

# Power of Sport: The True Sport Report 2022

TRUE  
SPORT



CANADIAN CENTRE  
FOR ETHICS IN SPORT

## Power of Sport

Sport is an integral part of Canadian society and can be used to positively influence a wide range of societal goals. Existing evidence has demonstrated that sport's benefits reach far beyond the positive health effects of physical activity. Community sport serves as a generator of social capital, creating benefits across a broad spectrum of societal goals including child and youth development, crime prevention, economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion for all Canadians.

The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) undertook this research initiative to provide concrete evidence of the type of benefits that can be realized with a values-based approach to sport. Values-based sport places values and principles at the heart of all policies, practices and programs in an effort to increase ethical conduct and decrease unethical behaviour.

True Sport is an approach to values-based sport that is founded on the core values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun. When the seven True Sport Principles — Go For It, Play Fair, Respect Others, Keep It Fun, Stay Healthy, Include Everyone, and Give Back — are resident in the sport experience, positive sport environments that instill character, strengthen community, and increase opportunities for excellence will result.

**There is a simple idea at the heart of this report, the same idea that lies at the heart of True Sport — good sport can make a great difference.**

Similar to the original report [What Sport Can Do: The True Sport Report 2008](#), this report is intended to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system and to catalyze new approaches that will put this potential to work for Canadians. Power Of Sport: The True Sport Report 2022 includes additional research on the impacts of sport on children with disabilities, LGBTQ+ inclusion and representation, experiences of racialized peoples, intersectionality, the footprint of community sport, the impact of climate change on sport as well as COVID-19 and Canadian sport.

Community sport is not broken, but if we want sport to live up to its true potential, we need to be intentional about ensuring that it reflects our shared values and that everyone has a chance to participate. We need to work together, across all sectors of society, to realize the power of sport.

On behalf of the CCES, thank you for your role in fostering the type of sport that we know can make a great difference in the lives of all Canadians. We hope that this research inspires you to bring True Sport to life in meaningful ways. We invite you to reflect on what you, your team, your organization, your business or your community can do to help sport live up to this potential and encourage you to visit True Sport ([www.truesport.ca](http://www.truesport.ca)) for help in transforming your ideas into action.

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Existing evidence has demonstrated that sport's benefits reach far beyond the positive health effects of physical activity. Community sport serves as a generator of social capital, creating benefits across a broad spectrum of societal goals including child and youth development, crime prevention, economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion for all Canadians.



To realize these benefits, the sport we play must be **good sport**, intentionally driven by **positive values**.



As a result, a new picture for Canada's community sport system is emerging, highlighting the far-reaching benefits of sport across the nation. Evidence documenting these benefits, paired with further investigation on the importance of purposeful inclusion in sport, is integral to delivering the benefits of sport to all Canadians. Notably, future research in this area should focus on those who are underrepresented in sport or face barriers to participation.

To realize these benefits, the sport we play must be good sport, intentionally driven by positive values.

Values-based sport places values and principles at the heart of all policies, practices and programs in an effort to increase ethical conduct and decrease unethical behaviour. A values-based approach to sport will create good experiences for all stakeholders (e.g., athletes, participants, coaches, officials, parents, volunteers, allies, sports organizations).

True Sport is an approach to values-based sport that is founded on the core values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun. When the seven True Sport Principles — Go For It, Play Fair, Respect Others, Keep It Fun, Stay Healthy, Include Everyone, and Give Back — are resident in the sport experience, positive sport environments that instill character, strengthen community, and increase opportunities for excellence will result.

Research indicates that this is exactly the kind of sport that the vast majority of Canadians want, understanding intuitively that this is the sport that generates the greatest benefits. Unfortunately, sport in Canada continues to grapple with numerous issues that prevent stakeholders from realizing all that sport has to offer, most notably access and inclusion and participant safety and maltreatment. The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) undertook this research initiative to provide concrete evidence of the type of benefits that can be realized with a values-based approach to sport — to put data and examples around this intuition and aspiration.

Similar to the original report [What Sport Can Do: The True Sport Report 2008](#), this report is intended to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system and to catalyze new approaches that will put this potential to work for Canadians.

Below are some research highlights from the literature review. Please refer to the full report for more.

### Community Sport in Canada

- **Defining Community Sport** – “Sport” refers to an organized activity involving two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition. It involves formal rules, requires specialized skills and strategies, and includes training or coaching. Community sport, or organized sport, is led and supported by community volunteers and institutions, and is found across the country in communities of all kinds. Community sport is not a private individual pursuit, nor is it undertaken for profit. It relies heavily on volunteers and is supported by the communities where it is held. Community sport offers inclusive participation and civic engagement, providing benefits that for-profit sport cannot.
- **Sport Participation in Canada** – More than 8 million Canadians over the age of 15 participated in sport within the year 2016, an increase from previous years. Women's increased participation in sport is responsible for contributing to this change. Similarly, more Canadians are serving as sport coaches, administrators and spectators. Greater sport participation and involvement is associated with higher income and educational levels.

- **The Sport We Want** – Canadians value sport, believing it instills character in youth and strengthens communities. Sport reinforces the importance of commitment, honest effort, ethical play and hard work in the pursuit of excellence, and allows for individuals to experience achievement and satisfaction.

### Improving Health and Well-Being

Good health is fundamental to an individual's well-being and their ability to realize their full human potential. It is also a crucially important economic asset. Sport helps make Canadians healthier by:

- **Increasing the Number of Active Canadians** – Adult Canadians who are active in sport average almost three hours of mostly moderate or vigorous physical activity per week and are, therefore, likely reaching recommended activity levels that have been proven to reduce mortality rates by as much as 30%.
- **Reducing the Burden of Chronic Disease** – People who are active on a regular basis significantly reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer (in particular breast and colon cancers), type 2 (adult-onset) diabetes, and bone loss and pain in later life due to osteoporosis.
- **Enhancing Mental Health** – Physical activity through sport helps to enhance self-esteem, reduce stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression. In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression. Sport also offers opportunities for positive relationships, friendship and support that foster emotional health.

- **Promoting Healthy Aging** – Physical activity through sport can help prevent chronic disease, improve balance and coordination as people age (significantly reducing their risk of falls and hospitalization), improve memory and learning, and reduce the risk of cognitive loss through Alzheimer's and small strokes. Sport also provides opportunities for social connection for older Canadians at risk of social isolation.
- **Reducing Health Care Costs** – Physical inactivity costs Canadians approximately \$10 billion in direct and indirect costs annually. Increasing physical activity by 1% alone would save \$20 billion over 20 years. These metrics are increasingly important for older Canadians as health costs associated with aging grow.

### Putting Children and Youth on a Positive Life Course

Canadians value the impact of sport on children, providing positive effects for physical health, cognitive development and brain health, academic achievement, self-esteem, social and emotional functioning. Over three quarters of Canadian children participate in organized sport and over 90% of adults are confident of the character-building influence sport has on youth.

- **Structured Play, Organized Sport and Early Childhood Development** – Sport and organized physical activity have an important influence on childhood development. Preschool-aged children who participated in these activities had positive associations in the development of social skills, relationship building, engagement and psychological outcomes such as enhanced cognitive-intellectual development.
- **Building Physical Capacity and Motor Skills** – Involvement in organized sport has demonstrated improved fine motor skills in children. Providing opportunities to develop fine motor skills is important as they are not naturally acquired but are gained through experiences.

- **Keeping Children and Youth Active and Healthy** – Regular participation in physical activity during childhood and adolescence can help build and maintain bone mass, maintain a healthy body, and improve lifelong mental health.
- **Using Sport to Reduce Risky and Violent Behaviours** – Teens who participate in team sport are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviours such as substance abuse or sexually risky activities. Youth sport participation has been used to prevent crime, gang involvement and anti-social behaviours.
- **Fostering Positive Youth Development** – Children and youth sport participants have higher rates of self-esteem, self-concept and self-worth. Team sport has specific influence on promoting higher social acceptance, body satisfaction and life satisfaction.
- **Providing Adult Role Models** – Adolescents who experience positive coach relationships have enhanced social acceptance and reduced body dissatisfaction. The importance of positive coaching relationships is most significant for low-income children who significantly benefit from these relationships by achieving greater academic success and respect for their bodies.
- **Enhancing Academic Achievement** – Children and youth participation in physical activity is positively related to academic achievement, including higher grades and the ability to be more focused and concentrate.
- **Understanding the Particular Benefit of Sport for Girls** – Canadian girls experience higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders than their male counterparts, making sport participation increasingly important for this demographic. Girls' participation in sport enhances their body image and self-esteem and leads to an overall higher quality of life.
- **Impacts of Sport on Children with Disabilities** – Canadian children with disabilities are less active than their peers. Sport participation for children and youth with brain-based disabilities report improved sleep, concentration, executive function and well-being.

### Building Stronger and More Inclusive Communities

Sport's benefits are not limited to individuals. Sport can also help strengthen communities by building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of equity-deserving groups. This view is widely supported by Canadians, 82% of whom believe that sport builds stronger communities. Here are some additional examples of the impact of sport on community:

- **Building Social Capital** – Community sport has the potential to help bring individuals and communities together by creating a sense of community, encouraging active citizenship, and fostering trust, reciprocity, and a sense of security among community members. Together, these elements are the social capital of every community.
- **Helping Newcomers Integrate More Quickly into Canadian Society** – Over 80% of Canada's population growth is attributed to permanent and non-permanent immigration. Sport can serve as an important tool to integrate newcomers into their local communities through socialization, local language acquisition, and shared fun.
- **Fostering Greater Inclusion of People with Disabilities** – Individuals with disabilities have reported that their involvement in sports played a role in their development of self-confidence, self-worth and identity development. Sport programming can also provide opportunities for developing social connections with peers both with and without disabilities.
- **LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Representation** – LGBTQ+ youth are less likely to participate in sport than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Research suggests that social and safety barriers may impact LGBTQ+ sport participation. Creating awareness and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in sport is key to increasing participation and improving sport experiences as well as the lives of all Canadians.



- **Renewing Indigenous Culture** – Sport offers particular benefits with regard to Indigenous communities in terms of physical and mental health benefits, building cultural pride, social cohesion, self-esteem, and transferable skills among participants and volunteers. Support for both reducing barriers to mainstream sport participation for Indigenous people, as well as financial and governmental support for Indigenous-specific sport opportunities, will contribute to increasing participation rates for Indigenous people.
- **Experiences of Racialized Peoples** – Recent interventions have begun to push back against the white colonial rhetoric that erases racialized groups from Canadian sport. Ongoing work seeks to promote sport opportunities for visible minorities who participate in sport less than the rest of the population.
- **Intersectionality** – The intersection of multiple marginalized identities can result in an amplification of barriers faced by any one identity on its own. Canadians with intersectional identities may face additional barriers to inclusion in community sport. Prioritizing research in this area is important for advancing understanding of these individuals' experiences.

### Contributing to Canada's Economy

Sport plays a significant role in the economic and social life of communities, providing jobs, boosting tourism, contributing to neighbourhood economic renewal, and enhancing skills and productivity in the workplace. More specifically, sport contributes by:

- **Enhancing Tourism Through Sport Travel and Events** – Sport tourism contributes significantly to Canada's economy. In 2018, Canadian sport tourism created \$6.8 billion in total spending from both domestic and international sources.
- **Contributing to Local Development** – In addition to hosting sporting events, investment in Canadian sport infrastructure provides long-term benefits to local communities. These developments employ local community members and generate income in local economies.

- **Enhancing Workplace Skills and Productivity** – Evidence indicates that sport participation in childhood has been linked to better educational and employment outcomes later in life, particularly for women and girls. Employers are increasingly turning to sport and physical activity as a means to improve productivity in their workplaces through enhanced concentration and team communication.

### Promoting Environmental Sustainability

Sport can instill appreciation of the environment and a desire to protect it, as well as provide a platform for social mobilization related to environmental sustainability. Examples of how sport at all levels can ensure it is a net contributor, rather than detractor, include:

- **Fostering Environmental Awareness and Stewardship** – Many investments in community sport are investments in green space, with users often becoming advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and expansion, just as those who pursue wilderness sports are often advocates for the protection and sustainable use of remote environments.
- **Providing a Platform for Social Mobilization** – International sport events provide powerful platforms for promoting environmental protection because of their large audiences and global reach. High-profile athletes possess this same potential. Many international sport and environment bodies are using this capacity to raise environmental awareness and to advocate for greater sustainability at the local and global levels.
- **Footprint of Community Sport** – The most significant contributor to sport's environmental footprint is travel. Initiatives to reduce this impact through carpooling or chartered transportation services all play a part in reducing the carbon footprint of community sport.



- **The Impact of Climate Change on Sport –** Climate change poses a significant threat to certain sport activities. Winter sports such as skiing and snowboarding are vulnerable to climate changes as snow conditions become less stable, while summer sports are affected by conditions including increased heat and humidity.

