Climate-Ready Nature Walks: Community Convening & Tick-Prevention Initiative

NYSACHO Climate Change & Health Adaptation Projects – 2026 Mini-Grant

Suffolk County Department of Health Services' - Office of Minority Health (OMH)
Long Island Sound Partnership (LISP)
Stony Brook Office of Health Equity & Climate Medicine Research (HECMR)

Nature Walk Series

Origin Story Health

- The Long Island Sound Partnership (LISP) reached out to the Office of Minority Health for **ways to increase engagement with marginalized groups across Long Island** after conducting an "**Environmental Justice Needs Assessment for the Long Island Sound Watershed**."

SOME GENERAL INFO. ABOUT RESIDENTS OF THE LONG ISLAND SOUND REGION:

- The region is densely populated, has older residents, many minority groups & non-English speakers & the region contains some of the most disadvantaged communities in the US while also having some of the wealthiest communities in the country!
- **Some Findings from their assessment of disadvantages communities:**

- Knowledge of the LI Sound is lower in minority groups , disadvantaged groups are more concerned with water quality, water pollution, health, and safety, there is a Lack of signage and information about public access locations, Transportation challenges & Concern about costs associated with access to outdoor spaces

LISP Report: https://lispartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Long-Island-Sound-Study-Environmental-Justice-Needs-Assessment-2024_06_04-1.pdf

LISP- Assessment of Disadvantages Communities

Origin Story Health

❖ **FINDINGS ABOUT REACHING & ENGAGING COMMUNITIES:**

Broad Community Findings: According to disadvantaged needs assessment survey

- There is a clear desire for more clean and safe outdoor spaces in which people can recreate.
- Some communities feel that measures should be taken to increase feelings of safety or belonging in certain outdoor spaces
- Survey data confirms that there is a need to increase access specifically for disadvantaged communities.

❖ **Suffolk County Dept. of Health Services in Collaboration with LISP Launched the "Nature Walk Series in 2024:**

- ***Initial Mission*** to: Promote equitable access to outdoor spaces across Suffolk County
- Support community health & wellness
- Raise awareness of environmental conversation



Nature Walk Series

"Exploring Health & Conservation"



- Held throughout Suffolk County, partnering with County and State Parks
- Health-prevention & Nature focus that includes a Chat with a local health provider, guided birdwatching and discussions with experts about the natural habitat of Long Island
- Encourages physical activity and introduces residents to beautiful parks & water ways in Suffolk County
- Aim to include accessible parks so people of all abilities can participate and feel included
- Offer walks in English & Spanish to expand access and strengthen community connection

*Resource Tables for Participates to speak with Health Experts and pick up health information

Nature Walk Series

Exploring Health & Conservation

Year 1 - 2024



September 2024:
Sunken Meadow State Park,
Kings Park NY

- Collaborated with Long Island Health Collaborative, Stony Brook Medicine, Long Island Sound Study and AARP New York
- Health provider spoke about the importance of exercise especially as we age



October 2024:
Inlet Pond County Park,
Greenport NY
Our Health Commissioner,
Dr. Gregson Pigott
Joined Us!

- Collaborated with Long Island Sound Study, Eastern LI Hospital-SBM, and North Fork Audubon
- Long Island Sound Study spoke about the importance of keeping LI Sound clean

Nature Walk Series
Exploring Health & Conservation



March 2025:
Lakeland County Park, Islandia NY

- Collaborated with Alzheimer Association and Four Harbors Audubon
- AA spoke about brain health & SC Dept of Health spoke about tick safety
- *Wheelchair accessible*



May 2025:
Belmont Lake State Park, North Babylon NY
Our Largest Walk Yet, with 50 attendees!

Year 2 - 2025

- Collaborated with NYS Parks Dept
- SC Dept of Health taught participants how to use exercise stations throughout the park

Nature Walk Series

Exploring Health & Conservation

2025



May 2025:
Cordwood Landing County Park, Miller Place NY

- Collaborated with Long Island Sound Study, NY/CT Audubon & Stony Brook Hospital Health provider spoke about men's health and importance of screenings



October 2025:
Sears Bellows County Park, Hampton Bays NY

- Collaborated with Stony Brook Southampton Hospital & Eastern Long Island Audubon
- Health provider spoke about importance of getting outside & exercising while living with a chronic condition

Nature Walk Series
New Partner

Year 3 – 2026

Stony Brook Office of Health Equity & Climate Medicine Research (HECMR)

Vision: A resilient Long Island where every person can live a healthy, fulfilling life through high-quality care, strong community connection, and an adaptable environment.
Mission: HECMR's mission is to break down silos between research and the community to identify innovative solutions for the future of care, conservation, and connection.

ASK	BRIDGE	COLLABORATE	DEVELOP	EVALUATE
Community members, health care providers, and researchers identify a problem or opportunity. They bring those ideas to HECMR.	HECMR identifies potential partners and funding for research or programs.	Community members, health care providers, and researchers work together to collect data, develop an idea, or build a strategy.	The collaborators work together to implement the idea with HECMR's support.	Everyone works together to collect data and improve the work. HECMR provides evaluation and communication support.

