Pathways to Wellbeing
A National Framework for Recreation in Canada
Draft for Consultation: April 2014

A joint initiative of the
Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council
and the
Canadian Parks and Recreation Association
Acknowledgements

This paper is a collaborative effort of the provincial and territorial governments (except Quebec), the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and the Provincial/Territorial Parks and Recreation Associations. It was prepared by the National Recreation Framework Working Group.

National Recreation Framework Working Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norm Campbell (Writing Team)</th>
<th>Alexandra Leaverton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association</td>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaime Collins</td>
<td>Cathy Jo Noble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation</td>
<td>Canadian Parks and Recreation Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon Crossman</td>
<td>Jennifer Reynolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories Department of Municipal and Community Affairs</td>
<td>Parks and Recreation Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith Down (Writing Team)</td>
<td>Ian Reid (Writing Team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta Centre for Active Living (retired)</td>
<td>University New Brunswick (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Gilbert (Writing Team)</td>
<td>Art Salmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness</td>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (retired)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Ilnyckyj (Writing Team)</td>
<td>Grant Sinclair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport</td>
<td>New Brunswick Department of Healthy and Inclusive Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry Ketcheson</td>
<td>Chris Szabo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreation Ontario</td>
<td>Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc-André Lavigne</td>
<td>Shelley Shea (Writing Team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières</td>
<td>The City of Calgary-Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suzanne Allard Strutt (Writing Team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BC Recreation and Parks Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors of this paper would like to acknowledge and thank the many participants in the engagement process for their insights and contributions leading up to the development of this national framework document. Particular recognition is given to Brian Johnston for his early leadership, the organizers and hosts of the National Recreation Summit (Lake Louise, 2011) and the National Recreation Roundtable (Fredericton, 2013), and to Peggy Edwards, editor of this paper.
# Table of Contents

### Executive Summary

### Part I: Setting the Context

- Introduction
- Recreation at a Crossroads
- Understanding Recreation
- Current Challenges to Address
- Responding to these Challenges: The Benefits of Recreation
- The Economic Case for investing in Recreation Renewal
- Convergence and Collaboration

### Part II: A National Framework for Recreation in Canada

- The Framework Diagram
- Vision
- Values and Principles of Operation
- Goals and Priorities for Action

### Part III: Moving Forward

- Glossary

- Endnotes
Executive Summary

Recreation provides multiple pathways to wellbeing for individuals, communities, and places and spaces in both outdoor and indoor environments. This paper and the National Framework for Recreation it describes allows for a bold re-visioning of recreation's capacity for achieving wellbeing.

Recreation is at a crossroads. It has the potential to address challenges and troubling issues such as increasing obesity, sedentary living and social isolation, decreased contact with nature, and threats to the environment. Doing this requires a clear understanding and commitment to a shared vision, values and goals, as well as efficient and well-organized implementation plans. The National Framework provides a foundation for reflection, discussion and the development of such action plans.

The first part of the paper provides a refreshed definition of recreation and explores the challenges and benefits of recreation today. It provides the rationale for investing in a renewed recreational strategy now, and describes the need for collaboration with other initiatives in a variety of sectors.

Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.

The second part of the paper provides a bold, renewed vision for recreation that focuses on enabling the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and places and spaces. It suggests some common ways of thinking about the renewal of recreation, based on clear goals and underlying values and principles.

A Renewed Vision

A Canada in which everyone is engaged in meaningful, accessible recreation experiences that foster:

- Individual wellbeing: Individuals with optimal mental and physical wellbeing, who are engaged and contributing members of their families and communities
- Community wellbeing: Communities that are healthy, inclusive, welcoming, resilient and sustainable
- The wellbeing of places and spaces: Natural and built environments that are appreciated, nurtured and sustained.
The Framework describes five goals and priorities for action under each goal. The goals are:

1. Foster active, healthy living through recreation.
2. Increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation.
3. Help people connect to nature through recreation.
4. Ensure the provision of supportive physical and social environments that encourage participation in recreation and build strong, caring communities.
5. Ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the recreation field.

Although this paper and the National Framework is primarily written for and by the recreation and parks field, its implementation requires discussion and collaboration with a broad range of partners. Key partners for recreation include the private sector, and government departments and not-for-profit organizations at all levels, including those dealing in sport, physical activity, public health, education, health promotion and health care, urban planning, infrastructure development, rural development, natural resources and conservation, arts and culture, social development, tourism, justice, heritage, child development and active aging.

Our opportunity is to identify concrete ways we can work together to enable all Canadians to enjoy recreation and outdoor experiences in supportive physical and social environments that enable participation.

The development of the National Framework is a co-led initiative by the provincial and territorial governments (except Quebec), the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and the Provincial/Territorial Parks and Recreation Associations. It is a call to action that invites leaders, practitioners and stakeholders in a variety of sectors to collaborate in the pursuit of common priorities, while respecting the uniqueness of individuals and communities across Canada. The National Framework presents an opportunity to return to traditional paths and to forge new ones that will ensure recreation’s continued relevance and leadership in the journey to wellbeing. The time to move forward is now.
Part I: Setting the Context

Introduction

Recreation provides multiple pathways to wellbeing for individuals, communities, and places and spaces in both outdoor and indoor environments. This paper and the National Framework for Recreation it describes allows for a bold re-visioning of recreation’s capacity for achieving wellbeing. It presents an opportunity to return to traditional paths and to forge new ones that will ensure recreation’s continued relevance and leadership in the journey to wellbeing. The time to move forward is now.

Purpose of this Paper

This paper is designed to guide and stimulate effective, coordinated policies and practices in recreation that improve the wellbeing of individuals, communities and places and spaces in Canada.
Structure of this Paper

The paper is divided into three parts:

Part I: Setting the Context provides a refreshed definition of recreation, and explores the challenges and benefits of recreation today. It provides the rationale for the urgent need to invest in a renewed recreation strategy, and describes the need for collaboration with other sectors.

