not be attributable to individuals or to their organisation. The results are used for research only and not for any commercial purposes. On behalf of the ESP Thematic Working Group on Public Health & partners: Hans Keune, Conor Kretsch, Bram Oosterbroek, Kati Vierikko & Pim Martens

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There were 36 questions in this survey. We list the main topical sections here in combination with some first analysis results.

### Who are the respondents?

Our analysis is based on the answers of 75 respondents. Most respondents are in-between 30 and 49 years old and live in Europe (29%).

Most respondents work at an academic organization. For 64% of the respondents, the concept of human health directly relates to their work. However, how often this is the case varies from 'rarely' to 'entirely'. It must be noted here that only 13% of respondents indicated to have health-related expertise, such as in epidemiology.

### How do respondents appreciate the links between well-being and ecosystem services?

Three categories of well-being from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are connected to the ecosystem services work of respondents: highest is "necessary material for a good life", second is "security", and third is "health". When asked about which well-being aspects in general should receive

highest scientific priority for the ecosystem services community, about half of the responses relate to the same three categories.

The definition of human health by the World Health Organisation is: “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. About half of the respondents believe that this definition is still adequate today for people seeking to understand links between ecosystems and human well-being.

### **How are ecosystem services and health connections dealt with in the work of respondents?**

In section 3 of the survey, respondents were asked to indicate agreement / disagreement with several statements about Ecosystem Services and human health in their current work. 83% disagrees with the statement “human health is not relevant to my current work on ecosystem services” (including 36% strongly disagreeing). Though human health seems to be relevant to most respondents, more than half of them indicate that information about the links to ecosystems is difficult to find.

Section 4 also posed several statements, but now on research into ecosystem services and health more generally. An interesting observation was that whilst 80% agrees that human health should be considered within economic valuations of ecosystem services, only 31% agrees that human health perspectives should be expressed in monetary terms.

Section 5 posed some final statements, this time about current policy and practice on ecosystem services and health. As much as 96% agreed that “policy and practice on ecosystem services should account for human health aspects”, and 97% agreed that “the ecosystem services community should seek to develop / strengthen links to the health community”.

When asked to provide some brief examples of the own organisation's current or future projects that consider health (section 6), most projects that were (briefly) described, related to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's constituents of well-being, of which fresh water and mental health considered most. The most often mentioned mental health outcomes next to general mental health were stress, depression and ADHD. The most often mentioned physical health outcomes next to general physical health are birth outcomes. Most mentioned under 'Other aspects' were 'access to medicines' and recreation / amenity value.

### **Which opportunities and challenges to interdisciplinary research on ecosystems and health are mentioned?**

When asked about factors that act as *barriers* to interdisciplinary research on ecosystems and health, especially collaboration barriers such as disciplinary differences and lack of mutual understanding are mentioned. Further lack of awareness about ecosystem – health linkages, lack of scientific understanding of ecosystem – health linkages and lack of resources stand out.

The same question was asked, but then specifically for barriers within the own area of work as open-ended question. This led to similar responses, except that the lack of awareness of the linkages and political issues were mentioned much less as barriers.

When asked about factors that act as *opportunities* to interdisciplinary research on ecosystems and health in their own area of work, a wide variety of examples is mentioned, of which specifically ecosystem relevant topics, concepts or practices as a sub-group stand out. Topical examples are the influence of urban green infrastructure on health, climate change mitigation, and linking ES with food security, conceptual examples are ecological public health and valuation.

*More updates on the next steps on the publication of results will follow asap and will be notified here and via the ESP newsletter*

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