### COVID-19 and Canadian Sport

Undoubtedly, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 disrupted sport activity across Canada. During this time, Canadians' participation in sport was altered and new and unique opportunities to maintain participation through the pandemic were created. Highlights include:

- **Reduced Sport Participation During the Pandemic –** The majority of Canadian community sport activities and other recreational activities were cancelled throughout various stages of the pandemic. Nearly 90% of sport participants were impacted during this time.
- **Encouraged Activity Throughout the Pandemic –** Maintaining participation in sport during the pandemic was encouraged by mental health experts. As a result, the most common modification during the pandemic was the shift to online participation and engagement opportunities.
- **Returning to Sport –** There is a sense of optimism to “build back better” after the pandemic, ensuring that considerations for social inequalities are considered in sport moving forward.

## Conclusion

The benefits of community sport invite communities and decision makers to recognize its value as a substantial public asset, and to devote attention and intentional effort to ensuring these benefits are fully realized for all Canadians.

Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital, and perhaps the most effective system we have, outside of the family, for providing young people with positive adult role models, mentors and opportunities for positive development. Delivering on these benefits, however, requires that we build an inclusive community sport system that delivers the sport Canadians want — sport that is fun, fair, inclusive and promotes excellence.

This is not the job of sport alone. Local communities have a leading role to play, together with federal, provincial and territorial governments who can help ensure all communities have the sport infrastructure they need.

The quality and ultimate impact of community sport finally comes down to individuals — the athletes, parents, coaches, officials, administrators and volunteers whose ideas, attitudes and behaviour determine whether we will close the gap between the sport we have and the sport we want, or widen it.

By intentionally making the right choices, together we can all help ensure the sport we have is the sport we want: True Sport.

# Section 1

## Introduction

Values-based sport places values and principles at the heart of all policies, practices and programs in an effort to increase ethical conduct and decrease unethical behaviour. A values-based approach to sport will create good experiences for all stakeholders (e.g. athletes, participants, coaches, officials, parents, volunteers, allies, sport organizations).



True Sport is an approach to values-based sport that is founded on the core values of fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun. When the seven True Sport Principles (Go For It, Play Fair, Respect Others, Keep It Fun, Stay Healthy, Include Everyone, Give Back) are resident in the sport experience, positive sport environments that instill character, strengthen community and increase opportunities for excellence will result.



To realize these benefits, the sport we take part in must be values-based. Research indicates that the vast majority of Canadians intuitively understand the great and diverse benefits this kind of sport can deliver and that this is the kind of sport they want.

The CCES acts as a network leader for values-based sport and works to activate it by championing True Sport. This research initiative provides concrete evidence of these benefits and puts data and examples around this intuition and aspiration.

## Purpose of This Report

There is more and more evidence that sport's benefits go far beyond the positive health effects of physical activity that have long been understood. A growing body of research points to community sport's fundamental role as a primary generator of social capital and related benefits across a broad spectrum of societal goals, as reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, good health and well-being and climate action. Perhaps most significantly, no other domain of community life has demonstrated sport's capacity to connect so many young people to positive adult role models and mentors, opportunities for positive development, and help acquiring critical life skills.

This evidence has begun to change how policy makers, community organizations, the private sector, and sport organizations themselves view the role and importance of community sport. On the basis of these insights, a new picture of Canada's community sport system is emerging — that of a critical, yet largely untapped, reservoir of public benefit that, with intentional effort, can be made to deliver even more for Canadians.

Sport provides a tremendous opportunity to provide meaningful experiences for all people who live in Canada. Extensive literature demonstrates how the many positive outcomes of sport participation improve the lives of all demographics. Continuing to advance equity and inclusion within sport should remain an important goal within Canada.

Targeted sport opportunities for populations with lower participation rates, such as new Canadians, individuals with disabilities and Indigenous peoples continue to remain an important goal. Promoting greater engagement in values-based sport for everyone in Canada through the inclusion of diverse stakeholders and networks will allow for greater understanding of how intersectionality influences involvement in sport.

The evidence presented in this report validates what Canadians have long intuitively known — that Canada’s community sport system possesses a unique potential that we have only just begun to explore. The evidence also bears out Canadians’ fundamental belief that realizing this potential is profoundly linked, not just to the availability of community sport, but to the quality of the sport experience itself.

Study after study has shown that the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is conducted in a certain way — when it is inclusive, fair, fun and fosters the pursuit of excellence. What

Canadians understand to be good sport — the sport that they seek — is, in fact, the sport that delivers the greatest benefits to their families and communities.

By entrenching values-based sport all across Canada, we can also improve the sport experience of those involved in sport, encourage more people to take up sport, and thereby increase participation and retention rates. Values-based sport will, by design, have a positive impact.

The purpose of this report is to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system and to foster a shift in culture through a values-based approach that is guided by the True Sport Principles that will maximize this potential for all Canadians.

The sections that follow describe what we mean by community sport, sketch a brief picture of our community sport system, and summarize primarily Canadian evidence concerning the impact and value of community sport in relation to a broad range of societal goals that are important to the social and economic prospects of Canadians, the quality of life in our communities, and the ability of Canada, as a nation, to meet future challenges.




By entrenching values-based sport all across Canada, we can also **improve the sport experience** of those involved in sport, **encourage more people** to take up sport, and thereby **increase participation and retention rates**. Values-based sport will, by design, have a positive impact.





## Who Should Read This Report?

This report is primarily aimed at public, private and not-for-profit decision-makers at the community, provincial, territorial and national level who are working to improve social, economic and environmental sustainability in diverse spheres of Canadian life, but who may not currently see sport as a potential means of advancing these efforts. These include:

 <p><b>School boards, school administrators, educators and parents concerned with:</b></p>	 <p><b>Municipal and regional government representatives and officials concerned with:</b></p>	 <p><b>Provincial and territorial government representatives and officials concerned with:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the quality of education;</li> <li>• making schools healthier;</li> <li>• reducing drop-out rates;</li> <li>• promoting academic achievement; and</li> <li>• fostering healthy child and youth development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing recreation opportunities;</li> <li>• protecting public health;</li> <li>• strengthening community development and neighbourhood renewal efforts;</li> <li>• accelerating economic development and investment attraction;</li> <li>• improving the social inclusion and integration of newcomers;</li> <li>• encouraging healthy child and youth development;</li> <li>• preventing youth crime and gang involvement; and</li> <li>• building environmental sustainability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promoting health, preventing and managing disease, preventing and managing obesity, and reducing health care costs;</li> <li>• strengthening education, reducing school drop-out rates and increasing academic achievement levels;</li> <li>• eliminating barriers to the full social and economic inclusion of women, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, people with disabilities and other equity-deserving groups;</li> <li>• fostering healthy youth development;</li> <li>• building youth employment skills;</li> <li>• preventing youth crime and gang involvement; and</li> <li>• promoting environmental sustainability.</li> </ul>

The purpose of this report is to enable communities, policy makers, and business leaders to see the tremendous potential that lies within our community sport system, and to foster a shift in culture through a values-based approach guided by the True Sport Principles that will maximize this potential for all Canadians.

- Federal government representatives and officials concerned with:
  - public health, preventing and managing obesity, and helping provinces to reduce health care costs;
  - fostering civic engagement, building social capital and fostering national unity;
  - supporting community efforts to prevent crime and reduce youth involvement in gangs;
  - strengthening Indigenous community development and reducing rates of teen deaths by suicide in Indigenous communities; and
  - promoting regional economic development and investment attraction.
- Business leaders seeking effective ways to:
  - improve the productivity of their workplaces;
  - achieve philanthropic impact;
  - involve their employees in the community; and
  - make a positive contribution to Canada and to the communities where they work.

- Community organizations, staff and volunteers working to:
  - make their communities healthier;
  - provide children and youth with a good start in life and positive development opportunities;
  - promote greater social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups;
  - strengthen neighbourhoods and local economies; and
  - improve environmental sustainability and quality of life in their communities.
- Community sport athletes, volunteers, professionals and advocates seeking to:
  - build community and public support for community sport infrastructure, programs and participation.

## Research Methodology

This report is based on a search of primarily Canadian literature encompassing primary research published in peer-reviewed journals, Canadian public opinion research commissioned by the CCES, Statistics Canada data on community sport in Canada, and secondary research in the form of literature reviews and other research syntheses undertaken by governments, inter-governmental working groups, and non-governmental and sport organizations.

## Section 2

# Community Sport in Canada

### Defining Community Sport

“Sport” refers to an organized activity involving two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition. It involves formal rules, requires specialized skills and strategies, and includes training or coaching. Community sport, or organized sport, is led and supported by community volunteers and institutions, and is found across the country in communities of all kinds.



Community sport is not a private individual pursuit, nor is it undertaken for profit. Participation — playing, coaching, organizing, or advocating — is a highly social process and involves a high degree of volunteerism. Broadly inclusive participation and this elevated level of civic engagement are the distinguishing features which, together, enable community sport to deliver community benefits that individual physical activity and for-profit sport cannot. More particularly, these are the primary attributes that make community sport such an effective generator of social capital and platform for social inclusion.

Competition lies at the heart of all sport, and community sport is no different in this respect. High-performance athletes (amateur and professional) are an integral part of the community sport continuum because communities develop, support, identify with, and cherish their champions. In turn, they inspire us with their achievements, unite us, and often embody our highest ideals. Communities support high-performance sport because of what these champions do for communities.

Community sport is present in virtually every community in Canada and is largely supported by communities themselves.

While few athletes enter the realm of high-performance sport, good community sport embraces excellence on the basis that excellence, fairness, fun and inclusion are all mutually reinforcing values that help ensure accessible, enjoyable and challenging sport opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and skill levels.

## Sport Participation in Canada

In 2016, over 8 million Canadians aged 15 years or older participated in sport (26.7% of Canadian adults). This number is an increase from 2010, marking a major turning point in sport participation; the rate of participation had previously declined from 1992 to 2010. While more men participated in sport than did women in 2016, the overall increase

in participation was largely driven by an increase in women's participation in sport: 16.4% of women participated in sport in 2010 while 19.7% participated in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Rates of participation for males decreased by 1.4 percentage points between 2010 and 2016, from 35.3 to 33.9%.<sup>2</sup> This change was driven by a significant decrease in sport participation in men aged 15–24 (a decrease of 11.3% between 2010 and 2016).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to participating in community sport as athletes, over 5.7 million Canadian adults were spectators at amateur sporting events (38.5%), 7.4% served as administrators, 4.9% coached amateur athletes, and 2.1% acted as referees.<sup>4</sup> For spectators, coaches and administrators, this represented an increase from the 2005 figures (spectators decreased slightly [1% decline] from 2010 to 2016; the others stayed the same). While the number of women coaches has increased, as of 2016 there was still a significant gender disparity in amateur sport coaching, with twice as many men than women participating in coaching activities (6.5% and 3.3% respectively). Interestingly, this disparity seems to be driven by older age categories: more women coaches than men coaches were 15- to 24-years of age, while the numbers reversed for the 25 to 54 age group.<sup>5</sup>

For both sport participation and coaching, participation rates are higher for those from higher family income brackets and those with higher levels of education.<sup>6</sup> Both women and men with a university degree were 1.6 times more likely to regularly participate in sport than those with some secondary education or less. In 2016, 1 in 4 people with a postsecondary diploma or some university participated in amateur sport as a coach; however, this breaks down to 44% of men and only 14.6% of women.<sup>7</sup> Canadians from families that make over \$125,000 annually were more than 1.6 times more likely to attend amateur sport as spectators than those who made less than \$25,000 annually in 2016. Similarly 44% of men and 26.6% of women



**Community sport** is present in virtually every community in Canada and is largely supported by communities themselves.





Over **8 million Canadians** aged 15 years or older **participated in sport.**

from households that reported annual earnings of \$125,000 or more participated in sport, versus only 23.6% of men and 12.6% of women from households that reported earning \$25–49,000 annually in 2016.<sup>8</sup>

There are differences in community sport participation across racial and cultural groups. In 2016, the rates of participation for Indigenous adults were comparable to the national rate. Interestingly, Indigenous women were slightly *more* likely to participate in sport than non-Indigenous women (23.6% and 21.6%, respectively). By contrast, Indigenous men participated in sport at a lower rate than non-Indigenous men (28.4% and 35.7% respectively).<sup>9</sup> Adults who identified as visible minorities participated in sport at a slightly lower rate (25.2%) than the national average (26.7%) in 2016. Unlike Indigenous populations, women who identified as visible minorities had a significantly lower participation rate than the national rate for women (12.7% and 19.7% respectively), while men who identified as visible minorities participated in sport more than the national average for men (36.8% and 33.9% respectively).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, established immigrants had lower participation rates in sport than newly immigrated adults did. However, between 2010 and 2016, the rate of sport participation for recent and very recent adult immigrants decreased by 4.3 percentage points, to 24.7%.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, children's participation in organized sport in Canada has increased from 2005 to 2016.<sup>12</sup> In the 2014–2016 CANPLAY study, 77% of Canadian children aged 5–19 participated in organized physical activity and sport. Rates of participation in sport were the same for girls and boys, but participation decreased with age: 70% of teens aged 13–19 reported participating in sport, compared with 83% of youth aged 5–12. Children of parents with higher education levels and higher household incomes were significantly more likely to participate in sport than their peers from lower-income households.<sup>13</sup> Another factor that impacted children's participation in sport included whether or not their parents themselves were involved in sport. Children (aged

5 to 14) with at least one parent involved in sport as a participant or administrator were much more likely to participate in sport (57.2%) than those with no parental involvement (39.4%); these numbers are similar to those reported in 2005. Children from two-parent households are more likely to participate in sport than those from single-parent households, particularly if their parent(s) are active in sport themselves.<sup>14</sup>

## The Sport We Want

The exceptional level of volunteerism and community support for sport is a testament to the high value that Canadians place on sport. Canadians also place a high financial value on sport: In 2018, 84% of Canadians believed that it was somewhat or very important that the federal government continue funding community-level sport.<sup>15</sup> And Canadians understand the fundamental power of sport in their own lives: in a 2018 survey of over 2,000 Canadians, 84% agreed that participation in community-level sport can instill character in youth, 91% think that it can contribute to good health, and 82% believe it can strengthen our communities.<sup>16</sup>

All sports are characterized by a tension between the need for fairness — to be equitable and inclusive — and the desire to win. With the rise of professional sport as global mass entertainment, community sport is increasingly being pulled toward the values of professional sport, characterized by high costs and an emphasis on winning at all costs. Over 40% of parents worry that professional sport does not reflect the True Sport Principles, and over 80% are at least moderately concerned about the negative influence of professional sport on community-level sport.<sup>17</sup> The confusion around sport as commercial entertainment (the professional sport we watch on television) and community sport (the sport we play) can at times undermine the fundamental principles of inclusion and good sportsmanship and, with them, the benefits that sport produces in communities. This

is because the full value of community sport is only realized when sport is conducted in a certain way — when there is a place for everyone to play, when every participant has the opportunity to acquire new skills and improve their game, when winning is not possible without equitable and inclusive participation, and when the inherent joy of the game remains integral to the experience of the participants.