Part II: A National Framework for Recreation in Canada provides a bold, renewed vision for recreation and suggests some common ways of thinking about the renewal of recreation based on clear goals and underlying values and principles. The Framework is a call to action, which invites leaders and stakeholders in a variety of sectors to collaborate in the pursuit of common goals and priorities for action.

Part III: Moving Forward provides some ideas for next steps in implementing the National Framework for Recreation.

Throughout this document, “recreation” is an umbrella term for recreation and parks, as well as recreational activities in arts, culture and heritage. When recreation in nature is discussed, the term “parks” may be specifically added to acknowledge the lead role of parks services.

Sidebars are used to provide additional evidence or to illustrate promising practices in policies and programs. These serve as examples only; the paper does not provide a scan of the many excellent initiatives across the country that address the key issues and priorities described in the paper.

A Glossary at the end of this paper helps to clarify the meaning of key terms used in the text. The Endnotes section provides document sources, references and links to websites that provide additional information.
Recreation at a Crossroads

In recent decades, recreation and society have changed. What was once an inclusive approach to building and nurturing people and communities has often shifted toward an individual-based, facility-focused, user pay way of working. At the same time, we are witnessing rapid technological, economic, environmental, demographic and social change. This creates an urgent need for recreation to return to historic values, while simultaneously adopting new ways of working that meet emerging needs and empower people and communities to work together to support wellbeing.

Recreation is at a crossroads. It has the potential to address socio-demographic challenges and troubling issues such as increasing obesity, diabetes and social isolation, decreased contact with nature, and threats to the environment. Doing this requires a commitment to a shared vision, values and goals, as well as the development of effective implementation plans. The National Framework for Recreation provides the foundation for discussion and the development of such action plans.

The National Framework is the result of a comprehensive process of renewal that began at the 2011 National Recreation Summit. It draws on reflections and recommendations from two years of consultations, discussions and debate at provincial, territorial and national levels. Throughout these conversations, three key messages emerged:

- High quality, accessible recreation opportunities are integral to a well-functioning society.
- The recreation sector can be a leader in addressing major issues of the day.
- All people and communities deserve equitable access to recreational experiences, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, age, ability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and geographic location. Recreation is a public good that must be accessible and welcoming to all.

Understanding Recreation

In 1974, delegates at the First National Conference of Provincial Recreation Ministers endorsed the following statement: “Recreation is a fundamental human need for citizens of all ages and interests and for both sexes and is essential to the psychological, social and physical wellbeing of man.” While our understanding of recreation has evolved since then, recreation’s role in fostering wellbeing has grown even more important.
Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.

The evolution of this definition from the one in the 1987 National Recreation Statement reflects the evolution of recreation in response to changes in Canadian society.

Recreation includes physical recreation (e.g. cycling, yoga), sport (e.g. basketball, ringette), artistic expression (e.g. visual arts, dance), and cultural, social and intellectual activities (e.g. participation in community events, group activities at seniors’ centres, playing chess). Recreational activities can be structured (e.g. learn to swim classes) and unstructured (e.g. walking the dog). Many activities are done with other people (e.g. a family picnic in a park) while some are done alone (e.g. gardening at home).

People participate in recreational activities for enjoyment, fitness and health benefits, social interaction, creative expression, a desire to connect with nature, relaxation, and to relieve stress. Most people also understand and support the beneficial role that recreation plays in community development.

The recreation field includes volunteers, paid staff, community groups, educators, researchers, organizations and governments that work collectively to enhance individual and community wellbeing through recreation. The recreation field includes stakeholders and service providers from the not-for-profit, private and public sectors.

Key partners for recreation include government departments and not-for-profit organizations at all levels, including those dealing in sport, physical activity, public health, health promotion and health care, urban planning, infrastructure development, rural development, natural resources and conservation, arts and culture, social development, tourism, justice, heritage, child development and active aging. Educational institutions and educators are important partners in recreation, providing spaces and programs, teaching students about recreation, and developing and sharing knowledge.

Increasingly, innovative public-private partnerships in recreation have been shown to support access to facilities such as swimming pools in privately owned buildings, park renewal efforts, product and service innovation, corporate responsibility and sponsorship, and the delivery of tourism products and services.

Public recreation is the provision of recreation services by governments and non-governmental groups and organizations for the benefit of individuals and communities.
Within government:
- The provinces and territories have primacy of jurisdiction for recreation (as in health and education).
- The municipality or local government is the primary public supplier of direct recreation services.
- The federal government plays a role in matters of national and international concern, and in collaboratively developing and supporting policies and funding mechanisms that enable all Canadians to participate in recreation.

Collaboration between and among all levels of government is essential. According to the National Recreation Statement, there is an “expectation that independent provincial and territorial actions will be complemented by a commitment to work together on an interprovincial basis to meet mutual needs”.

The Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation provide a key platform for collective discussion of this Framework, and for considering action on the goals and priorities described in this paper.

**Current Challenges to Address**

Recreation has a rich history of enabling wellbeing in known landscapes. The challenge today is to build pathways to wellbeing in the midst of change and modern challenges. These include:

1. **Demographic changes.** The aging of the population means that many communities have a declining proportion of children and an increasing proportion of older adults. The population is increasingly rich in diversity. Many communities have gained significant populations of immigrants from countries where public recreation and recreating in nature is not widely experienced or understood. There is a growing presence of First Nations and Aboriginal communities in urban areas.

2. **Urbanization and threats to the natural environment.** Rapid urbanization (80% of Canadians now live in cities) means that people have less exposure to the healing power of nature. Growing threats to the natural environment has made the role of environmental stewardship increasingly important to the recreation field.
3. **Challenges to health.** Modern lifestyles combined with changes in the social and physical environments that affect health have precipitated negative trends in health. These include increases in risk behaviours such as sedentary living, and increases in chronic conditions such as diabetes, obesity, and mental health concerns such as depression and teen suicide.

