

Guest column

BC's aging recreation facilities put healthy communities at risk

**by Suzanne Allard Strutt, CEO
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Studies and surveys by the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) indicate that 70 per cent of BC's recreation, parks and sports facilities are at least 25 years old ... many of them more than 35 years old.

With the provincial election fast approaching there is going to be a lot of debate and discussion about important community issues and priorities. What better time for citizens to talk about the fact that many of the recreation and parks facilities in their communities are old beyond their time and desperately in need of renovation or replacement.

And, what better time than now to remind political candidates competing for our support that there is a pressing need for provincial investment in the renewal of aging recreation facilities.

The simple truth is that there has not been enough provincial funding for construction of new facilities in the past quarter century. Now, the negative impacts of aging facilities are challenging virtually every community in BC.

These facilities represent the life blood of our communities. They are the places our kids discover that physical activity and sports are fun. They are the places where adults learn that individual health is the bedrock of community health. They are the places that benefit the health and well being of all family members and connect them to their communities.

The problem is that facilities more than three decades old – like community centres, pools, rinks and playing fields – are very costly to operate and maintain. They require large scale repair or replacement to continue to serve community needs. Their old age undermines the ability of communities to attract, accommodate and sustain the healthy activities that are vital to fitness and health.

And, this problem is coming to a head at a time when we are all deeply concerned about the devastating community impacts of drug-related gang activity on our streets and about the need to provide suitable recreational havens where young people can enjoy healthy lifestyles.

From a dollars and cents perspective, renewal of recreation facilities will create much needed local employment in communities across BC and stimulate economic activity amongst local suppliers of goods and services.

At a time when BC is experiencing a dramatic increase in juvenile diabetes and obesity, there is mounting evidence that the provision of modern, accessible, activity-friendly recreation infrastructure represents a vital cost-saving investment in good health. The estimated annual cost of inactivity in BC is close to \$500 million with almost \$200 million of that in the form of hospital, physician, drug, institutional and other direct costs.

The BCRPA is committed to working with government to improve community health through a program of focused recreation infrastructure renewal. Help us to raise community awareness and engage others in dialogue. Please make your voice heard along with ours. Share your concern with your friends. Write a letter to the editor. Approach your community leaders to speak out. Ask questions at one of several all-candidates meetings that will be held in the coming weeks.

It's time to turn a pressing need into a public policy priority.

For more information or to contact us, visit our website at www.bcrpa.bc.ca

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