



## **Building a Healthy Future:**

### **A Case for Investing in Recreation and Community Sport Infrastructure to Promote Active, Healthy Living**



Quesnel Youth Soccer Association photo courtesy of Quesnel and District Leisure Services

## **British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association**

Submission to the BC Government Conversation on Health

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## **Executive Summary**

The BC Government has set its goal for British Columbia to be the healthiest jurisdiction ever to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The BC Recreation and Parks Association is committed to working with the BC Government to reach that goal through health promotion initiatives that will sustain the health of individuals and communities past 2010.

Physical inactivity is a risk factor for chronic disease. As we work toward increasing activity levels, we need to ensure there is adequate infrastructure to support physical activity in communities.

Recreation and sport facilities as well as infrastructure such as parks, trails and bikeways create opportunities for individuals to participate in recreation and community sport. Up-to-date and accessible activity-friendly infrastructure is vital to the health of communities in BC.

Recreation and community sport are widely acknowledged to have a positive impact on healthy, active Canadians. Physical activity provides proven health benefits. It protects against heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer, osteoporosis, obesity, depression, anxiety and stress.

However, 38 % of British Columbians are not active enough to achieve the health benefits associated with an active lifestyle. The estimated annual cost of inactivity in British Columbia is \$422 million, with \$185.7 million in the form of direct costs (hospital, physician, drug, institutional and other costs) equal to 1.6% of total government spending on these services.

The Province of BC is well on its way to improving the health of British Columbians through its health promotion goals and initiatives encouraging healthy active living. BCRPA plans to continue to work with the Province and its partners to reach these goals. Continuing to invest in health promotion programs and initiatives is essential in order to maintain the momentum that is building in communities to lead active lifestyles through to 2010 and beyond.

BCRPA recommends that the BC Government consider the information provided here and integrate it with other sources to form BC's response to the Conversation on Health.

1. That the BC Government invest 6% of its Health Care budget in health promotion and chronic disease prevention.
2. A) That the BC Government invest \$325,000 for BCRPA to conduct the next phase of its Facilities Assessment Study, a Recreation Facilities Audit of 65 recreation facilities across the Province.

- B) That the BC Government Increase funding for health-promoting Active Transportation projects such as trails and bikeways.

## **Introduction**

The BC Recreation and Parks Association commends the Government of BC for creating this opportunity to speak to health promotion and is pleased to contribute some of our findings as part of the BC Government Conversation on Health community consultations. BCRPA is a not-for-profit organization established in 1958 whose purpose is to build and sustain active, healthy lifestyles and communities in British Columbia.

BCRPA is fully committed to working with the Government of BC to improve the health of British Columbians and BC communities and to reach the provincial goal of leading the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. BCRPA will continue its productive working relationship with the Provincial Government as a strategic advisor, a partnership builder, a program delivery agency and an educative intermediary between local governments, stakeholders and the Province. BCRPA sees health promotion as part of its mandate and has initiated active living strategies such as the Active Communities Initiative. It has also chaired the BC Healthy Living Alliance since 2003.

BCRPA has been providing the lead in British Columbia in assessing the state of municipally owned and/or operated sport and recreation facilities. We are implementing a Community Recreation Assessment Study in order to develop an accurate profile of recreation infrastructure in BC. The work to date has resulted in a comprehensive database of municipal recreation infrastructure. What is required now is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the facilities in the Province through a Recreation Facility Audit.

The Audit will provide government with a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the facilities in the Province in order to make educated, informed decisions that will help meet the goals of a sustainable sport and recreation system creating opportunities to have the greatest impact on the health and physical activity levels of British Columbians.

A small investment of \$325,000 is required to conduct the audit which will review a sampling of 65 facilities, hire the experts to do the field work, database the information and provide a thorough analysis of the data and their report findings.

The findings to date reveal that infrastructure renewal is required in many communities as many current facilities are aging and facing replacement or renovation.

BCRPA recognizes and commends the BC Government's recent investments in community active infrastructure projects, such as the Cycling Infrastructure Partnerships Program and LocalMotion. We encourage the Government to increase this type of funding, which assists local governments and community partners in meeting the quality of life needs of its citizens through projects and programs that support active lifestyles and reduce barriers to activity.

We want to help develop a framework and paradigm shift that will ultimately support healthy and active individuals and communities by creating opportunities for health promotion and prevention. We present below our case for addressing sport and recreation facilities and physical activity-friendly infrastructure as a priority to promote active healthy living, thereby reducing or eliminating the further escalation of health care costs in BC.

## Implications of physical inactivity on health outcomes

Physical inactivity is a risk factor for chronic disease. As we work toward increasing activity levels, we need to ensure there is adequate infrastructure to support physical activity in communities.