4. **Increasing inequities.** While immigrant and visible minority populations face some of the worst effects of Canada’s growing economic inequality, this trend affects all Canadians. For example, family after-tax income inequality rose by 35% between 1989 and 2004, with economic gains going primarily to higher-income families. Individuals and families with lower incomes typically have less opportunities for recreational experiences; for example, they cannot afford to participate in high cost sports such as hockey, to take music lessons or to send their children to camp.

5. **Social challenges.** Rapid changes associated with increases in economic inequities, persistent unemployment, the economic downturn, new communication technologies, urban living, the migration of young people away from rural areas, and the loss of traditional supports have compounded feelings of isolation in many communities and negatively affected civic involvement, community engagement and social cohesion.

6. **Infrastructure deficit.** Most towns and municipalities in Canada have significant infrastructure deficits. These deficits include the need to develop new facilities and green spaces in order to meet the requirements of growing communities, and to upgrade existing facilities to make them more functional and energy efficient. Strengthening the infrastructure for recreation, sport and physical activity is critical to strengthening the health, vitality and economies of local communities.
Responding to these Challenges: The Benefits of Recreation

Recreation and parks can address all of the above challenges with policies and practices that:

1. **Enhance mental and physical wellbeing.** Evidence concludes that public recreation and parks services have an important role in enhancing physical activity, which in turn, is a critical factor in improved physical and mental health. Increased physical activity levels are associated with the presence of trails for walking, hiking and biking, and scheduled organized events, including sport competitions and other attractions. For children, the presence of a playground within a nearby park is significantly associated with enhanced levels of physical activity and healthy weights. Among all ages, recreational experiences involving physical activity facilitate the maintenance of healthy weights, as well as a reduction in health care costs, and the potential to decrease anti-social behaviours.

Participation in recreational experiences is also shown to enhance mental and social wellbeing. Participation in after-school recreation programs, for example, provides many developmental opportunities for children and youth. For both children and adults, recreation can facilitate and support social relationships – through clubs, social organizations, participating on a team or making a new friend. Participants in recreation report increased self-esteem and life satisfaction. Recreation provides opportunities for personal growth and development in people of all abilities and can be especially helpful to people living with disabilities.

2. **Help build communities that are healthy, inclusive, welcoming, and resilient.** Research shows that recreation can be an important vehicle for promoting family cohesion and adaptability. Culture and recreation provide the means to build social capital in the form of arts, recreation and parks programs, and community celebrations, such as festivals, parades and block parties. Community events, in particular, help keep neighbours in touch with each other and reinforce the relationships that make neighbourhoods strong. Participation in cultural and artistic programs has been shown to promote social connectedness and social cohesion, and positively influence civic behaviour, mutual caring and voluntarism. Recreational activities can help build welcoming communities for diverse cultures and Aboriginal peoples.

3. **Help people connect with nature.** Enhancing opportunities to connect people with nature can result in both environmental and human benefits. Nature-based recreation requires the protection and nurturing of the natural environment, and fosters a better understanding and appreciation for all aspects of nature. Studies have shown that exposure to the natural environment and green spaces have an independent, positive effect on health and health-related behaviours.
From lowering blood pressure, to reducing stress levels, to supporting children’s cognitive development, nature has the profound ability to support both physical and mental health. Populations that are exposed to the greenest environments also have the lowest levels of health inequality related to income deprivation. Access to nature may modify pathways through which low socioeconomic position can lead to disease.9

Recreation and parks has a key role as a steward of natural environments: protecting and interpreting parks, trails and wilderness areas, managing altered landscapes to balance the needs of natural ecosystems with the needs of users, and providing sustainable places that minimize the ecological footprint of services and programs.

Canadians Value and Use Recreation Services

In a number of public opinion surveys about recreation:
- Almost everyone polled - direct and indirect users alike - said they or their household members received benefits from recreation and parks services.
- Respondents perceived that recreation services make a significant contribution to improved health (93%), boost social cohesion (89%), ensure children and youth live healthy lifestyles (75%) and are a major factor in crime reduction (77%).
- They also recognized the role recreation and parks play in community and social development.
- Some 98% believed that recreation and parks are essential services (like health and education) that benefit the entire community. 10

The Economic Case for investing in Recreation Renewal

Though economic benefit is not the primary driver for recreation service decisions, recreation is an important contributor to community economic development and cost reductions in other areas. Spending on recreation creates jobs, fosters tourism, and renders communities more attractive places in which to live, learn, work, and visit. Improvements in individual and community wellbeing that result from participation in recreation help to reduce health care, social service and justice costs.11

Spending on public recreation is significant for municipalities and towns. For example, an analysis of local government spending in Alberta showed that in 2006, recreation accounted for 10% of operating and 10% of capital expenses, a per capita investment of $376.00. 12
Governments and citizens have invested substantial sums in recreation complexes all across Canada. Typically, as these facilities reach the end of their functional lifespan, operational costs and the need for capital upgrades escalate dramatically, while energy efficiency and functionality decline. Resources are required to reinvest in these public assets, upgrading and replacing them as they lose their physical vitality. Recent studies undertaken by provincial/territorial governments and not-for-profit recreation and parks associations estimated that over $15 billion in deferred capital investment was required to repair or replace existing sport and recreation facilities.13

Municipalities are the primary owners and operators of the sport and recreation infrastructure in Canada. They provide fitness centres, indoor and outdoor pools, water parks, sports fields, courts, ball diamonds, pre-school program spaces, and a variety of other places and spaces that support active choices. Safe, well kept outdoor environments including parks with playgrounds and trails are equally important. Recreation also has a key role in the design and provision of pathways and bikeways that link communities and encourage active transportation (e.g. cycling to school and work, walking to the library).

