

Province of British Columbia
Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Budget 2013 Consultation

Submission from the
BC Recreation and Parks Association

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Recreation – a budget priority for Health Care Reform

As consultations occur throughout BC on the 2013/14 BC Provincial Budget, the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) would like to inform and support this crucial dialogue.

The provincial budget is currently proposing allocating the largest proportion (42% or \$18.5 billion) to health; an area that is seeing unprecedented escalations in costs. Increases in obesity and chronic disease rates, an aging population, and the introduction of the Federal Conservative government's new Health Accord that will trim the growth in health transfers to provinces, are going to leave the provinces with significant, and potentially unrecoverable, financial gaps.

An obvious solution to this is for the province to take action to reduce costs without cutting services by reducing the number of people needing and using the health care system: decrease demand by increasing the health of individuals, through personal action and the provision of supportive environments.

Public health research and expert commentary on the current health care funding crisis are urging the health care system to move the focus away from traditional reactive measures of treatments and cures to a strengthened commitment to proactive initiatives such as health promotion and disease prevention.

By refocusing spending on health promotion and disease prevention this significant area of government spending can realize a reduction in overall costs and help keep our health system intact and life affordable for British Columbians.

A focus on health promotion and prevention

It has been reported that the largest proportion of health care costs in Canada – both direct (health care) and indirect (lost production) – are attributable to chronic diseases (52.7%) and injuries (7.9%)¹. Chronic diseases alone are costing the Canadian economy around \$93 billion annually.²

¹ Kendall P.R.W., OBC, MBBS, MSc, FRCPA *Investing in Prevention: Improving Health and Creating Sustainability*. The Provincial Health Officer's Special Report. September 2010. Provincial Health Officer, British Columbia

Yet, chronic disease is preventable. Reductions in its occurrence and severity will dramatically reduce the strain on health care spending and resources. Investing in prevention keeps people healthy and reduces the need for more costly treatment later on. Prevention also supports a healthy population that can generate greater economic growth as healthy people are more likely to maximize their potential¹.

Health Promotion and Prevention has the best return on health dollar investment compared to other forms of healthcare related to curing sickness and disease.

The role of recreation in active healthy living and chronic disease prevention

Prevention through an increase in physical activity and improved citizen access to recreation will significantly lower the incidence of chronic disease and its related health care costs.

One specific health promotion and prevention strategy that is universal in application is that of promoting and supporting active and healthy lifestyles through recreation.

Recreation is an effective health promotion and disease prevention tool that is available within virtually every community throughout BC. Prioritizing funding for community based recreation initiatives and recreation infrastructure renewal will have a significant effect in reducing the occurrence of chronic disease and its related health care costs, and provide the greatest return on investment.

Recreation is a key factor in combating the high physical inactivity rates in our province. Physical inactivity is a leading contributor to obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, certain types of cancers, and fall-related injuries and chronic conditions in older adults. Community-based recreation supports physical activity and leads to healthier lifestyles, stronger civic and social engagement, improved mental health, increased productivity and economic growth.

Estimates have placed the cost of physical inactivity in Canada at \$5.3 billion in health care expenditures³. A 10% reduction in the prevalence of physical inactivity has the potential to reduce direct health care expenditures by \$150 million a year⁴. Even modest reductions in inactivity levels could result in substantial cost savings.

With appropriate levels and types of physical activity, British Columbians of all ages and abilities can experience improvements in physical, mental and emotional wellbeing⁵.

² Mirolla M. The cost of chronic disease in Canada. *A study prepared for the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada*. January 2004.

³ Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD). (2004) *Physical Activity: Health benefits and costs to health care system*. Ottawa, Ontario: Author.

⁴ Katzmarzyk, P.T., Gledhill, N., Shephard, R.J. (2000). *The economic burden of physical inactivity in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: School of Kinesiology and Health Science, York University.

⁵ Healthy Aging and Wellness Working Group. (2006). *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment. From Evidence to Action. A Background Paper for the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Committee of Officials (Seniors)*. Ottawa, Ontario: Author.

The role of recreation infrastructure in active healthy living

Community recreation infrastructure is a means through which people achieve the benefits of recreation and reach their healthy living goals and as the need for recreation services increases so too does the need to support these facilities. Recent investment has not kept up with rising and changing demands and investment in our province's recreation facilities is now critical. In BC upwards of 70% of indoor recreation facilities are over 25 years of age and require an investment of \$7B to adequately address the indoor recreation facility infrastructure deficit and population growth⁶.

Community recreation facilities are one of the most cost-effective prescriptions for our good health

Investment in recreation infrastructure is an investment in public health. It is a preventative approach for individual and community health that offsets spending on reactive investments in health care. Resources required to provide adequate recreation facilities are significantly less on a per user basis than medical facilities such as hospitals, medical laboratories and care facilities.

Recreation infrastructure investment also supports economic goals and objectives by maintaining the economic and social viability of BC communities; increasing property values and tax revenue; generating construction and operations job opportunities; and supporting tourism.

Recreation as part of the health system

The Recreation sector works collaboratively with government and related stakeholders in identifying and addressing the health issues most seriously afflicting British Columbians. This includes partnerships with provincial and local public health authorities and physicians to develop strategies at the clinical management level to environmental, building walkable communities and healthy built environments and transportation.

The BCRPA urges the Provincial government to prioritize and direct funding to the promotion of health and the prevention of chronic disease as a means by which to address the escalation of health costs, the deterioration of our province's health, and the affordability of life in British Columbia.

On behalf of the BC Recreation and Parks Association,



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Chief Executive Officer

⁶ A Time For Renewal. BC Recreation and Parks Association.
http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation_parks/facilities/sports_recreation/documents/BCRPA_ExecutiveSummary_Web.pdf 2009