Good sport reinforces the importance of commitment, honest effort, ethical play and hard work in the pursuit of excellence. Winning achieved through other means is not a measure of sporting excellence. Canadians know the value of honest effort: 82% of Canadians believe that it's not okay to cheat, even if you know your opponent is cheating.<sup>18</sup> Through sport, we experience exhilaration and joy, the profound satisfaction that accompanies achievement, and a shared spirit of pride in our athletes and sports teams. These emotions are felt every day in communities as individuals and teams of all ages test themselves and their competitors, and strive to realize their — and our — aspirations in the shared pursuit of the promise and potential of sport.

This is the sport Canadians want. Of those surveyed, 82% of Canadians believe that community-level sport can contribute to strengthening our communities, and when asked about the importance of the True Sport Principles in community sport, “Respect Others” has consistently been rated the most important principle since 2016 (67% in 2018).<sup>19</sup> However, Canadians are concerned that community sport is not always reflecting these principles.

Fewer than 1 in 5 Canadians think that community sport very effectively enacts the True Sport Principles, and only 14% of Canadians think that community-level sport in their community is doing an excellent job at delivering a positive sport experience.<sup>20</sup> Two of the top-ranked concerns about community-level sport are poor parental behaviour and harassment, bullying



**84%** agreed that participation in community-level sport can **instill character in youth.**



**91%** think that it can **contribute to good health.**



**82%** believe it can **strengthen our communities.**

or other abuse. Furthermore, Canadians are concerned that not all community members have the same access to sport: half of respondents in a 2018 survey indicated concern about lack of access for some people, and the top-mentioned concern with respect to community-level sport was the cost of participation.<sup>21</sup>

These views point to a continued gap between the positive benefits Canadians believe sport can provide for their children and their communities and what they are actually experiencing. The sections that follow set out the broad spectrum of public benefits that are available to Canadians if we apply ourselves deliberately to the task of closing this gap by building a comprehensive, accessible and inclusive community sport system that delivers the sport we truly want.

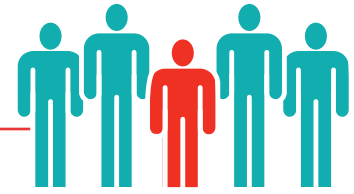
## Section 3

# Improving Health and Well-Being

Good health is fundamental to the ability of individuals to enjoy well-being and to realize their full human potential. It is also a crucially important economic asset. In youth, poor health is associated with challenges to learning and academic achievement as well as poor health in adulthood. Poor adult health impedes people's ability to work and earn a living for themselves and their families. It also drives up public health care costs and reduces economic productivity — both challenges for Canada in the context of its aging population and labour force.



Among Canadian adults, **54.6% are physically active**, but fewer than **1 in 5 meet the current Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines**.



## Increasing the Number of Active Canadians

Physical activity is critical to many aspects of health, including maintaining healthy body composition, preventing chronic disease, fostering good mental health and well-being, and promoting healthy aging. Conversely, physical inactivity is the fourth leading global risk factor for premature death.<sup>22</sup> Globally, physically inactive adults have a 20% to 30% increased risk of death compared to people who are sufficiently active.<sup>23</sup> Studies have shown that increased physical activity levels, particularly high-volume and high-intensity activities, are associated with reduced premature mortality; this is true even for those with chronic health conditions.<sup>24</sup> The burden of physical inactivity is not just an individual concern: as of 2012, physical inactivity was producing an economic burden of about \$10 billion per year in Canada.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the importance of physical activity, 63% of Canadian adults are unaware of Canada's physical activity guidelines.<sup>26</sup> Among Canadian adults, 54.6% are physically active,<sup>27</sup> but fewer than 1 in 5 meet the current Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines, which recommend a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week, accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more.<sup>28</sup> These figures have remained roughly the same since 2007.<sup>29</sup>

Sport is a fun and rewarding way to engage more Canadians in moderate to vigorous physical activity on a regular basis. Canadians are aware of this benefit: in 2016, Canadians ranked health and fitness as the second most important benefit to sport participation (69.2%).<sup>30</sup> When asked to rank their own physical health, 64.4% of Canadians who participated in sport perceived themselves to be in excellent or very good health, compared to only 46.5% of those who did not participate in sport. This trend was seen in

self-reported mental health status as well: 70.3% of sport participants perceived themselves as being in excellent or very good mental health, compared to only 59.9% of non-participants.<sup>31</sup>

## Reducing the Burden of Chronic Disease

Physical activity plays a critical role in the prevention and management of many chronic and non-communicable diseases that rank among the leading causes of death and disability in Canada and account for a large portion of our health care spending.<sup>32</sup>

- Cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada, responsible for nearly 1 in every 3 deaths.<sup>33</sup> As of 2013, approximately 3.5% of cancer diagnoses in Canada were attributable to physical inactivity; this relationship was particularly strong for women (5.3% vs 1.9% in men).<sup>34</sup>
- Cardiovascular diseases are the second leading cause of death in Canada.<sup>35</sup> Frequent physical activity has been repeatedly shown to reduce both the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, as well as the likelihood of dying from a cardiovascular event.<sup>36</sup> In fact, improving fitness levels has been shown to reverse elevated cardiovascular mortality rates associated with high Body Mass Index (BMI).<sup>37</sup>
- Diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in Canada.<sup>38</sup> Individuals with insulin-dependent and non-insulin-dependent diabetes have been shown to have more stable blood sugar levels after even a single session of low-intensity physical activity.<sup>39</sup> Regular exercise can delay or prevent the development of type 2 diabetes<sup>40</sup>, and may even reduce the number of hospital admissions for people with type 2 diabetes.<sup>41</sup>



- As of 2009, over 1.5 million Canadians aged 40 and over suffered from osteoporosis (10%).<sup>42</sup> Osteoporosis has been described as “a pediatric disease with geriatric consequences,” as the critical period for strong bone development occurs during the ages of 16–25 years.<sup>43</sup> Participating in sport as a youth improves bone development to carry one throughout adulthood. Older adults who participate in physical activity, particularly resistance exercises, can also limit bone density loss and, in some cases, build bone mass.<sup>44</sup>

## Enhancing Mental Health

Mental illness is estimated to affect 1 in 5 Canadians.<sup>45</sup> Canadian youth are particularly affected: by the time Canadians turn 40, half have or have had a mental illness.<sup>46</sup> Between 2000 and 2016, the proportion of Canadians under 19 years of age using mental health services increased an average of 2.6% per year.<sup>47</sup> Some Canadians, including LGBTQ+ Canadians, Indigenous peoples, Black Canadians<sup>48</sup>, individuals from the lowest-income households<sup>49</sup> and those with long-term chronic health conditions<sup>50</sup>, are at even higher risk of experiencing mental illness. As of 2017, over 2 million Canadians over the age of 15 had a mental health-related disability (7.2%), the most common of which are anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and extreme stress.<sup>51</sup> The economic burden of mental illness in Canada is estimated to be about \$51 billion per year, with expectations that this will continue to increase over the next 20 years.<sup>52</sup>

Participation in any physical activity, from domestic chores to walking to playing sport, has been shown to lower psychological distress.<sup>53</sup> In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression.<sup>54</sup>

Sport, as distinct from individual physical activity, also offers important opportunities for social relationships, friendship, and support that contribute in a significant and positive way to emotional health. When asked to assess their own mental health, over 70% of sport participants indicated that they were in excellent or very good mental health, compared to less than 60% of non-participants<sup>55</sup> Club-based and team-based sport participation, in particular, has been associated with better psychological and social health outcomes for adults.<sup>56</sup>

## Promoting Healthy Aging

As of 2016, the number of Canadian seniors has exceeded the number of children under 14 years of age.<sup>57</sup> While sport participation rates tend to decline with age, 17.8% of all Canadians over 55 still actively participate in sport.<sup>58</sup> This indicates only a small increase since 2010, while the proportion of the Canadian population aged 65 and over has increased substantially during the same time period.<sup>59</sup>



When asked to assess their own mental health, over **70%** of sport participants indicated that **they were in excellent or very good mental health**, compared to **less than 60%** of non-participants.



As of 2012, **physical inactivity was costing** Canadians approximately **\$10 billion** in combined direct and indirect costs. Just a 1% relative reduction in physical inactivity would save an estimated \$20.3 billion over 20 years.

Of Canadians 65 years or older, 73% suffer from one of the top 10 most common chronic illnesses, many of which can be prevented or ameliorated through physical activity.<sup>60</sup> For example, Alzheimer's is the eighth leading cause of death in Canada, the risk of which increases with age.<sup>61</sup> We know that physical activity helps with Alzheimer's prevention, and is an effective intervention for improving cognitive function.<sup>62</sup> However, over 60% of seniors do not meet physical activity health guidelines.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to helping prevent the onset of chronic disease, physical activity helps to improve strength, balance and coordination as people age, reducing the risk of falls and injuries, improving overall functioning and quality of life, and enabling individuals to remain independent longer.<sup>64,65</sup> Sport participation also provides an important source of social connection for older Canadians who are at greater risk of social isolation once they retire from the labour force.<sup>66</sup>

## Reducing Health Care Costs

Sport's ability to engage more people in a physically active lifestyle has other important economic benefits. As of 2012, physical inactivity was costing Canadians approximately \$10 billion in combined direct and indirect costs.<sup>67</sup> Just a 1% relative reduction in physical inactivity would save an estimated \$20.3 billion over 20 years.<sup>68</sup>

Reducing health care costs associated with aging should be a priority, particularly as the proportion of Canadians over 65 years of age is increasing. We know that physical activity can be protective for many conditions impacting older adults. For example, in 2016 the total financial burden of osteoporosis in Canada was estimated at \$4.6 billion, a value double earlier (2008) estimates.<sup>69</sup> Instituting low-cost prevention and treatment measures including the promotion of sport and physical activity could significantly reduce these national health care costs.



## Section 4

# Putting Children and Youth on a Positive Life Course

Canadians place great value on what sport can do for children. In addition to the physical health benefits, physical activity in children has been associated with cognitive development and brain health, academic achievement, self-esteem, and social and emotional functioning.<sup>70</sup> However, fewer than 1 in 5 Canadian children and youth meet all three recommendations within the Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.<sup>71</sup> This includes 15% of 5- to 17-year-olds and 10% of students in grades 6 to 10.<sup>72</sup>



Making sport **accessible and inclusive** for all children and youth should be a **Canadian priority**.



Between 2014 and 2016 more than three quarters of Canadian children (5–19 years) participated in organized physical activity and sport.<sup>73</sup> More and more, Canadian adults see the value of children participating in sport: nearly 90% of Canadians are somewhat or very confident that community-level sport instills character in Canadian youth by teaching them values and positive life lessons; this is an increase from 2013.<sup>74</sup>

Introducing children and youth to a wide range of age-appropriate organized sports promotes physical, social and cognitive development opportunities.<sup>75</sup> International research shows that, over and above family income and other societal barriers, sport can contribute to giving children from toddlers to teenagers a healthy start in life, promoting social and physical development, and supporting personal and academic growth.<sup>76, 77, 78, 79, 80</sup> However, both in-school and out-of-school participation in sport is disproportionately available to youth from higher-income families; a difference that isn't seen in many non-sport extracurricular activities.<sup>81</sup> Making sport accessible and inclusive for all children and youth should be a Canadian priority.

## Structured Play, Organized Sport and Early Childhood Development

Sport can begin making a contribution early in the lives of children. Play is one of the primary ways that young children explore and experience the world and develop their physical, cognitive, and social-emotional capacities. While competition should be avoided before age 5, sport can be used to effectively introduce fundamental skills like running, throwing and catching, and to provide opportunities for exploration, experimentation and fun.<sup>82</sup>

The primary determinants of whether children and youth will have a positive or negative experience are the adults involved — parents, coaches, officials and administrators — and the quality of coaching and mentoring.