### Recreation as an Economic Generator

- In 2012, the average Canadian household spent $3,773.00 on recreation, in comparison to $7,739.00 on food.14

- In 2009, it is estimated that Canada’s national, provincial and territorial parks created over 64,000 full time equivalent jobs resulting in $2.9 billion dollars in labour income and a $4.6 billion dollar contribution to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Visitors to these parks contributed to the economy through the purchase of food, accommodation, equipment and other amenities that translate to more than 5.7 times higher than the capital and operating costs of park organizations.15

- Anglers contributed a total of $8.3 billion to various local economies in Canadian provinces and territories in 2010. Of this amount, $5.8 billion was in the form of purchases of durable goods related to recreational fishing activities. The remaining $2.5 billion covered direct expenditures during recreational fishing trips, such as transportation, food, lodging, fishing services and fishing supplies.16
Convergence and Collaboration

In recent years, a number of complementary policies and frameworks have been developed, which address interrelated public policy at national, provincial and local levels. These include:

- **Active Canada 20/20: A Physical Activity Strategy and Change Agenda for Canada** (2012) provides a vision and a change agenda to describe successful steps that will increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour, thereby reducing health risks and achieving the many benefits of a society that is active and healthy. Recreation is identified as an important player in pursuing this agenda.17

- The **Canadian Sport Policy** (CSP, 2012) sets a direction for the period 2012-2022 for all governments, institutions and organizations committed to realizing the positive impacts of sport on individuals, communities and society. Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation endorsed the policy in June 2012. CSP sets out 5 broad objectives, including “Recreational Sport: Canadians have the opportunity to participate in sport for fun, health, social interaction and relaxation”. Participants are introduced to the fundamentals of sport through programs delivered primarily by clubs, schools and local recreation departments. Participants develop sport-specific skills with an emphasis on fun, a positive attitude, healthy human development and remaining active for life.18

- **Connecting Canadians with Nature. An Investment in the Well-Being of our Citizens** was developed by the Canadian Parks Council on behalf of the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Parks. The report synthesizes the growing body of evidence that demonstrates the immense benefits of connecting with the natural world. Canada’s park leaders endorsed the paper in March 2014 and committed to working with various sectors to support experiences in nature that enhance Canadians’ collective health, prosperity, growth and productivity. This initiative positions park agencies to adapt to changing societal circumstances and enable increased opportunities for recreational experiences in nature.19

- The **Declaration on Prevention and Promotion** which was adopted by Canada’s Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Health and of Health Promotion/Healthy Living in 2010, confirms that health and wellbeing is determined by “the physical and social conditions that people experience daily in the places where they live, learn, work and play”. The declaration calls upon a wide range of people and organizations in communities and across society to help create the conditions that reduce risks for poor health and support individuals in adopting healthy lifestyles.20
Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment a policy brief adopted by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Committee of Officials Responsible for Seniors in 2006, specifically identifies recreation as critical to addressing priority areas in healthy aging such as social connectedness, physical activity and age-friendly communities. Canada has been a leader in developing Age-Friendly Communities in communities and cities of all sizes, and particularly in rural areas.

The fields of physical activity, sport, recreation, parks, the environment and health share a common mandate to enhance the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment. Thus, there is a clear need to coordinate these frameworks and policies, and to collaborate on specific actions and initiatives.

Strategies proposed by the parks, physical activity, sport and health sectors have historically involved the recreation sector. For example, municipal recreation is a key delivery agent for sport and provides a variety of supports to local sports organizations. These include access to facilities, early skill development and exposure programs, ongoing sport play, coordination and communication, enhanced coaching capacity, allocation policies and subsidies, joint use agreements, sport hosting and sport tourism.

Similarly, the promotion of active, healthy lifestyles is a key priority for recreation. This includes the provision of physical activity programs for all age groups, ranging from active play for pre-school children, to teen and adult fitness classes, to engaging older adults in ongoing activity. Many municipalities have worked with partners in public health, sport and education to develop comprehensive community plans for active living. These plans include awareness campaigns, program opportunities and events, initiatives aimed specifically at inactive and vulnerable populations, and the development of supportive indoor and outdoor environments.

Our challenge and opportunity is to link these unique yet complementary efforts in ways that strengthen each sector while leveraging resources, and facilitating outcomes that meet our common mandates and goals. This requires collaborative action, ongoing communication, knowledge sharing, common measurements, the sharing of resources and joint efforts in service improvement.
Part II: A National Framework for Recreation in Canada

The Framework Diagram

Everyone engaged in recreation experiences that foster:
- individual wellbeing
- community wellbeing
- the wellbeing of places and spaces in built and natural environments.

• inclusion and equity • public good • sustainability
• lifelong participation • outcome-driven • quality and relevance • evidence-based • partnerships

Goals

1. Active healthy living
2. Inclusion and access
3. Connecting people and nature
4. Supportive environments
5. Grow and sustain recreation

Priorities

- Participation throughout the lifecourse
- Play
- Fundamental movement skills
- Recreation education

- Equity for all, including:
  - all economic groups
  - Aboriginal peoples
  - immigrants
  - gender equity
  - all abilities
  - all sexual orientations
  - rural and Northern communities

- Natural spaces and places
- Comprehensive system of parks
- Public awareness and education
- Minimal ecological footprint

- Renew infrastructure
- Partnerships in social environment
- Common assessment tools
- Volunteer strategies
- Align initiatives in community building

- Comprehensive recreation system
- Capacity development staff and volunteers
- Knowledge development strategy
- Career development strategies
Vision

A Canada in which everyone is engaged in meaningful, accessible recreation experiences that foster:

- **Individual wellbeing**: Individuals with optimal mental and physical wellbeing, who are engaged and contributing members of their families and communities
- **Community wellbeing**: Communities that are healthy, inclusive, welcoming, resilient and sustainable
- **The wellbeing of places and spaces**: Natural and built environments that are appreciated, nurtured and sustained.

