



Key Messages and Policy Recommendations for Access to Recreation

Background

In 2011, the Ontario Society of Physical Activity Promoters in Public Health (OSPAPPH) member survey identified access to recreation and physical literacy as key priorities for their health units. Building on the survey results, this key message document was developed to assist physical activity promoters from across the province to deliver consistent messaging from a public health perspective about access to recreation.

These key messages, including policy recommendations, were identified and researched by an access to recreation working group made up of physical activity promoters from a number of OSPAPPH member health units. These messages also received further input from a stakeholder consultation survey.

Using the Key Messages & Policy Recommendations

This document has been created for *internal use* and is not meant to be a stand-alone resource for widespread distribution. It would be appropriate to share this document with your community partners who are working on access to recreation initiatives to ensure consistent messaging.

Several ways that you may utilize this key message document include, but are not limited to:

- Preparing for media interviews;
- Preparing media releases;
- Writing opinion pieces and/or responses to editorials;
- Writing position papers;
- Writing reports or guidance documents;
- Developing or enhancing policies and supporting the work of your community groups or key stakeholders.

This document may also assist you if you are just beginning to develop strategies in the area of access to recreation.

Each of the key messages has supporting evidence from the literature. You may see that a number of evidence points support more than one key message. This is done purposely to fit the format of a media interview when a journalist with his/her questions may attempt to lead you in any number of directions. The repetition helps you to stay on message, internalize the information and ensures your key points are heard.

The policy recommendations outlined in this document were identified to help support and advance the issue of access to recreation in your community. The decision-makers targeted to endorse these recommendations are at the municipal level.

Although the key messages and policy recommendations are directed toward specific decision-makers, access to recreation is an issue affecting a broader audience. As such, the key messages can also be used to raise awareness and mobilize the community around the issue. The key messages are written in a way to answers the following questions:

- What's wrong? The answer to this question further defines the problem and conveys a clear statement of concern;
- Why does it matter? The answer to this question includes the value dimension and will appeal to the decision-maker, but also highlights this is an issue that affects everyone.
- What needs to be done about it? The answer to this question provides clearly defined policy objectives.

A corresponding key message document for physical literacy has also been developed for your use.

Key Messages

What is access to recreation?

- Access to recreation means being able to participate in structured or unstructured physical activity to improve health, develop a skill or build self-esteem.¹
 - Unstructured physical activity includes, but is not limited to how a community is designed, availability of parks, green spaces, trails and infrastructure to support walkable and bikeable communities.
 - Structured physical activity includes sport and organized recreation programs.
- Having access means recreation is affordable, it is within your community and it is inclusive of different cultures, ages and ability levels.

A lack of access to recreation is a serious public health issue.

- In Ontario, chronic diseases are the leading cause of death. Heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes and cancer combined account for 60% of all deaths (or 6 in 10 deaths).²
- Approximately 50% of Ontarians are physically inactive and at a higher risk of developing chronic diseases.³
- Increasing access to recreation is part of the solution to reducing obesity.
- Children who do not have recreational facilities available in their neighbourhood are less likely to engage in physical activity after school.⁴
- Access to recreational facilities, parks and trails is associated with higher physical activity levels, particularly for children and youth.⁵
- Access to recreation must be made a priority to reverse the trend of physical inactivity.

There are many barriers preventing Ontarians from accessing recreation.

- There is a lack of accessible programs and services at the local level particularly in smaller or rural communities.⁶
- User fees, transportation and equipment costs are all barriers to being physically active, especially for low-income households.
- Competition exists for space within schools, community centres and other facilities that could support recreation.⁷
- According to a 2007 survey of Ontario municipalities, nearly two-thirds of municipalities do not have approved policies that deal with access to recreation programs.⁸

- According to the 2009 Survey of *Physical Activity in Canadian Communities*, overall the availability of discounted fee structures for children, families and seniors has decreased since 2000.⁹
- The way our communities are designed can either facilitate or constrain our ability to be physically active. More than 80% of municipalities do not require safe walking and biking routes when developing new areas or reconstructing roads.¹⁰

Everyone has a right to recreation in their community.