While much work has been done examining the relationship between physical activity and health for children aged 5 and older, it wasn't until recently that recommendations based on research in this area were released for the early childhood period (age 0–5).<sup>83</sup> The first five years of life are critical for physical, social and cognitive development; patterns established during early childhood can have a life-long influence.<sup>84</sup> International studies from 36 countries have shown the importance of



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physical activity on improved motor development, cognitive development, psychosocial health, and cardiometabolic health in children under 4 years old.<sup>85</sup>

For example, research has shown that parents are encouraged to engage with their children from birth, including a minimum of 30 minutes a day of “tummy time” (play in a prone position) to encourage muscle development in the first few months of life. By their first birthday, children should be engaging in physical play a minimum of 180 minutes per day.<sup>86</sup>

While most infants are hitting their activity targets, by the time they are in preschool only 62% of children meet the recommended amount of physical activity per day.<sup>87, 88</sup> When it comes to structured play and activities, fewer than half of preschool-aged children participate in organized lessons and sport (46%, aged 3–4years).<sup>89, 90</sup> While the concepts required for competitive sport are too advanced for very young children,<sup>91</sup> new research shows that sport and organized physical activity can contribute to psychosocial and behavioural development in children under 5. A review of nine studies of preschool-aged children found positive associations between participation in sport and organized physical activity and the development of: social skills, including successfully building relationships, engaging with others, and following pro-social conventions; psychological outcomes related to increased positive behaviours and fewer emotional problems and conduct issues;

and enhanced cognitive-intellectual developmental outcomes related to mathematical and linguistic skills.<sup>92</sup> Taken together, these studies suggest that providing children under 5 with the opportunity to engage in organized sport and physical activity delivers substantial developmental benefits.

It is crucial that families and childcare facilities be given the supports they need to ensure that children are engaging in age-appropriate physical activity.<sup>93</sup> Involving parents or caregivers in the activities can help them learn new ways to stimulate the child and strengthen the bond between them. While all children would benefit from more opportunities to be physically active, children living in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to lack appropriate stimulation and play opportunities that enable them to benefit from these developmental windows. Both structured and unstructured, self-directed play provides young children with opportunities for physical, social and cognitive development.<sup>94, 95, 96</sup>

## Building Physical Capacity and Motor Skills

Early- to mid-childhood marks a point of substantial motor development. Between the ages of 2 and 6 years, children develop what are known as fundamental movement skills (FMS): skills like catching, throwing, jumping, sliding, running and kicking.<sup>97</sup> The development of these skills is associated with cognitive, social and physical development.<sup>98</sup> Motor skill development in early childhood has been shown to moderate the drop in physical activity we often see between the ages of 6 and 10.<sup>99</sup>

Unlike gross-motor development in infancy, FMS are not acquired naturally but are gained through motor experiences.<sup>100, 101</sup> A small Canadian study recently showed that involvement in a community-based organized sport program was particularly beneficial to FMS development in a cohort of children aged 3–6 years.<sup>102</sup> Involvement in organized sport has also been shown to be beneficial for motor performance in older children (6–12 years).<sup>103</sup> This work suggests that providing accessible opportunities for participation in community sport, starting with preschool- and kindergarten-aged children, can have long-term benefits for physical development.

Middle childhood also marks a key transition in sport involvement: children in this age group tend to either drop out of sport or begin to specialize in specific sports.<sup>104</sup> However, while context-specific motor skills begin to develop around age 7, sport specialization at this young age can be detrimental to physical development.<sup>105</sup> Sport sampling provides the opportunity to develop a wide range of essential FMS, thereby opening up a range of different sporting activities throughout their life.<sup>106</sup> It is important to continue to provide a range of sporting options to children in middle childhood so as to both increase retention of children this age in sport and to encourage broad participation across a number of activities.

## Keeping Children and Youth Active and Healthy

As with adults, the benefits of physical activity for the health of children and youth are substantial. In a systematic review of over 160 studies measuring physical activity and health in kids aged 5–17, physical activity was positively associated with physical, psychological and cognitive health measures.<sup>107</sup> This relationship was particularly strong for moderate-to-vigorous levels of physical activity, though low-intensity physical activity was favourably associated with cardiometabolic biomarkers (e.g., blood pressure, cholesterol, and insulin sensitivity).<sup>108</sup> Both young children and adolescents who participate in organized sport are more likely to hit the recommended moderate-to-vigorous activity levels targets for their ages.<sup>109, 110</sup>

Bone health is a particularly important health indicator in youth, as the bulk of bone mass accumulation develops before the age of 25.<sup>111</sup> Poor bone health in childhood and young adulthood contributes to osteoporosis in adulthood, a disease that impacts 1 in 10 Canadian adults.<sup>112</sup> Participation in physical activity in childhood is associated with better bone health in a number of measures.<sup>113</sup>

Canadian children continue to struggle with their body composition. In 2019 nearly 1 in 4 youth aged 12–17 self-reported as overweight or obese<sup>114</sup>, and over 30% of toddlers aged 2–5 years were considered at risk of being overweight or obese in 2015.<sup>115</sup> Childhood obesity has been linked to both physical and mental health concerns, as well as long-term adult health outcomes.<sup>116, 117, 118</sup> Physical inactivity is one cause of obesity in children<sup>119</sup>. Providing youth with community sport opportunities would increase engagement in moderate-to-vigorous levels of physical activity on a regular basis, thereby contributing to reduced levels of body fat in children and teens.<sup>120</sup>



Teens who participate in team sports specifically are **less likely** to engage in high-risk health behaviours like **substance abuse** and **risky sexual activities**.

Physical activity and sport participation also support mental health for children and youth. One in five Canadians aged 5 to 24 have a mental health disorder; this proportion has remained stable for more than a decade.<sup>121</sup> While rates of hospitalization for youth in this age group has decreased overall, hospitalization for mental health has increased over the past 10 years.<sup>122</sup> Participation in sport helps minimize depressive symptoms in children and youth and plays a role in managing feelings of anxiety.<sup>123</sup> Young people participating in sport demonstrate lower rates of contemplating suicide.<sup>124, 125</sup> Over time, long-term participation in physical activity is thought to help regulate neurotransmitter release, thereby improving emotional and mental health throughout their lifetime.<sup>126</sup> Regular physical activity has also been related to other measures of brain health in children and youth, including increased blood flow and increased neuroplasticity, promoting the development of new pathways in the brain and supporting learning and development.<sup>127</sup> While regular physical activity can occur outside of sport, engagement in sport offers the additional benefit of social connectedness which is so important to those experiencing mental health challenges.

In spite of these benefits, there has been little improvement in the physical fitness levels of children and youth over the past decade.<sup>128</sup> Participation in organized sport during childhood is associated with an increased likelihood of meeting physical activity recommendations, and more time engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, which has been shown to have the largest positive impacts on health.<sup>129</sup> This suggests that further interventions, such as expanding opportunities for kids to engage in sport, are necessary. Indigenous children, children from low-income homes, and households with lower educational attainment are at higher risk of childhood obesity,<sup>130</sup> and sport participation is lower

for children from these backgrounds.<sup>131</sup> As such, it is imperative that initiatives to make sport accessible to children are focused on children from these communities.

## Using Sport to Reduce Risky and Violent Behaviours

While physical activity is beneficial to all teens, those who participate in team sports specifically are less likely to engage in high-risk health behaviours like substance abuse and risky sexual activities.<sup>132, 133</sup> High-risk behaviours like cigarette smoking are lower for both boys and girls who play sports in high school compared to their peers.<sup>134</sup> Other substance use is also lower in teen athletes, including drugs like cocaine, heroin and hallucinogens.<sup>135, 136, 137</sup>

Alcohol is the number one substance used by youth aged 15–24, with nearly 60% of 15- to 19-year-olds reporting alcohol use in the past year.<sup>138</sup> The relationship between sport participation and alcohol consumption is more complex, with some studies reporting increased binge drinking but decreased alcohol consumption overall,<sup>139, 140</sup> and other studies reporting increased alcohol consumption for student-athletes.<sup>141</sup> Contact sports, in particular, appear to be associated with increased risk of alcohol and cannabis use. However, one key component appears to be coach involvement: participation in sport with a coach present has been associated with decreased substance use.<sup>142</sup> Importantly, participation in organized sport seems to reduce the risk of alcohol consumption that often comes with low parental monitoring and lone-parent families; this emphasizes the importance of making community sport programming accessible to adolescents who may be at increased risk of alcohol use due to their home environment.<sup>143</sup>

### Youth involved with community sport have described how their involvement promoted feelings of **connectedness and community**.

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Sport has also been used to prevent youth crime and gang involvement. Young people participating in sport demonstrate lower rates of anti-social behaviour, including carrying a weapon.<sup>144, 145</sup> Youth involved with community sport have described how their involvement promoted feelings of connectedness and community.<sup>146</sup> The similarities between athletic teams and potentially violent social groups like gangs include providing a sense of belonging, status and excitement.<sup>147</sup> Anti-social behaviour in youth and youth involvement in the criminal justice system is costly; investment in community-based sport for youths in the United Kingdom have shown benefits to the youth themselves and to costs to the government and taxpayers long-term.<sup>148</sup>

In Canada, Indigenous youth are at particular risk for gang involvement; 22% of all gang members in Canada identified as Indigenous as of 2010.<sup>149</sup> Some of the factors that put young people, and Indigenous youth in particular, at risk for gang involvement include low educational attainment, suicidality, involvement with alcohol and other substances, and social exclusion.<sup>150</sup> Many of these factors are known to be improved when youth participate in sport. However, in order to develop a successful community sport program, the program should be guided by community needs.<sup>151</sup> Urban Indigenous youth in Canada have voiced their need for community support to enhance sport participation. Given the many unique aspects of Indigenous identity in Canada, including movement between urban and reserve settings, it is crucial to include Indigenous community members in the development of community-based programming for Indigenous youth. This will help avoid the Euro-centric perspective

that is common in sport literature, and build a successful and sustainable community-sport option.<sup>152</sup> Using sport to provide positive role models and healthy social engagement, support mental wellness, and promote community and a sense of belonging could be highly impactful in curbing gang involvement for Indigenous youth in Canada.

### Adolescents involved in sport rated **higher levels of self-knowledge, emotional regulation and healthy self-image** than their peers.

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## Fostering Positive Youth Development

Sport has the capacity to provide positive experiences for children and youth. Measures of psychological well-being including self-esteem, fatalism, loneliness and social support consistently demonstrate the positive impacts of sport participation for youths.<sup>153</sup> Children and teens who participate in sport and physical activities have higher rates of self-esteem, self-concept and self-worth.<sup>154</sup> This is true both for typically developing individuals and for those with brain-based disabilities.<sup>155</sup>

Adolescents involved in sport rated higher levels of self-knowledge, emotional regulation and healthy self-image than their peers.<sup>156</sup> For shy children, sport participation provides a uniquely protective role, such that shy children participating in sport show increased social skills, and those who participate in sport over time show lower rates of anxiety relative to shy non-participants.<sup>157</sup>

Participation in team sport, in particular, is associated with higher social acceptance, body satisfaction and life satisfaction, and negatively associated with depression and social isolation later in life.<sup>158, 159</sup> Importantly, the positive effects of sport participation



increased with the number of sports in which youth participate<sup>160</sup>; this supports the idea of making many different sport opportunities available to children and youth rather than encouraging early specialization.

Parents whose kids participate in sport credit this participation for teaching their children a variety of life skills, including teamwork, dealing with adversity, perseverance and sportsmanship.<sup>161</sup> Being more physically active can help develop skills like communication, motivation and resilience, which are broadly applicable to other aspects of life.<sup>162, 163</sup>

In a study examining low-income parents' and their children's perceptions of the benefits associated with participation in youth sport, a wide range of benefits were reported. These included increased confidence and exploration by the child, emotional control, teamwork, social skills and making new friends.<sup>164</sup> However, parents reported crucial barriers to their children's continued participation, including financial and time barriers.<sup>165</sup> It's important that these barriers are addressed to ensure that children from all backgrounds are able to benefit from sport participation.

The **positive effects of sport participation** increased with the number of sports in which youth participate; this supports the idea of **making many different sport opportunities available to children and youth** rather than encouraging early specialization.

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## Providing Adult Role Models

The adults present in a child's life have a significant impact on the child's outlook, and this holds true for sport as well. Parents reported that positive relationships with coaches supported the personal and social development of their kids, and adolescents who had positive experiences with their coaches reported enhanced perceived social acceptance and reduced body dissatisfaction.<sup>166</sup>

Sport offers young people a means to gain and enhance a range of life skills that can improve their chances of finding employment, raise their level of income, and make them more optimistic and willing to volunteer in the community.

Children from low-income backgrounds who participated in sport reported having positive relationships with a coach, learning discipline, keeping busy, and having more academic success and enhanced body image.<sup>167</sup> The impact of a positive coaching relationship can have a significant impact for youth from low-income families, where financial pressures and the stress of poverty can lead to a reduction in parental monitoring and impact the parent-child relationship.<sup>168</sup>

Given the important role coaches play in the lives of children and youth, they need to be aware of the messages they communicate. Children can learn misinformed gender stereotypes through sport participation if coaches and parents show more passive interest in girls in sport, providing less support for girls and even using gendered language like "throwing like a girl."<sup>169</sup> This stereotyping can contribute to a dropoff in the participation of women and girls. It is critical that the adults running sport programming for children and youth are embodying the values we want to pass on to the next generation.