Values and Principles of Operation

**Values** are deeply held beliefs that guide the decision-making, management and delivery of policies and practices.

- **Inclusion and equity**. Inclusion is an organizational practice and goal in which groups and individuals with different backgrounds such as origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion, ability, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation are culturally and socially accepted, welcomed and valued. Equity speaks to fairness in access to resources, opportunities and experiences.

- **Commitment to the public good**. Historically, community organizations were mainly focused on providing recreation experiences for disadvantaged individuals and groups. Public recreation was conceived of as a public good that offered recreational experiences that were not affordable for most individuals and families. Over time, the field broadened to serve more middle-class families and communities. This led to major investments in public facilities and services, followed by mounting pressure to fill them, and then still greater pressure to reduce operating deficits. Leaders in recreation have continued to stress the need for equitable recreational experiences among disadvantaged populations with a call for the renewed importance of public recreation’s historic mandate. Recreation would be available to all, paid for by a combination of flexible user fees that take into account economic circumstances and through the tax base. This does not mean denying services to people who have resources, but that they should not be served at the expense of those who face constraints to participation.
• **Sustainability.** Recreation requires a sustainable system that includes people and organizations, facilities and natural areas. Recreation values and stewards indoor and outdoor places and spaces, while balancing the needs of natural ecosystems with those of users, and providing sustainable facilities and services that have no greater ecological footprint than necessary.

• **Lifelong participation.** Individuals and communities benefit from lifelong participation in recreational experiences, from early childhood to old age.

---

**Active for a Lifetime**

Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) is a movement to make sport and physical activity better and more fun for kids so that they are more likely to be active for the rest of their lives. [www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)

---

**Principles of operation** provide some “rules of the road” in how the field carries out its business.

• **Outcome driven.** Recreation is outcome-driven. It strives to help individuals and communities attain the outcomes they are seeking, such as improved health and wellbeing. It also focuses on indirect benefits to all, such as enhanced community cohesion and green environments that will serve generations to come. Thus, recreation also measures costs and benefits in units of social value.

• **Quality and relevance.** Recreation is committed to offering safe recreation experiences of the highest possible quality, and recognizes the requirement to address the unique needs and capacities of each community.

• **Evidence-based.** Recreation is committed to “fact based” decision-making—getting the best evidence and using it to guide policy and practice. Recreation integrates the best available research evidence with practitioner expertise and the characteristics, needs, capacities, values and preferences of those who are affected. This requires support for the systematic collection and analysis of data, the sharing of information, and the use of qualitative research methods, evaluation and social and economic modeling.

• **Partnerships and collaboration.** Recreation relies on and nurtures partnerships and collaboration among:
  - public, not-for-profit and private providers of recreation and parks experiences
  - public and private planners and developers (urban and rural spaces and places)
  - all levels of government (local, regional, provincial/territorial and federal)
o multiple sectors and disciplines that influence wellbeing and share common goals, e.g. health, tourism, education, arts and culture, nature conservation
o multiple jurisdictions, e.g. several municipalities working together to build and manage green corridors between cities
o people who care about and influence the wellbeing of individuals, communities and places and spaces, e.g. parents, elected officials, recreation staff, seniors groups, early childhood educators and caregivers, teachers, school boards, principles, coaches, and volunteer leaders in community programs such as Scouts and Brownies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Assurance Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH FIVE® is an example of a quality assurance program for recreation and sport programs for children aged 6-12. HIGH FIVE provides a range of training, assessment tools and resources to ensure that organizations can deliver the highest quality programs possible. HIGH FIVE ensures leaders, coaches, and instructors have the tools and knowledge to nurture a child’s mental health and create positive experiences for children. <a href="http://www.highfive.org">www.highfive.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Priorities for Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 1: Active healthy living. Foster active, healthy living through recreation.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in recreation is essential to building healthy, active individuals from infancy to older adulthood.

For the last few decades, children’s lives have become increasingly structured and media oriented, reducing their time in unstructured play. This shift has contributed to increasing levels of physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour and excess weight in children.\(^{23, 24, 25, 26}\) There is a particular concern for the missed opportunity of outdoor play, which has been shown to increase a child’s capacity for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development.\(^{27}\)

The evidence is also strong that regular physical activity, social connectedness and community engagement are particularly important to active, healthy aging.\(^{28}\)
Priorities

1.1 Enable *participation throughout the lifecourse*, continuing to focus on children and youth but expanding to meet the needs and foster the participation of the growing number of older people in Canada.

1.2 Promote *play* for all ages. Enhance opportunities for children to play outdoors and interact in nature. Support the child’s right to play, and to participate freely and fully in age-appropriate recreational experiences, cultural life, and artistic and leisure activities, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.29

1.3 Incorporate *fundamental movement skills* (physical literacy) in recreation programs. Physical literacy is the cornerstone of both participation and excellence in physical activity and sport across the lifecourse and for people of all ages and abilities. Physical literacy has been adopted as the foundation of the Sport for Life concept in Canada.30

1.4 Develop and implement *recreation education campaigns* to increase Canadians’ knowledge about the value of recreation, and how recreation positively contributes to personal growth and reciprocal caring (caring for each other and the places and spaces in which we live). Proactively encourage new Canadians who may not be familiar with recreation to use services in ways that help to build skills, wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

---

**Recreation and Youth Wellbeing**

Parks and recreation out-of-school time programs can help:
- reduce juvenile delinquency
- increase positive behaviours and reduce negative ones
- decrease youth exposure to violence
- improve the educational performance of young people
- decrease health problems and health care costs related to childhood obesity
- increase the contributions young people make to society when they become adults
- youth develop self-confidence, optimism, and initiative
- increase civic responsibility and participation among young people
- reduce parental stress and thus affect health care costs and lost job productivity.31
Goal 2: Inclusion and access. Increase inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation.