Nature Walk Series

New Partner



Stony Brook Office of Health Equity & Climate Medicine Research (HECMR)

Bold Ideas



Finding Gaps in Care With Geolocation

The Block-Level Climate Health Decisionmaking Tools



Learning About Health on Nature Walks

A Partnership With the Suffolk County Department of Health Services



Breaking Down Research Silos

The HECMR Research Network Database

Nature Walk Series

Mini Grant Support



<u>With the NYSACHO Mini Grant ($3,000)</u>:

- **Convene residents from Suffolk County communities and the HECMR Community Advisory Board network** for climate-health adaptation education and community-led planning.
- **Distribute tick-prevention kits** (tick removal tools, tick ID cards, prevention instructions) and **Sun safety items and resources**
- **Provide bilingual educational sessions** on heat safety, air quality awareness, environmental justice, and your rights to park access.
- **Recruit additional providers & clinicians** through HECMR and SCDHS to participate in the Nature Walks as climate-health educators, and Tick specialist, expanding the existing “chat with a provider” model.
- **Increase recruitment of underserved populations,** diverse community partners and expand access to climate adaptation resources across Long Island**.**

Nature Walk Series
Mini Grant Support

<u>With the NYSACHO Mini Grant ($3,000)</u>:

- **Expansion is supporting 4, *no-cost* Climate Ready Nature Walks** and **1 Climate & Nature Adaptation Convening (in-person forum)**,
- HECMR and SCDHS will host a ***"Our Nature, Our Health"*** community convening at the Riverhead Public Library on **August 22, 2026,** focused on the importance of accessing public spaces and being informed about health & climate-specific resources
    - **The event will feature short presentations from:**
        - Stony Brook Neurology about Super Movers
        - The New York Sea Grant/LISP about a sense of belonging in Long Island's public access spaces
        - SCDHS new "Climate and Health" website

Nature Walk Series

With Stony Brook HECMR

Year 3 – 2026



March 2026:

Gardiner County Park, Bay Shore NY

- Collaborated with HECMR Advisory Board Member, Shinnecock Nation/Blossom Sustainable MH & South Bay Audubon Society
- Cornell Cooperative Extension spoke about **Nutrition** & SCDHS spoke about tick safety





June 2026:

Makamah Nature Preserve

Fort Salonga, NY

This one is a HIKE!

- Collaborated with LISP, NY/CT Audubon (provided binoculars!), SC Office of Health Education & SC Parks Dept.
- **Tick Safety** Talk by Stony Brook Medicine



Nature Walk Series

STONY BROOK
Health Equity and Climate Medicine Research

Evaluation (Pre-and Post-walk Survey):

Pre-survey done the day of the walk & the post survey emailed to participants a few weeks after the walk to ascertain retention of health information learned at the Nature walk.

- Basic demographic information is collected, and questions focus
- on how often registrants come to County and State Parks, their
- knowledge of ticks native to Long Island, tick borne illness and
- ways to protect oneself etc.



Dr. Andrew Handel, MD
from Stony Brook Children's
Speaking about Tick Borne Illness Prevention

Convening Survey

- At the convening, we will survey participants about their use of local parks, their beliefs about health and the environment, and how likely they are to add nature walks or getting outside to their health behavior.
- We will also use this time to identify issues and ideas that are important to them, which SCDHS and HECMR can collaborate on in the future.

Nature Walk Series

Challenges Faced:

- Ensuring we are covering the entire County, while selected Parks that are accessible to diverse communities
- Delays in purchasing promotional items and limitations on what items can be purchased with grant funds
- **The unpredictability of our climate** (We've cancelled two walks over 2 years due to flooding and poor air
- quality cause by Canadian wildfires
- Finding the most impactful ways to reach diverse communities, who do not access information in the same ways. (Utilizing: Printed flyers (Eng. & Span), newsletters (with accessible format), social media, landing page request, press releases)



Nature Walk Series

Success Stories

- **Attendance at Walks Increasing**: Attendance data from 2024–2025 demonstrates consistent demand, with over 175 residents engaged across six successful walks. We hope to continue this momentum!
- **Strengthening Relationships & Building New Ones**: Walks are promoted by the Long Island Health Collaborative (Hosts “Walk with a Doc”), and we were contacted by a program that works in Queens and Nassau County. They want to partner to do more in Suffolk
- **Increase in Community Inquires :** With Support from CDC's Building Resilience Against Climate Effects (BRACE) Program, the NYSDOH & NYSACHO, the SCDHS and HECMR have seen an increase in emails and phone calls to the office. This in turn increase knowledge of SCDHS

Thank you !

NYSACHO

NYSDOH & CDC (BRACE)

Suffolk County Dept. of Health Services

Stony Brook Medicine & HECMR

Long Island Sound Partnership

Suffolk County Parks Department

New York State Parks

Any Questions?????