## Enhancing Academic Achievement

There is substantial evidence to support a link between participation in sport and academic achievement, educational attainment, and greater academic expectations and aspirations. High school sport participants are more likely than their non-participant peers to report plans to graduate from a four-year college and attend professional or graduate school, and self-report earning more A/A- grades.<sup>170</sup> As with other health indicators, teens who played multiple sports performed better academically.<sup>171</sup>

The **impact of a positive coaching relationship** can have a significant impact for youth from low-income families, where financial pressures and the stress of poverty can lead to a reduction in parental monitoring and impact the parent-child relationship.

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While many teens participate in sport within the school setting, the relationship between sport participation and academic achievement are seen for out-of-school sports as well<sup>172</sup>.

Participation in regular physical activity is positively related to child and youth academic achievement, including higher grades in subjects like math, reading, science and social studies.<sup>173</sup> Children and youth are better able to pay attention, focus and concentrate; a single bout of physical activity for children with attention deficit disorders and autism spectrum disorder leads to improved attention and focus.<sup>174</sup> Memory and recall are also positively associated with physical activity in children and youth.<sup>175</sup> These skills are related to overall academic performance and decreased school-related stress in children and youth.<sup>176</sup>

Studies that look specifically at low-income and minority children have found largely positive associations between physical activity and academic-related outcomes.<sup>177, 178</sup> One study of low-income elementary school students in the United States found that measures of gross motor skills are positively associated with on-task behaviour in the classroom.<sup>179</sup> However, this group of students are less likely than their more affluent peers to participate in sport given financial constraints.<sup>180</sup> The positive impact of both outside-school sport and in-school sport on adolescent educational attainment is particularly strong for girls; one study from the United States found that a 10% increase in girls' participation in sport led to a 1% increase in university applications.<sup>181</sup> Making community sport programming accessible could have a big impact on members of these communities.

## Understanding the Particular Benefits of Sport for Girls

In early and middle childhood, the same percentage of Canadian boys and girls report participating in sport weekly.<sup>182</sup> However this changes in later childhood and, while both boys and girls participate less as they age, the rate of girls participating in sport falls much faster.<sup>183</sup> By the time Canadian teens are 16–18 years old, only 38% of girls participate in sport weekly, compared to 56% of boys.<sup>184</sup> In fact, across adolescence 1 in 3 girls drops out of sport compared with 1 in 10 boys.<sup>185</sup>

Adolescent girls who participate in sport are less likely than non-athletic peers to participate in sexual activity and/or report a pregnancy.

While increased physical activity levels in teens are associated with decreased risky behaviours, the addition of team sport independent of activity levels is particularly valuable for adolescent girls, such that girls who participate in a physically demanding team sport are more protected from risky health behaviours than those who are part of a team but don't engage physically or those who are physically active independently.<sup>186</sup> For example, girls who participate in sport are less likely to become pregnant at an early age.<sup>187</sup>

Women and girls in Canada experience a higher rate of mood and anxiety disorders than men and boys do<sup>188</sup> and, as such, the protective effects of sport participation is particularly valuable to this group. Girls' participation in sport also enhances body image and self-esteem and is associated with higher overall quality of life compared with non-athletes.<sup>189</sup>

More and more research is finding a relationship between girls' participation in sport and their success as leaders. Participating in sport can help subvert negative gender stereotyping over talent and potential in science, technology, engineering and math fields.<sup>190</sup> When interviewed, 94% of executive-level women leaders and 74% of executive women reported feeling that their participation in sport accelerated their careers.<sup>191</sup> A study in the United States found that a 10% increase in girls' participation in sport led to a 1% increase in university applications and a 1–2 percentage point increase in participation in the labour workforce.<sup>192</sup>

**Girls' participation in sport** also enhances body image and self-esteem and is associated with **higher overall quality of life** compared with non-athletes.

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Providing girls with more **opportunities to participate in sport** leads to greater participation by women in fields previously dominated by men, particularly high-skill occupations.



Moreover, providing girls with more opportunities to participate in sport leads to greater participation by women in fields previously dominated by men, particularly high-skill occupations.<sup>193</sup> Participation in team sport can help girls develop skills like teamwork, confidence, leadership skills, communication, motivation and resilience — all of which are transferable to other industries.<sup>194</sup>

In spite of all of these benefits, why do we see decreased sport participation for girls and young women? The same financial and cultural barriers that impact sport participation in boys and young men are at play with girls and young women; for example, a study from the United States showed that the dropout rate for girls of colour in urban and rural centres is twice that of suburban white girls.<sup>195</sup> Beyond these structural deterrents, additional studies in the United States have found that almost one third of girls report that sometimes boys make fun of them or make them feel uncomfortable when they play sports.<sup>196</sup> As early as preschool, negative gender stereotyping can be reinforced by parents and coaches, such as paying less attention to players who are girls or using phrases like “throw like a girl.”<sup>197</sup> In fact, over three quarters of women leaders report that lack of exposure to women coaches as role models limits girls’ sport participation.<sup>198</sup>

The social landscape of sport needs to encourage participation by young women and girls. To enable changes that will support the participation of young women in sport, Canadian Women & Sport released guidelines including:<sup>199</sup>

1. Involving women and girls in the design, delivery and evaluation of sport programs;
2. Applying a gender lens to decisions such that the impact of policy and programming decisions are considered specifically as they apply to women and girls; and
3. Providing training to sport leaders to address the unique needs and experiences of women and girls.

Children and youth with brain-based disabilities, such as ADHD or autism spectrum disorder, **should be encouraged to participate in physical activity and sport**, as it is associated with better sleep, improved concentration and executive function, and feelings of happiness and mental wellness.



## Impacts of Sport on Children with Disabilities

Regular physical activity and participation in organized sport has additional benefits for children and youth with both physical and brain-based disabilities. However, children and youth with disabilities are often less active than their peers.<sup>200</sup> Fewer than 1% of Canadian children and youth aged 4–17 years with disabilities met all three recommendations within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.<sup>201</sup>

Participation in sport promotes inclusion and social well-being for children with disabilities,<sup>202</sup> including enhancing interaction and communication skills and improving social integration.<sup>203</sup> Children and youth with brain-based disabilities, such as ADHD or autism spectrum disorder, should be encouraged to participate in physical activity and sport, as it is associated with better sleep, improved concentration and executive function, and feelings of happiness and mental wellness.<sup>204</sup> A longitudinal study in Ireland found that participation in organized sport by age 5 was associated with a reduction in behavioural difficulties for boys with diagnosed developmental delays in infancy.<sup>205</sup>

Sport and physical activity can have positive impacts for children with physical disabilities. For example, including sport participation as part of therapeutic treatment programs for children with motor disabilities can improve motor function by helping to increase endurance and strength, as well as providing self-esteem and promoting inclusion and overall well-being.<sup>206, 207</sup> In recent studies of youth with disabilities and chronic medical conditions, those who participated in organized sport at least two times per week had higher scores on all health-related fitness measures, with no higher risk of injury or illness than non-participant peers.<sup>208, 209</sup> Out-of-school inclusive activity programming, which brings together typically developing children and those with disabilities, has benefits beyond increasing physical activity participation; these programs have been shown to have positive effects on development, social skills and psychosocial health.<sup>210</sup>



## Section 5

# Building Stronger and More Inclusive Communities

While we experience sport's benefits most immediately as individuals, sport also plays a major role in strengthening communities by bringing people together, building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of equity-deserving groups.



Sport can help **strengthen communities** by **building social capital** and **fostering greater inclusion** of equity-deserving groups.



There are many individual and community benefits to social participation within a community, including improved mental and physical health, higher academic achievement, and better employment prospects.<sup>211</sup> However, as of 2015, 38% of Canadians reported feeling like they didn't have a stake in their local community.<sup>212</sup> Sport and recreation groups are the most popular type of community group, with almost one third of Canadians being involved in a local sport and recreation group.<sup>213</sup> Canadians know that community sport is one way to strengthen feelings of belonging: 85% of Canadians agree that sport participation builds stronger communities.<sup>214</sup>

Participation in sporting events can act as a driver for social inclusion and integration, providing social opportunities for community members to develop friendships and networks.<sup>215</sup> Community sport offers valuable opportunities for developing new friendships, with 36.8% of women and 33.3% of men ranking 'making new friends and acquaintances' as a very important benefit gained from sport participation.<sup>216</sup> Nearly 1 in 4 Canadians feel a sense of community as fans of a sports team; this is higher than for those identifying with either a school or religious community.<sup>217</sup> For example, more than 90% of Canadians said that cheering on our athletes at the Vancouver Olympics in 2010 boosted their sense of national pride.<sup>218</sup> Sport participation can build community spirit, promote intercultural learning, and strengthen shared beliefs and values.<sup>219</sup>

Sport can help strengthen communities by building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of equity-deserving groups.

## Building Social Capital

Community sport has the potential to help bring individuals and communities together, create a sense of community, encourage active citizenship, and foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of security among community members. Together, these elements are the social capital of every community.

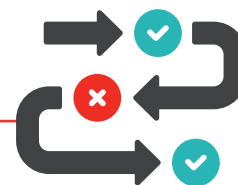
Involvement with community organizations, particularly volunteer experiences, are one of the key components to increasing social capital in a community. Participating in volunteer organizations provides human connections and enhances feelings of belonging and shared values. Among life-long volunteers, 65% report that their first experience volunteering was through sport and recreation.<sup>220</sup> In fact, as of 2012, volunteerism in sport and recreation accounted for 19% of total volunteer hours.<sup>221</sup>

Volunteer-run sport organizations provide a number of opportunities for social capital to develop, including:<sup>222</sup>

- Building new relationships;
- Having more contact with peers;
- Integrating immigrants;
- Fostering civic engagement; and
- Building trust.



Sport is being used successfully to **link newcomers** to key community services and supports.



Sport involvement has been found to be a particularly strong predictor of social connectedness, even more so than involvement in other community organizations.<sup>223</sup> Adolescent involvement in non-school team sport has been shown to increase civic engagement, including political voting and signing petitions.<sup>224</sup> Relationships and trust developed through participation in sport works to both strengthen existing social networks and develop new community connections.<sup>225</sup> Sport clubs in particular contribute to both the development and maintenance of relationships within groups of people with similar status (known as “bonding social capital”), and the creation of relationships between individuals of different social groups (e.g., different ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds; known as “bridging social capital”).<sup>226</sup>

Social capital is also related to the level of trust, shared values, and cooperative norms present in a community. For example, local children and adolescents who participate in sport clubs are more willing to help out friends, neighbours and other community members, including newcomers to the country.<sup>227</sup> By increasing social capital, local sport clubs have the ability to foster fair and inclusive cooperation through the development of norms like tolerance and non-discrimination. In this way, promoting

By **increasing social capital**, local sport clubs have the ability **to foster fair and inclusive cooperation** through the development of norms like tolerance and non-discrimination.

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community sport can lead to the development of more inclusive communities.

## Helping Newcomers Integrate More Quickly into Canadian Society

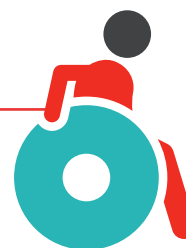
In 2019, permanent and non-permanent immigration was responsible for over 80% of Canada’s population growth.<sup>228</sup> Sport can be an important tool in integrating newcomers into their local communities by facilitating community building, socialization, English language acquisition, and fun!<sup>229</sup> However, there are important considerations around how to promote sport and recreation participation among immigrant and refugee community members.

Sport is being used successfully to link newcomers to key community services and supports.

Evidence shows that participation in physical activity can reduce depression, stress and anxiety for immigrants.<sup>230</sup> Newcomers to Canada have reported having more meaningful social interactions while playing and watching sports than they have in other settings, like in the workplace.<sup>231</sup> Of new Canadians, 87% agree that watching their children play sports makes them feel more connected to the community.<sup>232</sup> In addition to facilitating participation within typically Canadian social circles, providing sport and recreation opportunities for refugees and immigrants to participate with members of their homeland communities enables individuals to connect, acting as sources of guidance, comfort and empathy to newcomers.<sup>233</sup>



Sport provides opportunities for **people with disabilities** to build their **self-confidence and self-esteem**, enhance their social skills and networks, and become more motivated and independent.



However, immigrants and refugees face additional barriers to participation, including language barriers, lack of familiarity with the activities, lack of information on how to register, discrimination and alienation.<sup>234, 235</sup> Designing programs to be affordable, locally accessible, and with cultural customs in mind (e.g., offering girls- and women-only options, programming with flexible clothing options) would help promote community sport participation among Canadian newcomers.<sup>236, 237</sup>

Participation in community sport among youth and adolescents provides ample opportunity to engage with local youth. Participation in youth sport among new immigrants is positively associated with personal contact with local peers, leading to reports of more intercultural relationships between youths and stronger feelings of cultural integration.<sup>238</sup> Immigrant children who participate in sport clubs are more likely to report social acceptance and respect from their peers.<sup>239</sup>

## Fostering Greater Inclusion of People with Disabilities

People with disabilities also face many forms of social, economic and political exclusion. These may be intentional or unintentional. Even in the absence of negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, people without disabilities may underestimate the capacities of people with disabilities and feel unsure about how to accommodate and include them in day-to-day activities.