This goal speaks to the value of equity and inclusion. Everyone in Canada has the right to enjoy quality parks and recreation services regardless of their ability, race, ethnic origins, age, gender, geographic location, sexual orientation and economic circumstance. A rebalancing of how recreation is delivered is necessary if it is to become more focused on strategically serving those who are most in need. Moving forward, recreation must be inclusive in every way, actively developing in a manner that does not exclude those with barriers to participation and creating new ways to engage marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Priorities

2.1 Develop and implement strategies and policies, which ensure that no-one in Canada is denied access to public recreation opportunities as a result of economic disadvantage.

2.2 Ensure the provision of recreational opportunities and experiences that are respectful and appropriate for Aboriginal peoples and immigrant populations. Include these communities in developing, leading and evaluating recreation and park activities.

2.3 Ensure gender equity by addressing the historical, cultural and social barriers to participation experienced by girls and women.

2.4 Ensure that persons of all physical and mental abilities are able to participate in recreation.

2.5 Welcome people with all sexual orientations.

2.6 Ensure the provision of appropriate recreation infrastructure, opportunities and experiences in rural and Northern communities.
Parks and recreation acting on equity and social inclusion

In Moncton, New Brunswick, the Parks and Recreation Services Department addresses poverty and homelessness within their portfolio of services. A Community Development Officer of Social Inclusion facilitates programs and services for disadvantaged citizens in the city. He/she liaises with other recreation community development staff and other municipal programs. These efforts encourage a coordinated approach to reducing poverty and encouraging social inclusion in the community through parks and recreation. (2014).

Goal 3: Connecting people and nature. Help people connect to nature through recreation.

People have an inherent need to connect with the natural world and the recreation field plays a vital role in meeting that need. Connecting with nature is associated with improved cognitive, mental, and physical health, enhanced creativity and positive social behaviours. Communities also see economic benefits associated with ecotourism.\(^\text{32}\)

Traditionally, recreation has contributed to this goal through the provision and stewardship of outdoor places and spaces, and the development of enabling policies, programs and services related to natural environments. These activities continue to be essential components of recreation’s role. More recently, the need to increase appreciation of and exposure to natural environments through participation in the community design process has become increasingly important. Recreation contributes to creating walkable, safe, livable communities through the provision of parks, trails and landscaped areas, and by supporting policies that ensure that neighbourhoods are designed to maximize opportunities for healthy, active living and exposure to nature.

For many people, urban parks may be one of the few connections that they experience with the natural world. Because of this, urban parks play an essential role in public health and wellbeing. Urban parks can serve as restorative environments in which individuals have the ability to view nature, to be in nature, to observe plants and gardens, and to observe and encounter animals (both pets and wildlife).
Priorities

3.1 Work in partnership with municipal and provincial/territorial planners to provide natural spaces and places in neighborhoods, communities and regions through the retention and addition of natural areas, forests, parks, trails and recreational waters (rivers, lakes, canals and beaches).

3.2 Work collaboratively at all four levels of government (local, regional, provincial/territorial and federal) to create and maintain a coordinated, comprehensive system of parks and protected areas across Canada that allows year-round access to nature. Share best practices and findings in planning, design, management, ecosystem monitoring and public information.

3.3 Develop public awareness and education initiatives to increase understanding of the importance of nature to wellbeing and child development, the role of recreation in helping people connect to nature, and the importance of sustainability in parks and recreation.

3.4 Ensure that recreation policies and practices in parks and recreation leave as small an environmental footprint as possible, by limiting the use of non-renewable resources and minimizing negative impacts on the natural environment.

Goal 4: Supportive environments. Ensure the provision of supportive physical and social environments that encourage participation in recreation and build strong, caring communities.

Supportive physical and social environments help people adopt healthy, active lifestyles by making “the healthy choices the easy choices”. They also facilitate community and family connectedness, which foster reciprocal caring—taking care of each other, our communities and our natural environment.

Environments for recreation encompass many settings, including homes, schools, neighbourhoods, community spaces and places, rural places and the natural environment. Recreation has a leadership role to play in community building in all of these settings by aligning with other community initiatives and helping to build social networks and voluntarism, as well as community norms of trust and cooperation.

Voluntarism is a critical part of the social environment in communities. Volunteers need to be valued, trained and supported as an essential part of the delivery of recreational experiences in every community in Canada.
Creating supportive environments for recreation has many dimensions including the implementation of policies and guidelines, innovative programming, social action, education and funding. All of these mechanisms are needed to ensure access to safe and effective spaces and places that are required to deliver a comprehensive mix of high quality recreational experiences.

Creating supportive physical environments includes addressing the state of decline of Canada’s sport and recreation infrastructure.

**Priorities**

4.1 Enable all communities to renew aging recreational infrastructure as required and to meet the need for green spaces by:

- securing long-term, dedicated government funding at all levels for the development, renewal and rehabilitation of sport, recreation and physical activity facilities and outdoor spaces
- developing assessment tools and evidence-based guidance for investing and reinvesting in aging recreation infrastructure
- developing and adopting innovative renewal strategies that will endure over time, use less energy and provide affordable access for all

4.2 Create supportive social environments in the settings where people live, learn and play by strengthening partnerships with schools, social service groups, transportation and urban planners, community organizations and the private sector.

4.3 Develop a common understanding of community wellbeing through the use of standardized assessment tools and indices that will help communities assess and measure their status on community wellbeing.

4.4 Rejuvenate and update volunteer strategies to reflect societal changes and take advantage of community and individual capacities. Engage volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life. Make a special effort to recruit and support volunteers from vulnerable groups.

4.5 Adopt a strategic approach to community building that features alignment and collaboration with other community initiatives (e.g. Age-Friendly Communities, Healthy Cities, Community Food Centres).
Goal 5: Grow and sustain recreation. Ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the recreation field.

