

HIGHLIGHTS:

2022 Speaker Series for FPT Governments

Hosted by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) in partnership with the FPT Physical Activity and Recreation Committee (PARC)

Emerging From the Pandemic: Prioritizing Physical Activity and Recreation

February 10, 2022

Reframing and Inspiring Success Toward Active, Vibrant Communities

March 8, 2022

KEY MESSAGES

- Physical activity and recreation have been important for Canadians' quality of life and their physical and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Public health restrictions were associated with an initial overall reduction in population physical activity and increased sedentary behaviours.
- Systemic inequalities and health disparities were exacerbated by the pandemic, reinforcing the importance of applying an equity, diversity and inclusion lens across sectors, including sport and recreation.
- Due to the pandemic's impact on the recreation sector, public health protection and consumer safety will be key for the planning and delivery of physical activity and recreation policy and program delivery.
- Promoting accessible, safe, unstructured outdoor activities through supportive natural and built environments, social supports and key settings are important to equitable and sustainable communities (e.g., access to green areas and play spaces, daily movement and play, and socialization).
- Engaging with Indigenous communities provides valuable insights on unstructured physical activity, social connection through multi-generational programming, and ways to address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action through physical activity, sport and recreation.
- More attention is needed on the mental health and social connection benefits of physical activity and recreation.
- Governments and other civic institutions are applying new ways to measure physical activity in a quality-of-life, well-being economy context, and new paradigms for more responsive, coherent public policy that addresses the underlying determinants of health.



IDEAS FOR ACTION

Build on and Learn from Successes

- Invest in built and social environments that support low-barrier, unstructured outdoor movement and active transportation.
- Support the development of physical activity and recreation opportunities across settings including schools, recreation, workplaces, assisted living and long-term care centres and others.
- Support rural and urban communities to implement community-wide plans to encourage movement for all ages.

Engage Stakeholders in Multiple Sectors

- Consider building on existing partnerships and funding relationships with the physical activity and recreation sectors to support renewed organizational capacity that has been lost due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure agenda can address the upgrades and innovative approaches needed to ensure facility-based offerings are safe to meet the changing needs, preferences, and behaviours of Canadians, and to protect against future health crises.
- Foster multi-sector partnerships that lead to action on linking community well-being/ population health and the built environment, such as with municipalities, urban planners, school boards, sport, physical activity and recreation (SPAR) sector, affordable housing sector, and public health.

Address Inequities

- Use an equity, diversity and inclusion lens to develop responsive physical activity and recreation policies that address the underlying determinants of health.
- Take deliberate action to address the findings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, including its [Calls to Action](#), through physical activity, sport, and recreation, with emphasis on Indigenous-led programming and the role that physical activity plays in Indigenous resurgence.
- Demonstrate the value of public spaces in providing equitable access to physical activity settings, which can lead to improved physical and mental health, such as contributing to people's sense of well-being and belonging.
- Promote the benefits of physical activity and recreation as protective factors against anxiety, depression, and isolation and beneficial for positive mental health and social connection.

Make Informed Decisions

- Consider how to leverage the [Common Vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour in Canada](#) and the [Framework for Recreation in Canada](#) to drive sport, physical activity, and recreation priorities in the pandemic/endemic context.
- Apply “well-being valuation” measurement tools such as the Quality of Life Framework when making recommendations to ministers on physical activity, recreation and sport.
- Use evidence to inform the sport, physical activity, and recreation sector decision-making, particularly in addressing the inequities that priority populations face.



SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic: Emerging Evidence

- The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated significant and long-standing problems at a societal level (e.g., income security, employment insurance, social and physical infrastructure) that have led to systemic inequalities and health disparities, most notably by income level, gender, ethnicity, indigeneity, and disability.
- The impact of the pandemic on physical activity varied by settings. For example, there was a decrease in physical activity at work and school, as well as in active transportation to and from these domains. However, there was an increase in physical activity at home and in neighbourhoods through outdoor play, walking, and family time.
- Overall impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SPAR sector are fundamental and severe, including in the areas of consumer behaviour and expectations, revenue generation, staffing retention and attrition, program and service delivery, overall business operations, and capacity to contribute to community well-being. Some of these impacts will be long-lasting.