Sport provides opportunities for people with disabilities to build their self-confidence and self-esteem, enhance their social skills and networks, and become more motivated and independent.

The 2017 Canadians with Disabilities survey reported that an estimated 1 in 5 Canadians over the age of 15 has a disability, including 13% of youths (ages 15–24).<sup>240</sup> Over 40% of Canadians with a disability reported having a “more severe” or “severe” disability, which tends to be correlated with lower rates of employment and enrolment in school, and higher rates of poverty.<sup>241</sup> About 1 in 3 individuals aged 3–21 with severe developmental disabilities play team sports; however, while there has been progress made in offering sport and physical activity programs to small children with developmental disabilities, far fewer programs exist for adolescents and adults.<sup>242</sup> Adult women with a disability reported less participation in sport than their able-bodied peers (13% vs 20%).<sup>243</sup>

Individuals with disabilities have reported that their involvement in sport played a role in their development of self-confidence, self-worth and identity. Sport programming can also provide opportunities for developing social connections with peers both with and without disabilities.<sup>244, 245</sup> These opportunities for forming social networks benefit both individuals with disabilities as well as their caregivers: participation in sport has been shown to decrease feelings of isolation for both parties.<sup>246</sup> While information on program availability can be hard to find, participation in sport leagues both provides individuals with disabilities with role models and offers the opportunity to serve as role models themselves.<sup>247</sup>

Children with disabilities tend to be more sedentary than their typically-abled peers, including spending more time engaging in screen-based activities.<sup>248</sup> However, research about sport and physical activity in children living with chronic mental health conditions and disabilities shows largely positive outcomes, including increased acceptance, social functioning,

Working to **create awareness and promote inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals** within community sport by educating teachers and coaches, providing funding for program development, and providing a voice for community advocacy will make significant improvements in the lives of all Canadians.

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and quality of life, and decreased symptoms (e.g., lower vocal tic severity for physically active children with Tourette syndrome, and less arterial stiffness in active children with congenital heart disease).<sup>249</sup> Regular physical activity in children with brain-based (neurodevelopmental) disabilities have been associated with increased self-concept and self-worth, just as we see in neurotypical children and youth.<sup>250</sup> In fact, children and youth with brain-based disabilities seem to show even greater benefits in executive function as a result of physical activity than their active neurotypical peers.<sup>251</sup>

Parents of kids with disabilities are often unsure of what sport programming is available to their children, or whether or not there are inclusive options. This can serve as a barrier for sport participation in this community. Ensuring that children are involved in sport and physical activity is vital for developing a lifelong positive association with sport. Health care professionals should become familiar with community-based inclusive programming, including disability-specific sport organizations, so they can better advise parents.<sup>252</sup> Sport and recreation providers should also work with health care providers, parents, and advocates to provide specialized staff training, and ensure their programming is accessible and supportive to kids with all levels of abilities.<sup>253</sup> In order to do this, government officials must be willing to provide funding to support these community initiatives, as well as subsidies for families with children and youth with disabilities, to help decrease barriers to participation.<sup>254</sup>

## LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Representation

Despite recent efforts to increase participation by sexual minorities in sport, 81% of Canadians have witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport. Among a large international sample of sport participants, 82% witnessed homophobic or transphobic language in sport in the last six months, and 90% considered homophobia and transphobia to be a current problem in sport.<sup>255</sup> Similar findings have been demonstrated consistently across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union over the past five years.<sup>256</sup> The experiences of gay Canadians reflect these findings: 1 in 4 gay men did not play youth team sports themselves, with nearly half of these men reporting that negative experiences in school turned them off team sport participation.<sup>257</sup>

While sexual minority youths would benefit from the physical, psychological and social benefits of sport participation, implicit and explicit acts of homophobia are common across sport organizations and stand in the way of LGBTQ+ youth participation.<sup>258</sup> Of Canadians, 70% believe youth team sports are not welcoming or safe for gay, lesbian and bisexual people.<sup>259</sup> These beliefs are reflected in the participation rates: gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadian youth are still participating in sport at a lower rate than their heterosexual peers.<sup>260</sup> Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are less likely to participate in both formal sport (with a coach) and informal sport (without a coach) than their heterosexual peers.<sup>261</sup> In addition to serving as a barrier to participation for LGBTQ+-identifying youths, heterosexist language and other heteronormative assumptions serve to exclude families with LGBTQ+-identifying parents.<sup>262</sup> This isolates both the parents and their children from participating fully in the community.

These social and safety barriers to participation are having a significant negative impact on the LGBTQ+ community. Members of this community suffer from a variety of mental health concerns at a higher rate than other Canadians, but supportive friends, family and community can work to combat these issues.<sup>263</sup> Working to create awareness and promote inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals within community sport by educating teachers and coaches, providing

funding for program development, and providing a voice for community advocacy will make significant improvements in the lives of all Canadians.

## Renewing Indigenous Culture

In Canada, significant disparities exist between the social, economic and cultural opportunities available to Indigenous peoples and to Canadians on the whole. These disparities are reflected in data such as increased levels of obesity-related chronic disease, substance abuse and mental health concerns, unemployment, and urban poverty in Indigenous populations relative to non-Indigenous people across Canada.<sup>264, 265</sup> Sport offers particular benefits to Indigenous communities in terms of physical and mental health benefits, building cultural pride, social cohesion, self-esteem, and transferable skills among participants and volunteers.

Sport plays an important role in the cultural identity of Indigenous communities and has been intricately woven into the colonial history of Canadian-Indigenous relations.<sup>266</sup> In spite of the cultural significance of community sport, Indigenous populations show a slightly lower sport participation rate than the Canadian average, with 26.1% of Indigenous respondents indicating that they play sport (the Canadian national average is 26.7%).<sup>267</sup> When broken down further, we find that Indigenous women play sport at a slightly higher rate than non-Indigenous women (23.6% vs. 21.6%), while Indigenous men participate at a significantly lower rate than non-Indigenous men (28.4% vs. 35.7%). This may be in part due to the difference in the Euro-centric definition of sport that Canadians tend to use, which does not always include things like cultural activities (Indigenous dance and hunting) or traditional Indigenous games.<sup>268</sup> Many of these traditional activities were replaced with Euro-centric sports and games that were deemed “appropriate” during the long history of Canadian residential schools, a recent trauma which continues to impact Indigenous sport participation and identity to this day.<sup>269</sup>

Among Canadian youth, girls who self-identified as Indigenous reported the lowest participation in sport

(24%) relative to their Asian, White, South Asian and Black peers (32%–45%).<sup>270</sup> This data is particularly concerning when we remember that nearly half of the Indigenous population in Canada is composed of people aged 24 and younger.<sup>271</sup> Systemic barriers including disempowerment, lack of resources, geographic remoteness and safety concerns all contribute to the significantly lower rates of sport participation among Indigenous youth.<sup>272</sup> However, the data shows that sport provides Indigenous youth with positive development opportunities, including strengthening resiliency, incorporation of Indigenous values and traditions, cultural pride, promotion of culture and education, and improvements in physical and mental health.<sup>273, 274</sup>

Support for both reducing barriers to mainstream sport participation for Indigenous people, as well as financial and governmental support for Indigenous-specific sport opportunities like the Arctic Winter Games and the North American Indigenous Games, will contribute to increasing participation rates for Indigenous people. Steps towards meaningful inclusion include incorporating Indigenous values and traditions in the creation of culturally-specific programs.<sup>275</sup> As McHugh and colleagues found in their research into urban Canadian Indigenous youth and adults, “in order for sport programs to be successful, they need to be community-driven and community-based.”<sup>276</sup> Crucially, this must involve inclusion of Indigenous voices in the development of community sport programming.

**Sport offers particular benefits to Indigenous communities** in terms of physical and mental health benefits, building cultural pride, social cohesion, self-esteem, and transferable skills among participants and volunteers.

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**Self-identified “visible minorities”** in Canada reported participating in sport at a slightly lower rate than the rest of the Canadian population.

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## Experiences of Racialized Peoples

Racialization, or the ascription of “race” and “racial categories” to non-white bodies and the subsequent oppression as a result of those labels, has been a deep part of Canadian history that continues to impact our identity today.<sup>277</sup> While the specifics of which groups are considered racialized are ever-changing, there has been a consistent and systematic exclusion of Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian bodies from mainstream Canadian rhetoric. This includes both an implicit and explicit dismissal of the needs and experiences of individuals with racialized identities from within the sport community.<sup>278</sup>

Self-identified “visible minorities” in Canada reported participating in sport at a slightly lower rate than the rest of the Canadian population (25.2% vs 26.7%).<sup>279</sup> In particular, women who identified as visible minorities had a significantly lower participation rate than the rate for the total female population of Canada (12.7% vs 19.7%); this is likely a reflection of the intersectional oppression faced by members of this community.<sup>280</sup>

Recent interventions have begun to push back against the white colonial rhetoric that erases racialized groups from Canadian sport. Hijabi Ballers in Toronto provides an opportunity for Muslim women to play basketball in an inclusive and welcoming environment and explore their passion for sport.<sup>281</sup> Since its inception nearly 10 years ago, the program has grown and now offers bursaries for Muslim women to become certified coaches or referees,

providing opportunities for sport sector employment and a means to give back to their community.<sup>282</sup> The APNA Hockey program was founded in 2017, directed at developing hockey talent in the South Asian community.<sup>283</sup> Other ethnically specific competitions have existed in Canada for some time (e.g., the Asian Hockey Championship and the Maccabi National Jewish Hockey Tournament). But the APNA Hockey program seeks to provide something different to the members of its community by fostering new skills, providing South Asian mentorship, and connecting its members with national and international scouts and sport management personnel, with long-term goals to expand to other sports.<sup>284</sup> Providing community support for organizations like APNA Hockey and Black Girl Hockey Club,<sup>285</sup> as well as including the voices of organizers and members of these and similar groups in conversations on how to increase engagement by members of racialized communities in community sport, will be vital starting points from which to expand sport participation in these communities.

The intersection of multiple marginalized identities can result in an **amplification of barriers faced by any one identity on its own.**

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## Intersectionality

While each of these identities pose significant potential barriers to participation on their own, many individuals will find their identities crossing between more than one of these groups. The intersection of multiple marginalized identities can result in an amplification of barriers faced by any one identity on its own. This concept has been termed intersectionality and is defined by the Ontario Human Rights Commission as “intersectional

## Prioritizing research into intersectional identities and barriers to inclusion **should be a national priority.**

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oppression [that] arises out of the combination of various oppressions which, together, produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone ... [taking] into account the historical, social and political context and [recognizing] the unique experience of the individual based on the intersection of all relevant grounds.”<sup>286</sup>

Bisexual and trans people are overrepresented among low-income Canadians.<sup>287</sup> We know that members of both the LGBTQ+ community and low-income Canadians face barriers to participation in community sport; by considering the fact that some members of the LGBTQ+ community are also more likely to be part of a lower income bracket, we see the potential for an additive relationship between barriers faced by members of both communities.

Similarly, gender and disability are both identities that impact the experiences of sport participants. Girls and women who identify as disabled are more likely to report lack of confidence, injury and body image as barriers to sport participation relative to girls and women without a disability.<sup>288</sup> We know that body image and confidence are already potential barriers for women’s participation in sport, even before considering disability status.<sup>289</sup> Considering the duality of identity for women and girls with disabilities shows us the deeper barriers to participation by those who share membership in both communities.

While we know that those with intersectional identities face additional barriers to inclusion in community sport, there is still a dearth of data available to fully understand the experiences of these individuals. Prioritizing research into these questions should be a national priority.

Specific research questions could include:

- What are the positive and negative experiences of racialized women and girls in different sporting roles (e.g., athletes, parents, coaches, referees, administrators, spectators and/or sport journalists) and in different levels/forms of sport participation (e.g., recreation, exercise, dance, competition, high-performance, community-based) in Canada?<sup>290</sup>
- Understanding participation rates in disability sport by gender across levels of involvement (e.g., organizational, coaching, athletic) and across context (e.g., high-performance, recreational, school), from a Canadian perspective.<sup>291</sup>
- What are the experiences of girls, women, two-spirited and trans athletes/participants with anti-Indigenous racism and misogyny? What can be done to address anti-Indigenous racism and patriarchy in sport for Indigenous girls, women, two-spirited and trans individuals?<sup>292</sup>

These examples illustrate the many layers of complexity involved in an intersectional approach, and demonstrate the importance of considering how experiences with sport and sport participation are impacted by the many intersecting factors involved in an individual’s identity. It is crucial to consider these factors when designing interventions to increase the accessibility of community sport to members of these groups. For example, knowing that many people with disabilities also face financial barriers, it would be important to include financial subsidies and accessible public transit options when designing sport programming for Canadians with disabilities. Similarly, when designing facilities and programming with racialized groups in mind, including childcare options will ensure that caregivers in these communities will be able to take full advantage of the available programming. Failing to consider these intersecting factors will impede success of targeted program interventions for the most marginalized among us.