Leaders in recreation can be professional staff or volunteers (e.g. coaches and voluntary leaders). It is imperative that both of these groups of people have the skills, knowledge and resources they need to plan and deliver high-quality recreation services based on specific community needs and strengths.

These leaders need to work within a connected, vibrant and comprehensive delivery system. This system requires ongoing nurturing and support to deliver a comprehensive mix of recreational experiences and sustain a viable system that Canadians can enjoy for generations to come.

As many of the early leaders who shaped recreation and parks move into retirement, the field needs to recruit and inspire new leaders. All who work in recreation need to acquire and maintain the core competencies for recreation and the capacity to address changes in the physical and social environments that impact recreation.

To remain relevant and effective, leaders in recreation need access to current evidence and information in a timely manner. A comprehensive knowledge development strategy, which includes research, knowledge transfer, monitoring and evaluation, and program development addresses this need.

Academics and governments at all levels undertake research to analyze recreation trends and issues in order to keep recreation policies and programs current and effective. Applied research projects, which identify promising approaches at the community level, are particularly helpful. The findings of research need to be shared broadly (knowledge transfer), with provincial/territorial recreation associations, municipalities and other stakeholders and partners.

Priorities

5.1 Increase collaborative efforts between provincial/territorial governments, municipal governments and recreation associations to support and nurture a comprehensive recreation system that serves as the primary means for achieving the vision and goals in this Framework.

5.2 Implement high-quality training and competency-based capacity development programs for both professionals and volunteers working in recreation.

5.3 Support a knowledge development strategy that increases support for:
   • advanced education in recreation at the college and university level
• recreation research carried out by universities and colleges in conjunction with provincial/territorial and municipal governments, with special attention to applied research at the community level
• the national recreation information system so that all those planning and delivering recreation services have access to the latest evidence
• collaborative efforts among provincial/territorial governments, recreation associations and colleges and universities to develop new recreation programs and services that meet the evolving and expanding needs within communities.

5.4 Implement career awareness, preparation and development strategies to attract and educate new leaders.

Developing and Sharing Knowledge

The Leisure information Network (LIN) at www.lin.ca is a national knowledge-based digital forum for sharing value-added information on individual and community wellbeing through recreation, parks, and active living. The National Benefits HUB at www.http://benefitshub.ca is a living resource, which summarizes evidence on the value of recreation and parks services. Validation is provided for 49 outcome statements. LIN and the Benefits HUB are invaluable resources for policy development, planning, marketing, program/service development and evaluation.
Part III: Moving Forward

Recreation in Canada is at a crossroads, and the National Framework for Recreation represents an invitation to the field to think of its place in Canadian society in different ways. With a refreshed definition and vision, and a renewed sense of what is important, the National Framework presents a rare opportunity to take a new path. This path will ensure recreation’s continued relevance as an essential contributor to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and places and spaces.

The National Framework for Recreation was developed as a tool to enable an aligned and efficient focus of efforts across Canada. It represents a call to action for the recreation field. Its implementation requires broad acceptance across the country by both governmental and non-governmental providers of recreation experiences at all levels, and the use of an intentional, coordinated and focused approach.

Anyone and everyone that has a hand in developing and delivering policies, programs and services in recreation have a role to play in the implementation process. Some activities are underway. For example, an FPT work group has been established in partnership with Sport Canada, P/T governments, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and CPRA to develop a common methodology to inventory sport and recreation facilities across the country and better understand their current condition.

Some actions going forward require strategic thinking and development at the national level. These will require the leadership of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and Federal/Provincial/Territorial intergovernmental mechanisms, if they are to be successfully advanced. Willing provincial/territorial organizations, municipalities, not-for-profit organizations and private sector stakeholders can take on other initiatives, either alone or in partnership.

Although this paper and the National Framework is primarily written for and by the recreation and parks field, its implementation requires collaboration, especially with sectors dealing with sport, physical activity, health and environments in nature. The Canadian Sport Policy 2012, Active Canada 20/20, Connecting Canadians with Nature and the other complementary, national initiatives mentioned in Part I of this report represent areas where visions overlap, strategies converge and resources can be shared. Our opportunity is to identify concrete ways we can work together to enable all Canadians to enjoy sport, physical activity, recreation and outdoor experiences in supportive physical and social environments that enable participation.
A wide range of other sectors share recreation’s passion for safe, healthy, age-friendly, inclusive communities, active and engaged people, and places and spaces that enhance wellbeing and quality of life. Leaders in recreation have worked closely with diverse stakeholders for many years and have fine-tuned their skills in collaboration. Part of this Framework’s call to action is to utilize those capacities in new ways, at higher levels and to greater effect than ever before.

A first step in implementing the National Framework for Recreation is to ensure it is top of mind within the recreation system. There are a myriad of ways to achieve this, which could include utilizing the Framework as a subject of staff meetings, conferences, workshops and post-secondary curriculum. It can be used to inform the identification of research topics and inspire choices for professional development. The Framework is designed to guide decision-making, plans, strategies, policies, performance metrics and resource allocations. It can be used as a tool for re-examining and updating the 1987 National Recreation Statement.

The reader is invited to share this document widely and talk about the Framework—how it is relevant in your jurisdiction, how it may influence the work of your organization, and how your organization can support its implementation.

It is recommended that the Federal/Provincial/Territorial governments, CPRA and the Provincial/Territorial Recreation and Parks Associations establish a mechanism for tracking and reporting on progress in the implementation of the Framework.