One of the BC Government's Five Great Goals is to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness. This goal is directly linked to the ability of BC's recreation facilities and infrastructure to meet this challenge.

Recreation facilities, programs and active infrastructure (parks, trails and bikeways) are critical to creating and supporting healthy active communities and are central to binding communities through sport participation and social interaction. These facilities are also vital to the economic development of communities.

In recent years, many organizations and stakeholders have become concerned about the general state of sport and recreation infrastructure, the ability of our local governments to maintain and expand this critical system, and its subsequent impact on health. At the same time, the incidence of common and preventable risk factors relating to chronic disease (i.e. physical inactivity and unhealthy eating) is on the rise for those who are vulnerable.

Virtually every community throughout BC is challenged by its aging facilities. This was clearly indicated by the BCRPA "Facility Assessment Study." In addition to renewal and upgrading, there are needs for new facilities, parks and trails.

The state of sport and recreation facilities in British Columbia:

Over the past several years, the BC Recreation and Parks Association has completed a three-phase study focused on gaining an understanding of the magnitude of this infrastructure problem. Through this process, the BC Recreation and Parks Association has created an inventory database of municipal sport and recreation infrastructure, both indoor and outdoor.

The findings reveal that, currently, over 70% of this infrastructure is over 25 years of age. By 2010, most will be in this category. It is estimated that these facilities represent a total capital investment of \$3,350,000,000. [3] Although we have experienced an increase in construction over the last 10 years, the current rate of construction is not keeping pace with approximately 20% of indoor infrastructure less than 15 years old. This challenge is particularly concerning given that it is generally understood that as a facility ages it becomes more and more costly to operate and nears the point at which large scale rehabilitation or replacement is required in order to continue to serve the community.

## Role of recreation programs and infrastructure in addressing inactivity

Existing data indicates that 70% of obese adolescents will continue to be obese in adulthood. [6] It is crucial that we help these children and their families to develop healthy lifestyles that will last a lifetime.

Physical activity provides proven health benefits. It protects against heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer, osteoporosis, obesity, depression, anxiety and stress.

Recreation and community sport are widely acknowledged to have a positive impact on healthy, active Canadians. Accepting these key benefits, the importance of ensuring the long term sustainability of a healthy stock of community sport and recreation infrastructure becomes clear. We require actions that are multidisciplinary, comprehensive, integrated, sufficiently resourced and sustainable. People need encouragement and opportunities to adopt lifelong healthy habits that will improve their health and ease the burden on the health care system.

### Impacts of physical inactivity on communities:

Lack of physical activity is a major public health concern in British Columbia—38% of British Columbians are not active enough to achieve the health benefits associated with an active lifestyle. The estimated annual cost of inactivity in British Columbia is \$422 million, with \$185.7 million in the form of direct costs (hospital, physician, drug, institutional and other costs) equal to 1.6% of total government spending on these services. An additional \$236 million is indirectly

lost each year due to productivity losses from premature death and disability. The lowest estimate of inactivity costs in BC is \$357 million and the upper end estimated at \$600 million. [6]

Emerging research also shows that physical activity is associated with other health issues, such as mental health, that are extremely costly to the health system and to individuals and families in British Columbia. Epidemiological studies estimate that 36% of heart disease, 27% of osteoporosis, 20% of stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and colon cancer, and 11% of breast cancer are attributable to physical inactivity. The problem of obesity and its accompanying health ramifications is a growing crisis in Canada and in BC. [6]

If just 10% more British Columbians were physically active, the province could save an estimated \$16.1 million every year in avoided hospital drug, physician and other direct costs. Added to an estimated \$19.9 million in productivity gains, the total economic savings to British Columbia from a 10% reduction in physical inactivity could amount to \$36 million. [6]

Our health care system is already stretched to the point where many question its sustainability. Yet, as we are in the midst of an epidemic of childhood obesity, we can only look forward to an upward spiral in obesity-related health care costs burdening the healthcare system.

At the same time, there is a growing interest in addressing this issue:

- The Premier has set the goal for BC to be the most active jurisdiction to host an Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Canada's Ministers of Sport have recently established 2010 as the deadline to dramatically increase the level of fitness of Canadians
- British Columbia has set its goal of increasing physical activity by 20% by the year 2010
- Physical activity, healthy eating and maintenance of a healthy weight are key components of a chronic disease prevention strategy of the BC Healthy Living Alliance, "The Winning Legacy"
- Physical activity is the key focus of the ActionSchools! BC project
- BCRPA delivers the Active Communities Initiative which is already having an impact on communities

## **Community Testimonials**

"I was at the community centre one day and I noticed that there was a blood pressure clinic. After having my blood pressure taken, the woman suggested I call my doctor...thank you so much - you may have saved my life."