Valuing Physical Activity as a Measure of Subjective Well-being

- Increasingly, applied approaches to measuring and evaluating the contribution of physical activity to quality of life are being applied in the public sector. This has allowed policymakers to show high social returns on investment in physical activity, including its value to subjective well-being.

- Applying tools such as the Government of Canada's [Quality of Life Framework](#) to policy decision-making can help reimagine public policy in support of a well-being economy, improving subjective life satisfaction, and realizing sustainable communities.

Unstructured, Accessible Activities

- The trend towards holistic, unstructured, and unorganized movement behaviours built into all settings, including outdoor physical activity, should inform public policy related to physical activity and recreation (e.g., equitable access to and use of active transportation, improved access to outdoor or semi-outdoor facilities and equipment, culturally appropriate land-based physical activity for Indigenous peoples).
- Access to alternative sources of transportation, including active transportation (i.e., bikes, e-bikes) was not equitable for all Canadians who were avoiding public transit.

Supportive Built Environments

- Policies that prioritize supportive built and natural environments where people could be active proved important in supporting active choices during the pandemic.
- Active, vibrant communities prioritize community life around resident engagement and creating supportive built environments, including pedestrian and family-friendly downtown cores and neighbourhoods, and by supporting physical activity in schools.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES continued

Social Environment, Social Connectivity, and Mental Health

- There is a need for more attention to the mental health and social connectivity benefits of physical activity and recreation. People who reported an increase in physical activity during the pandemic reported less boredom, positive mental health, and an increase in subjective well-being.
- The reported negative impacts of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of Canadians in urban, suburban, as well as rural settings may be long-lasting.
- Social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among older adults, is a key by-product of closures and related public health measures that need to be addressed. Physical activity and recreation opportunities can provide reconnection opportunities.
- In contrast, some people experienced an increase in familial, intergenerational, and community connections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at examples of multi-generational programming in Indigenous communities is one opportunity to help inform physical activity programming going forward.
- There has been increased interest in linking community sport and recreation to social services and public health.

Shift Towards Well-being Model for Community Vitality

- Policymaking centred on a “well-being economy” paradigm that is focused on quality of life for all and the sustainability of the planet could help alleviate some societal issues illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic that lead to systemic inequalities and health disparities.

- A systems approach to community planning supported by cross-sectoral leadership and community involvement in decision-making can foster communities with a culture of well-being. This occurs through changing community policies, prioritizing the built and natural environment, and providing opportunities for social connection.
- Communities with a focus on accessible unstructured physical activity have shown measurable benefits on the quality of life and well-being of residents (e.g., reduced health risks, increased volunteerism, socialization), as well as the community’s economy (e.g., increased productivity and health system savings, property values, tourism, population size).
- Active, vibrant, and sustainable Indigenous communities are best informed by Indigenous perspectives and practices and led by Indigenous peoples. Culturally appropriate physical activity programs for Indigenous communities would benefit from support to women-led programs through friendship centres, Indigenous-led research, greater focus on Indigenous persons with disabilities, as well as Indigenous-focused land-based activities.
- Applying an “age-friendly communities” approach supports policymakers to address the domains of community and urban life that help to identify and address barriers to the well-being and participation of older people.
- Increasingly, cities and communities are improving the people’s quality of life by finding innovative ways of bringing citizens together to enhance mobility and prioritize public space.

RESOURCES

A photograph of two women walking outdoors on a path. The woman on the left is wearing a pink shirt and dark pants, pushing a red stroller. The woman on the right is wearing a black shirt and patterned pants. They are both smiling and looking towards each other. The background is a lush green forest.

Speaker Series

- Speaker Series #1 – Emerging from the Pandemic: Prioritizing Physical Activity and Recreation (recording)
- Speaker Series #2 – Reframing and Inspiring Success Toward Active, Vibrant Communities (recording)

Other Resources

- ReImagine RREC: The findings of these research activities are summarized in [four corresponding reports \(on the Bench\)](#) in addition to a standalone summary report.
- [Impacts of COVID-19 on the physical activity, sport and recreation sector](#) – Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) research reports.
- [Big Idea: A Wellbeing Approach to Governance](#)
- [ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults \(2021\)](#)