## Section 6

# Contributing to Canada's Economy

Sport plays a significant role in the economic and social life of communities by providing jobs, boosting tourism in large and small communities alike, contributing to neighbourhood economic renewal, and enhancing skills and productivity in the workplace.



According to Statistics Canada, the operating revenue of spectator sports, event promoters, artists and related industries rose 6.9% to \$10.5 billion in 2019.<sup>293</sup> Revenue from spectator sports accounted for the largest share of total operating revenue (36.4%), totalling \$3.8 billion, an 8.7% increase from 2018.<sup>294</sup> By the end of 2019, occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport employed over 200,000 full-time employees and over 120,000 part-time employees.<sup>295</sup> Household spending on recreation in 2019 totalled an average of \$4,624 nationally.<sup>296</sup>

## Enhancing Tourism Through Sport Travel and Events

Sport tourism makes a significant contribution to the Canadian economy. A 2018 report conducted by the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance and Statistics Canada reported that Canada maintained a historical high in the value of sport tourism, with \$6.8 billion in total spending.<sup>297</sup> This included \$4.4 billion in spending by domestic visitors as well as \$2.5 billion by international visitors.

Canada hosts over 250,000 sport events annually ranging from professional events to multi-sport amateur games to local tournaments, and all of these provide economic benefits in the form of visitor spending.

In recent years, Canada has been the host of multiple national and international tournaments, including the 2010 Winter Olympics (Vancouver, BC), the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup (hosted by multiple cities across the country), and the HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series in 2015 (Vancouver, BC).

In 2015, Toronto hosted the Pan American and Parapan American Games. The Games included 6,132 athletes competing in 364 events across 36 sports.<sup>298</sup> In addition to the revenue brought in by the games directly, including over 1 million tickets sold, Ontario invested in infrastructure necessary to support an event of this size. This included the Union Pearson Express (a direct rail line between Union Station and Toronto Pearson International Airport), and other transit options for connecting previously

disparate communities. Further, the games helped fund the completion of a 250-kilometre stretch of the Great Trail (formerly named the Trans Canada Trail), connecting Windsor to Ottawa and Fort Erie to North Bay.<sup>299</sup> The province also saw an economic boost in the hospitality industry, including a 260.3% increase in foreign tourist spending on entertainment in the city compared to the same time the previous year.<sup>300</sup> The surrounding cities that hosted large events also saw a significant spending bump, including Hamilton (where men's and women's soccer was hosted), Milton (where cycling was hosted), and Ajax (where baseball was featured).<sup>301</sup>

Canada hosts over **250,000 sport events annually** ranging from professional events to multi-sport amateur games to local tournaments, and all of these **provide economic benefits in the form of visitor spending.**

## Contributing to Local Development

In addition to the immediate impact of hosting international sporting events, the investment in sport and related infrastructure provides long-term benefits to both local and national communities. For example, Tennis Canada has used the revenues from both the Rogers Cup and Coupe Rogers to invest in development programs and facilities for junior athletes in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.<sup>302</sup> Over 328,000 fans attended the two tournaments in 2017, producing a surplus of \$22 million.<sup>303</sup> Local employment also benefited: 75% of the officials working the events were Canadian.<sup>304</sup> In 2018, 70 organizers and over 5,000 players were involved in Rogers Community Team Tennis, one of the initiatives that continues to be funded largely off revenues from the yearly tournaments.<sup>305</sup>



Community sport amenities help cities **attract and retain highly valued knowledge-workers** and the companies that seek to employ them.

Community sport amenities help cities attract and retain highly valued knowledge-workers and the companies that seek to employ them.

## Enhancing Workplace Skills and Productivity

Sport participation — and physical activity levels more broadly — have important implications for economic productivity. Employers place a high value on the transferable skills acquired by sport participants and volunteers because these skills improve workplace performance. Evidence indicates that sport participation in childhood has been linked to better educational and employment outcomes later in life, particularly for women and girls. Increased participation in school sport during childhood has been shown to lead to higher earnings and job quality.<sup>306, 307</sup>

Employers are increasingly turning to sport and physical activity as a means to improve productivity in their workplaces. Evidence suggests that being more physically active can help concentration, and participation in team sport contributes to the development of useful skills like teamwork and communication.<sup>308</sup>

Employees participating in sport are significantly **less likely to take sick leave** than their colleagues who don't participate.

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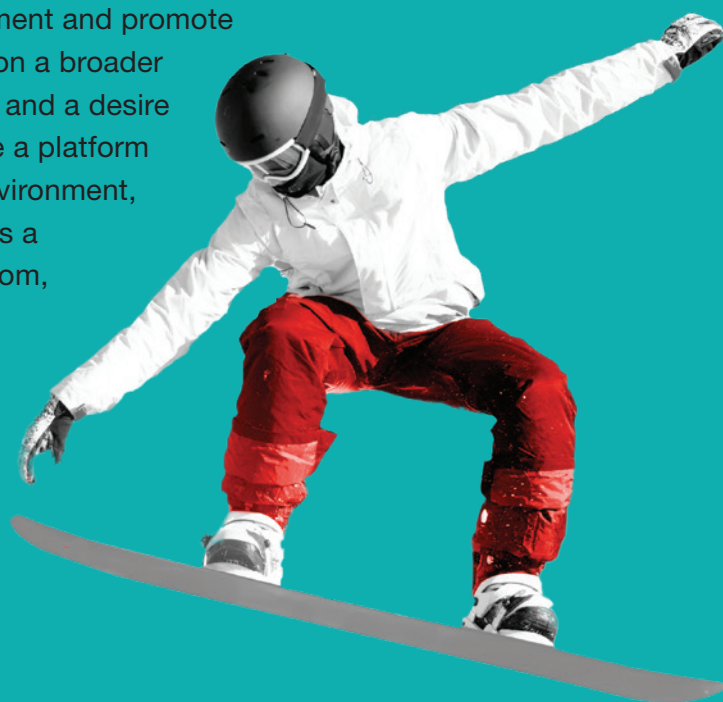
Employees participating in sport are significantly less likely to take sick leave than their colleagues who don't participate, and the sick leaves that they do take tend to be shorter; a difference of approximately 20 days over a four-year period.<sup>309</sup> These effects are largest for those participating in sedentary work. A 2013 report found that back pain and non-work-related mental health conditions are major contributors to both short- and long-term absences from work; both of these conditions are known to be prevented or alleviated through physical activity.<sup>310</sup> The financial savings associated with reducing employee absenteeism are significant: one manufacturer found that a 1 percentage point reduction in absenteeism rates over a three-year period produced an estimated gross cost savings of £11 million (approximately C\$18 million).<sup>311</sup>

Company policies to support employee fitness include flexible work hours, incentive plans for employees to join athletic/recreational clubs or work out individually, company sponsored recreational sport teams, and workplace facilities to accommodate active employees such as showers and bike racks.

## Section 7

# Promoting Environmental Sustainability

As interest in the economic benefits of sport has grown, so too has awareness of sport's potential to benefit the environment and promote greater sustainability — within sport and on a broader basis. Sport can instill appreciation for — and a desire to protect — the environment and provide a platform for social mobilization on behalf of the environment, including ensuring that sport at all levels is a net contributor to, rather than detractor from, environmental sustainability.





## Fostering Environmental Awareness and Stewardship

Because so much sport takes place outdoors, it has traditionally been closely associated with an appreciation of nature's beauty, as well as its challenges. Arising from this association is the knowledge that healthy sport requires a healthy ecosystem — clean air, clean water and clean earth. The significant efforts to improve air quality in Beijing, China in the lead-up to the 2008 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games is just one example of this necessary and close relationship between sport and environmental stewardship.

Many investments in community sport are investments in green space, with users often becoming advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and expansion.

Many investments in community sport are, in fact, investments in additional green space that improve the environment and quality of life in Canadian communities. Parks, playgrounds, playing fields, trails, beaches and other outdoor facilities provide Canadians with access to nature, improved air quality, and the space to pursue outdoor physical activity in clean and enjoyable surroundings. Sport club members and other recreational users of these spaces, in turn, often become advocates for their protection, proper maintenance and even expansion, even as those who pursue wilderness sports often become advocates for the protection and sustainable use of more remote environments.

Many investments in community sport are, in fact, investments in additional green space that **improve the environment and quality of life in Canadian communities.**

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## Providing a Platform for Social Mobilization

This relationship between sport and the environment has been formally recognized and is being actively promoted by a wide range of international sport and environment bodies such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Global Forum for Sports and Environment, Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the Global Sport Alliance.

In 1994, UNEP and the IOC signed a landmark agreement declaring environmental protection and sustainable development to be the third pillar of the Olympic Movement, together with sport and culture. This has translated into growing encouragement for cities hoping to be future Olympic hosts to prove the sustainability of their Olympic plans and proposals, unleashing bold innovations in the areas of sustainable sport facility development and operation, event management, and transportation. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games included low-carbon commitments.<sup>312</sup>

In 2015, international governments convened to determine the Sustainable Development Goals, and state parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) signed the Paris Climate Agreement. Both of these international efforts aim to catalyze action to combat climate change (mitigation), while promoting well-being (adaptation) by supporting actions and investments necessary for a sustainable low-carbon future.<sup>313</sup> In 2018, the UNFCCC, with the IOC, released a report entitled *Sport for Climate Action Framework*. This document was designed to outline a framework to support the sport sector in achieving the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels.<sup>314</sup>

The *Sport for Climate Action Framework* report outlines five principles:

1. Undertake systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility.

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2. Reduce overall climate impact.

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3. Educate for climate action.

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4. Promote sustainable and responsible consumption.

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5. Advocate for climate action through communication.

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The high profile of international sport events, like the Olympic and Paralympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, provides a **powerful platform for promoting environmental protection** because of the extraordinary audiences these events command and their global reach.

The *Sport for Climate Action Framework* stresses the potential of the sport sector to reduce its own footprint, no matter how big or small the individual sporting organization, and promotes the use of sport's significant platform and visibility to inspire participants, fans and suppliers to follow suit.<sup>315</sup> In 2019, the Canada Games Council became a signatory to the *Sport for Climate Action Framework*, making a commitment to strengthen its sustainability efforts and amplify the message of climate action.

The high profile of international sport events, like the Olympic and Paralympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, provides a powerful platform for promoting environmental protection because of the

extraordinary audiences these events command and their global reach. High-profile athletes, in turn, possess the same potential to reach large audiences with environmental sustainability messages. More importantly, their influence as role models is likely to ensure their messages have an impact on behaviour — particularly that of young people. In 2019, British sailor and two-time Olympic medallist Hannah Mills, with the support of the IOC, founded the Big Plastic Pledge to combat ocean plastic pollution through sport.<sup>316</sup> Other Olympians have used their platform to promote a variety of environmental and sustainability initiatives, including basketball champion Yao Ming's role as an ambassador for the WildAid conservation campaign and marathoner Eliud Kipchoge's advocacy for the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya.<sup>317</sup>

These athletes are giving a voice to the many athletes, volunteers and spectators who care for the places and habitats that afford them and their families well-being. This passion is reflected in the involvement of sport groups in local green space planning, as well as the establishment and protection of 'green belts' around cities, in order to ensure that future generations of urban and suburban residents can enjoy the recreational, aesthetic and health benefits that these natural, open spaces offer.

## Footprint of Community Sport

Sport participation has been promoted in recent years due to its significant social and health benefits. However, the environmental costs of sport participation have been largely overlooked.<sup>318</sup>

Amateur and community sport is often tightly linked with the local environment, but they can also have a substantial carbon footprint. Resource consumption such as heating and cooling athletic facilities, water usage to supply pools and fields, and ancillary services like construction, catering and energy use can all contribute considerably to climate change.<sup>319</sup> However, the single most significant carbon contributor for amateur and community sport is travel.<sup>320</sup>

Whether it's daily travel to and from practices, or commuting to large national and international competitions, sport participation and spectatorship often involves significant transportation costs. While nature

Small-scale local initiatives like facilitating a carpooling schedule to local events and practices, chartering buses to transport large groups of athletes and spectators to and from events, and providing secure storage for equipment and gear (thereby allowing participants to walk, bike or take transit), **can make a big difference in the overall carbon footprint of community sport.**

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sports like mountain biking, skiing and surfing are intimately tied to the local environment, individuals practicing nature sports contribute substantially to carbon emission levels, even more so than those practicing other team or individual sports.<sup>321</sup> Small-scale local initiatives like facilitating a carpooling schedule to local events and practices, chartering buses to transport large groups of athletes and spectators to and from events, and providing secure storage for equipment and gear (thereby allowing participants to walk, bike or take transit), can make a big difference in the overall carbon footprint of community sport.<sup>322</sup>

We can improve both the physical health of our communities as well as our ecological footprints with initiatives to promote active transportation, like installing bike racks at local fields and athletic facilities. Furthermore, making these spaces accessible by public transit will both benefit the environment and promote access to community sport services by community members, particularly those from lower income backgrounds.