-Betty, 69 yrs, Burnaby  
Fall 2000

"Parks and recreation has been an important part of my life....the Alley Youth Centre has given me a place to go on the weekend to relax, stay out of trouble and where my parents know I am safe."

-Robyn, 15 yrs, Port Moody  
November 2002

"Parks and Recreation has provided me with an opportunity to socialize at a location that is close to my home...I am an active participant of the Bridge Club and the entertainment that it provides is a great benefit and is important to me."

-Elizabeth, 76 years, Port Moody  
December 2002

### Community Support for Active Infrastructure:

BCRPA, through its Active Communities Initiative, organized a series of Active Transportation Workshops in regions throughout BC in May 2007. The workshops educated the various community sectors represented - the recreation sector, the health sector, the education sector, local governments, traffic/transportation engineers, urban planning/architecture, service clubs, and other community groups - and facilitated discussions within and between communities on how to improve community health through active infrastructure.

The workshops featured a keynote presentation, group sessions, and on-the-ground assessments of each host community's infrastructure design through the lens of neighbourhoods being safe and easy for walking or bicycling. The feedback questionnaires received from participants reflect the value in such educational sessions and the importance of BCRPA continuing to facilitate this dialogue in order to build community partnerships and promote healthy communities. The following are some sample responses:

Q: What can BCRPA/Active Communities do to further support you in developing or implementing an Active Transportation plan, or creating more activity friendly environments in your community?

A: "Have BCRPA create a bridge between the community organizers and the decision-making parties responsible for the policy changes and law creations."  
- Kelowna workshop participant

"Keep up the education and do more workshops." - Kelowna workshop participant

"Grants, infrastructure, consultations and workshops." - Prince George workshop participant



"More community awareness/involvement." - Prince George workshop participant

"Provide funding." - Abbotsford workshop participant

Q: What steps will you take to implement what you learned?

A: "Work on 'incentives' programs for landowners and developers where trails/pathways are an issue. Talk about the physical inactivity and poor nutrition epidemic." - Kelowna workshop participant

"Try to implement these ideas into our planning objectives for new parks." - Kelowna workshop participant

"I will get our community groups together to link our community together by trails." - Prince George workshop participant

"Review community policy and projects with a view of active living." - Prince George workshop participant

"Create multi-sectored connections." - Abbotsford workshop participant

"Networking - letting other groups know about this." - Abbotsford workshop participant

"Pass on the information, engage the council, and engage community." - Abbotsford workshop participant

"Collaborate with other community groups to create projects in our area." - Abbotsford workshop participant

The information shared, and networks formed, from these regional workshops will go a long way in creating a paradigm shift and building the infrastructure needed to promote healthy active communities.

## **Recommendations**

BCRPA is fully committed to working with government to create an equitable, efficient and responsive approach to health prevention and promotion. BCRPA is positioned to assist and understands this investment will ultimately support healthy and active individuals and communities. In this spirit, we offer the following recommendations:

That the BC Government consider the information provided here and integrate it with other sources to form BC's response to the Conversation on Health.

1. That the BC Government invest 6% of its Health Care budget in health promotion and chronic disease prevention.
2. A) That the BC Government invest \$325,000 for BCRPA to conduct the next phase of its Facilities Assessment Study, a Recreation Facilities Audit of 65 recreation facilities across the Province.  
  
B) Increase BC Government funding for health-promoting Active Transportation projects such as trails and bikeways

## **About BCRPA**

The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to building and sustaining active healthy lifestyles and communities in BC. Established in 1958, the Association is a central resource agency for members and stakeholders of the parks, recreation, physical activity and culture industry, providing leadership, training and support to help meet national, provincial and local priorities. Through a diverse network of partners and extensive programs and services, BCRPA actively advocates accessibility and inclusiveness to recreation and physical activity and strives to bridge the gap between the recreation and sport system to increase participation from “playground to podium.”

BCRPA is the implementation partner of the Active Communities Initiative, with support from the Ministry of Health and in partnership with ActNow BC and 2010 Legacies Now. Active Communities works with local governments, partner organizations and communities throughout BC to help increase by 20% the physical activity levels of British Columbians by the year 2010.

In September 2007, the CEO of BCRPA will complete her second two-year term as Chair of the BC Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA), a provincial coalition of organizations working together to improve the health of British Columbians by promoting physical activity, healthy eating and living smoke-free. BCRPA is actively involved in the development and delivery of the Alliance’s provincial health promotion strategy, *The Winning Legacy*, and the disbursement of the Alliance’s \$25.2 million grant from ActNow BC. In 2006, BCRPA also led the development of BCHLA’s comprehensive provincial physical activity strategy which aims to decrease the number of inactive adults aged 35 to 54 by 20%.

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