Now is the time to choose a path to a renewed and increasingly relevant recreation sector that plays an essential role in achieving wellbeing for individuals, communities and spaces and places. It will take time, effort, innovation and determination to achieve the potential of the National Framework. It starts with conversations within recreation and with other sectors. While there are many steps along the path to an integrated and effective strategy for recreation in Canada, the National Framework for Recreation provides a clearer picture of what that end will look like.
Glossary*

**Age-Friendly Communities.** In an age-friendly community, the policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help older people "age actively". In 2014, over 400 cities and communities in Canada are involved in this global movement.

Source: 1) [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/afc-caa-eng.php#sec](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/afc-caa-eng.php#sec), provincial/territorial health websites and 2) [afc-hub.ca](http://afc-hub.ca) and 3) [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/topic/AE132538BBF7F620E5F51298860EFAA4E/afbc/becoming_an_agefriendly_community_local_government_guide.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/topic/AE132538BBF7F620E5F51298860EFAA4E/afbc/becoming_an_agefriendly_community_local_government_guide.pdf)

**Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L)** is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity in Canada. It links sport, education, recreation and health, and aligns community, provincial and national programming. CS4L’s mission is to improve the health, wellness, and sporting experiences of all Canadians by advancing physical literacy, improving performance and increasing life-long participation in physical activity.

Source: Canadian Sport for Life: [canadiansportforlife.ca](http://canadiansportforlife.ca)

**Community and communities:** a group of individuals who share common interests or characteristics, such as demography, geographic location, culture, etc., and who are perceived or who perceive themselves as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.

Source: Adapted from Dictionary.com

**Community Food Centres** provide places where people come together to garden and grow, cook, share and advocate for good food.

Source: [cfccanada.ca](http://cfccanada.ca)

**Health** is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion goes on to say, “Health is a resource for everyday life, not the object of living. It is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities.”

**Healthy Cities/Communities** create and improve the physical and social environments and community resources, which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential. Several cities and communities in Canada have adopted Healthy City strategies.


**Knowledge development in recreation** is the creation, synthesis, exchange, and application of knowledge to strengthen recreation and improve wellbeing. It includes research of all types, monitoring and evaluation, the sharing of knowledge (sometimes called knowledge transfer) and program development.

**Physical literacy** is the mastering of fundamental movement and sport skills that permit people to read their environment and make appropriate decisions, allowing them to move confidently and with control in a wide range of physical activity situations. The ABCs - Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed are the four skills that underpin physical literacy.

Source: Canadian Sport for Life, 2014; accessed March 2014 at [canadiansportforlife.ca](http://canadiansportforlife.ca)

**Play**: Freely chosen and self-directed mental or physical activity that is undertaken for enjoyment and that is separate in some way from “real” life.


**Recreation** is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.

The **recreation field and system** includes stakeholders and providers from the not-for-profit, private and public sectors; including volunteers, paid staff, community groups, educators, researchers, organizations and governments that work collectively to enhance individual and community wellbeing through recreation.

**Public recreation** is the provision of recreation services by governments and non-governmental groups and organizations for the benefit of individuals and communities.
Recreation and sport infrastructure includes the construction, maintenance, repair, operation, and the supervision of facilities and outdoor areas. Indoor spaces and places include arenas, community centres and halls, indoor pools, cultural centres, senior and youth centres. Outdoor spaces and places include parks, playing fields, play-structures, trails, forested areas, outdoor pools, splash pads, pavilions, gardens, waterfronts, marinas, outdoor courts (e.g., tennis, basketball), outdoor rinks and golf courses.

Recreation education is the process of acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for positive experiences in recreation. Recreation education helps individuals and communities understand opportunities, potentials and challenges in recreation; understand the impact of recreation on wellbeing; and gain knowledge, skills, and appreciation enabling full participation in recreation experiences.

Source: Adapted from Leisure education and physical literacy by Brenda Robertson, NRA 2011 National Summit, Accessed March 2014 at lin.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Robertson%20summit%20talk.pdf

Social environment: The social environment includes the formal and informal groups and networks to which people belong, the neighborhoods in which we live, the organization of the places where we work, worship, learn and play, and the policies we create to order our lives. The degree of social cohesion that exists in communities results from everyday interactions between people. It is embodied in such structures as civic, cultural and religious groups, family membership and informal community networks, and in norms of voluntarism, altruism and trust. The stronger these networks and bonds, the more likely it is that members of a community will co-operate for mutual benefit.


Social cohesion: The ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity.

Source: Adapted from Government of Canada’s Policy Research Sub-Committee on Social Cohesion. Accessed March 2014 at www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/prb0756-e.htm
Social connectedness: A person’s number of close friends, frequency of interactions with family and friends, trust in neighbors, and level of participation in volunteer activities or community events all play a role in supporting well-being and can also influence health, both directly and indirectly. Together, these examples begin to describe social connectedness - the extent to which people interact with one another, either individually or through groups.


Spaces and Places. Spaces are areas or expanses deliberately designed for specific processes or purposes, such as an urban park or a community garden. Spaces integrate people with nature and with each other, increase socialization within and between neighbourhoods and invite increased physical activity. Places are portions of those spaces, such as a specific building, structure, or location, e.g., splash pad or skate park within a larger park.

Source: Adapted from various sources

Supportive environments. Supportive environments for recreation offer safe, enjoyable experiences, and empower people to expand their self-reliance, confidence and abilities to participate. They occur where people live (their homes and communities) and where they learn, work, worship and play. Supportive physical and social environments are structured to support a desired activity, action or outcome. Individuals are provided with encouragement, opportunities, access, and resources that enable this activity, action or outcome.


Wellbeing. The presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression, focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high levels of democratic participation, and access to and participation in recreation and culture.

Source: Adapted from Canadian Index of Wellbeing, accessed March 2014 at uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing

* Acknowledgement: Thank you to The Leisure Information Network (LIN) for their help in preparing this Glossary.
Endnotes

1 2011 National Recreation Summit. The results are recorded in several documents available at lin.ca/national-recreation-summit; accessed March 2014.


4 Ibid.