- Having access to recreation and participating in recreational programs supports social inclusion, increases self-esteem and boosts physical and mental health.¹¹
- Community design has a significant impact on an individual's ability to be physically active.¹²
- Studies show that access to parks is positively associated with regular physical activity.¹³
- Having access to recreational opportunities can help Ontarians meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.

For every dollar spent on recreation, savings are made in health and social services.

- For every \$1.00 invested in recreation, savings of up to \$11.00 can be made on a broad range of expensive health care programs and services.¹⁴
- A 10% increase in the number of physically active Canadians has the potential to reduce direct health care expenditures by \$150-million a year.¹⁵
- Nearly \$0.50 of every dollar that Queen's Park spends goes towards health care costs.¹⁶ By 2030 health care costs could take up to 80% of the provincial program spending budget.¹⁷
- Young people who have higher participation rates in structured recreational activities have reduced rates of criminal arrest (by as much as 71%) and antisocial behaviour and increased success at post-secondary education.¹⁸
- Having access to recreation is a critical part of creating a healthy community and reducing the economic burden.
- Communities designed to support unstructured physical activity through walking and cycling not only benefit residents, but contribute to the local economy by supporting tourism.¹⁹

Policy Recommendations

Municipalities need to create environments that remove barriers to recreation and encourage physical activity. Municipalities can achieve this by:

- Developing comprehensive policies around affordable access to recreation for all residents. This includes access to programs, facilities and green spaces.
- Designing communities to support physical activity by including easy access to recreation facilities, sidewalks, trails, cycling paths and parks.
- Implementing shared-use agreements for facilities and shared maintenance costs to sustain access to recreation in their communities.
- Allocating and ensuring a certain percentage of their budget goes to improving access to recreation for all of their residents.
- Seeking out partnerships with other recreation providers and community groups working toward access to recreation.

Improving access to recreation requires a stronger investment from municipal, provincial and federal governments.

- An Ipsos Reid survey from January 2012 showed 70% of all respondents across Canada say governments should provide more funding to build recreation centres and provide resources to make it easier for kids to build exercise into their lives.²⁰
- Many provincial and federal organizations support an increased government investment in improving access to recreation including:
 - The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has a policy statement around the benefits of local policies and investment in recreation.
 - Parks and Recreation Ontario has completed numerous studies in partnership with other provincial organizations and developed a Policy Framework for all levels of government around improved investment in and access to recreation.
 - The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario has taken an active role in advocating for increased investment in physical activity to ensure that all Ontarian children and youth have access to opportunities to be active.
 - The Federation of Canadian Municipalities identifies recreation as paramount to Canada's social infrastructure program influencing quality of life and well-being.²¹

Public Health is aiming to work in partnership with these and other organizations to add a voice in improving the health of Ontarians through increasing access to recreation.

What can physical activity promoters in public health do?

- Build internal capacity to assess public policy in recreational settings
- Join municipal recreation advisory committees or planning tables
- Seek out and work with community partners who are advancing the issue of access to recreation
- Build community capacity for change and support community-based and municipal partnerships
- Advocate for the development of comprehensive policies that support access to recreation within municipal documents (e.g. Provide language and input into municipal planning documents)
- Work with planners, engineers, and developers to design a community that supports physical activity and increases access to recreation
- Share best practices of policies relating to access to recreation with other communities
- Engage in awareness-raising about the benefits of recreation on overall health and the types of structured and unstructured recreational opportunities available in their communities
- Advocate for policies that enable universal access to recreational programs through program subsidies
- Advocate for physical activity opportunities that support inclusiveness and diversity
- Advocate for physical activity opportunities and recreation in priority neighbourhoods

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