## The Impact of Climate Change on Sport

In addition to acknowledging the impact of sport on our environment, we must also consider the impact of climate change on sport. Given its dependence on climatic conditions, sport is one of the sectors most vulnerable to climate change.<sup>323</sup>

Winter sports are a major contributor to the Canadian economy, with between 17.2–20.7 million ski visits in Canada annually.<sup>324</sup> Winter sports are reliant on temperature and snowfall conditions, making them particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Research has consistently projected ski seasons becoming shorter on average, with more mid-season closures and increased reliance on interventions like snow-making to keep ski hills operational.<sup>325, 326</sup> These interventions are both costly and inefficient to maintain, and are not a perfect fix: data from across Canada and the United States points to a dramatic decline in average season length and visitation during abnormally warm seasons, even in areas with high snow-making capacity.<sup>327</sup> For example, during the warm winter of 2011–2012 there was a 10% decrease in skier visits in Ontario compared to previous season. Similar trends have been found across the globe, including in Austria, Australia and the United States.<sup>328</sup> Large-scale winter sporting events are getting cancelled more and more frequently due to warm weather and poor snow conditions.<sup>329</sup> Beginner skiers, families and children in particular are less likely to participate in skiing and snowboarding as conditions become less stable.<sup>330</sup> Advanced simulation models show significant financial losses and loss in participation opportunities if significant changes to our global emissions aren't met.<sup>331</sup>

In addition to the significant impact on winter sports, summer sports are also vulnerable to climatic changes. Increased summer temperatures will be an issue for summer sport participants, particularly field and endurance sports.<sup>332</sup> Local and international events are getting cancelled due to forest fires, hurricanes, heat and humidity conditions.<sup>333</sup> Facilities become more expensive to operate, with increased air



conditioning and water use costs and higher potential for damage due to extreme weather events.<sup>334</sup>

Unfortunately, this ends up as a positive feedback loop: climate change results in increased energy consumption and resource costs, which in turn worsens climate change. Changing weather and climate conditions also poses a risk to participants: extreme heat conditions and poor air quality lead to health concerns for athletes, impeding both participation and spectatorship at sporting events.

In addition to addressing the root cause of these issues by limiting greenhouse gas production and adhering to national and international environmental policies, community sport organizations must develop and follow guidelines to protect the health of the participants. The 2015 Pan Am Games in Toronto suffered from extreme weather variations including high heat and humidity, resulting in an increase of heat-related illnesses for both participants and spectators.<sup>335</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics has confirmed that exertional heat-related illness in children and adolescents is entirely avoidable.<sup>336</sup> Community leaders must enforce regulations to ensure participant and spectator safety.

These include:<sup>337</sup>

1. Providing regular water breaks, with readily accessible fluids available before, during and after activity sessions;

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2. Reducing the length and intensity of workouts and training sessions;

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3. Offering shaded places for players and spectators to cool off, or reschedule to a cooler time;

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4. Adding additional recovery time between training sessions or competitions (e.g., restructuring tournaments with multiple games per day to allow for recovery between events);

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5. Being considerate of uniform and equipment requirements (e.g., ensuring that uniforms are not made out of heavy fabric and giving time to remove heavy protective gear, like football helmets, that trap heat); and

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6. Ensuring that staff are up to date on health and safety information regarding heat illness, and that personnel and facilities for effectively treating heat illness are readily available on site.

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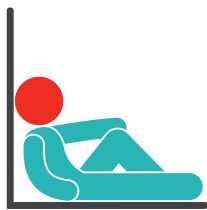


## Section 8

# COVID-19 and Canadian Sport

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2).<sup>338</sup> Subsequently, the Government of Canada, provincial, territorial and municipal jurisdictions took unprecedented action to control the transmission of the virus. Public health measures included recommendations for physical distancing, stay-at-home orders, quarantine initiatives and the closure of non-essential businesses, organizations and activities.<sup>339</sup> While these directives were essential to reducing COVID-19 infections, they greatly impacted sport participation.





The complications of physical distancing meant **lost participation in organized sport** for all Canadians, but child and youth organized sport was significantly impacted.

## Reduced Sport Participation During the Pandemic

Notably, recommendations for physical distancing, an effective measure for reducing transmission of the virus, were implemented throughout the pandemic which minimized close contact with others. Physical distancing practices required individuals to maintain a distance of at least two metres or six feet between one another as much as possible.<sup>340</sup> Given that close proximity is required for many sport activities, participation was greatly impacted. Further, some researchers even recommended that greater physical distancing would be a safer guideline for physically active individuals.<sup>341</sup> The complications of physical distancing meant lost participation in organized sport for all Canadians, but child and youth organized sport was significantly impacted.<sup>342, 343</sup> This loss of sport has been noted as a contributing factor in the declining mental wellness Canadians experienced throughout the pandemic.<sup>344, 345</sup> Research investigating athletes' experiences during the pandemic has highlighted that the loss of sport worsened athletes' ability to manage their emotions and support their physical and mental health.<sup>346</sup> These pandemic-related changes to resource access severely impacted athletes' physical activity, leading to detrimental consequences in their sport-specific training.<sup>347</sup>

The pandemic severely impacted community-level sport participation with over 87% of participants indicating they were affected.<sup>348</sup> In general, the majority of Canadian community sport activities and other recreational activities were cancelled throughout the pandemic, including restrictions for playgrounds, running and cycling trails and government-run

parcs.<sup>349</sup> The majority of participants who were affected by the loss of community-led sport (81%) cited that the sports they participated in were cancelled and 86% reported that children's sport had also stopped.<sup>350</sup> Not only were community sport activities cancelled, but the risk of the pandemic further deterred Canadians from participating in available sport opportunities, as 62% of individuals decided not to participate in sport due to pandemic-related concerns,<sup>351</sup> such as transmission of the virus.

The decrease of sport throughout the pandemic had negative ramifications for sport organizations. A Canadian survey polling local sport organizations across 56 sports and all provinces and territories in June 2020 documented that 99% of organizations' operations were affected by COVID-19 and 74% had to temporarily close.<sup>352</sup> While the financial impacts of the pandemic are long lasting, 66% of surveyed organizations laid off staff and the majority developed contingency plans to prepare for post-pandemic effects.<sup>353</sup> These long-term concerns include membership retention, operational impacts and financial recovery.<sup>354</sup> While financial aid was available to sport organizations throughout the pandemic with Canada's Emergency Wage Subsidy and Business Credit Availability Program, many volunteer-run organizations did not qualify for financial assistance.<sup>355</sup> Findings from Commonwealth countries' pandemic experiences highlight that COVID-19 has exposed the lack of government funding for community sport and physical education.<sup>356</sup> Many community sport organizations reported that even small amounts of emergency funding, under \$20,000, would allow them to deal with the unexpected challenges of the pandemic.<sup>357</sup>

## Encouraged Activity Throughout the Pandemic

Continued participation in recreational activities within physical distancing limitations was encouraged by mental health experts throughout the pandemic to reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, energy levels and overall coping with the complexities of the crisis.<sup>358, 359</sup> Individuals who were unable to participate in their traditional community sport opportunities reported that they and their children missed the social and mental health benefits of sport.<sup>360</sup>

Evidence from the pandemic has further cemented the importance of Canadians' engagement in exercise. Particularly when done outdoors, exercise produced better mental health outcomes during the pandemic. However, in keeping with physical distancing recommendations, most of these activities were completed in isolation, including walking, jogging or other forms of exercise, falling outside the scope of multi-person sport.

The most common modification made to sport during the pandemic was the shift to online opportunities where individuals could engage in instruction, coaching or other sport activities while abiding by pandemic restrictions.<sup>361</sup> The two primary barriers limiting this transition to online engagement included internet and equipment availability.<sup>362</sup> Additional promotion aimed to continue sport activity during this time included encouraging individuals to participate in sport activities within their households, where unnecessary contact with others was avoided. [Living True Sport: Helping Families Keep Active While Staying](#) offered opportunities for families to stay active and develop their sport skills while staying home during the pandemic.<sup>363</sup>

When restrictions eased throughout the pandemic, sport organizations had greater opportunities to hold in-person physically distanced drills and developmental games outdoors.<sup>364</sup> During these periods of lowered restrictions, individuals reported continued apprehension for participation based on the uncertainty of the virus.<sup>365</sup> [Safe Return to Community Sport: A True Sport Guide for Parents and Caregivers](#) outlined some of the questions and concerns individuals may have experienced when considering returning to community sport participation.<sup>366</sup> These questions included contemplating the safety of returning to sport and the COVID-19 risks associated with participation, whether physical distancing guidelines would be maintained and understood by other participants, and the implications that returning to sport participation may have for an individual's social circle.<sup>367</sup>

## Returning to Sport

With increased vaccination rates and lower infection rates there was a hopeful and long-awaited return to sport activities within Canada. The majority of the media attention surrounding the return to sport has profiled professional sport and international sport, including the National Hockey League or the Olympic Games, and has been driven by financial concerns.<sup>368</sup> At the community level the anticipated 'return to play' continues to be tied to safety concerns and the desire to restart local economic activity within Canadian communities.<sup>369</sup> This return to sport is governed by the various public health regulations at national, provincial, territorial or municipal levels and therefore will vary across the country. Some jurisdictions have utilized a staged approach where certain kinds of sport activities are allowed with the use of face masks or when physical distancing restrictions are respected.<sup>370</sup> Requirements to wear face masks during certain sport activities remain impractical (e.g., swimming) and therefore may hinder the transition to play for certain sports. Recommendations for a successful return to sport

may be observed in countries such as New Zealand where COVID-19 cases remain limited.<sup>371</sup> Best practices for a safe return to sport include the creation of a sport sector framework using public health guidelines and specific details for various sports, clear understanding of different restriction levels and continued monitoring and enforcement efforts.<sup>372</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the underlying social inequalities of communities by disproportionately affecting low-income and unemployed individuals, as well as women. There is an understanding that Canadians need to “build back better” after the pandemic. Within the realm of sport, this includes using an intersectional lens

when planning and investing in sport. Understanding the unique experiences of all Canadians will assist in promoting equity and inclusion considerations within Canadian sport. Addressing and reducing the barriers that prevent certain demographics from participating in sport will allow for more Canadians to receive the positive benefits of good sport experiences. After the unique and difficult circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity for sport to build stronger communities is more important than ever and it is imperative that these opportunities include all Canadians.

There is an understanding that Canadians need to **“build back better”** after the pandemic. Within the realm of sport, this includes **using an intersectional lens when planning and investing in sport.**

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## Section 9

# Conclusion

The broad and compelling evidence of sport's benefits invites communities and decision makers to recognize sport's value as a substantial public asset, one that merits our attention and intentional effort to amplify sport's positive effects across the full spectrum of opportunities outlined in this report.

Sport is a powerful means of promoting health, but an even more powerful means of building social capital, providing young people with positive adult role models and mentors and opportunities for positive development.

Delivering on these benefits, however, is not the job of sport alone. Local communities, where sport takes place and where the benefits are most tangible, have a leading role to play in both building a comprehensive and inclusive community sport system, and ensuring that the sport Canadians get is, indeed, the sport they want. This is critical to realizing the full range of benefits that values-based sport can generate. Evenly distributed opportunities to participate in sport can help narrow the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged groups, while positive sport experiences encourage participation and retention, foster positive character development in participants, and strengthen communities.

The opportunity to strengthen communities after the COVID-19 pandemic is more important than ever. Sport organizations and communities now have the opportunity to “build back better” using an intersectional lens to dismantle barriers that may have previously limited sport involvement. Building back sport that includes all Canadians will allow all stakeholders to have positive sport experiences.

Recent social advocacy for diversity and inclusion is apparent within the sport system and including everyone in sport ensures that all Canadians have the ability to receive the benefits associated with a good sport culture. As research has demonstrated, the unique positive impacts of sport on equity-deserving groups reinforce the need to reduce barriers to entry. Furthermore, involving stakeholders from these communities in sport advocacy and planning is an important component to creating positive sport environments.

The **benefits of community sport** invite communities and decision makers to recognize its value as **a substantial public asset**, and to devote attention and intentional effort to ensuring these benefits are fully realized for all of our Canadian communities.

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Focusing on the desire to achieve the sport Canadians want, individuals within sport communities have the opportunity to advocate for change and strive towards a values-based system. Not only will participants receive the benefits associated with a good sport experience but their communities will also benefit from greater social capital and inclusion.

Through intentional and strategic development of accessible, values-based community sport, municipalities — together with their many community partners and stakeholders — can harness the power of sport to advance a broad cross-section of their social, economic, and environmental goals, and make a measurable contribution to improving the quality of life in their communities. School boards, service clubs, business groups, community service organizations, foundations, law enforcement agencies, health practitioners, band councils, and, of course, sport organizations themselves, all have a role to play in this process.

The benefits of community sport invite communities and decision makers to recognize its value as a substantial public asset, and to devote attention and intentional effort to ensuring these benefits are fully realized for all of our Canadian communities.

All orders of government have a role to play in helping to ensure the infrastructure necessary to enable communities to benefit from sport is available to all communities, in particular those with limited resources of their own. While community sport offers benefits to everyone, it offers the greatest benefits

to individuals, groups and communities coping with isolation or exclusion, social and economic challenges, and, in some cases, decline. Many government policies and programs aimed at helping Canadians and communities to tackle these challenges can also benefit from the strategic integration of values-based sport as a low-cost and potentially highly effective tool for advancing their goals.

Community sport's cross-cutting effects and diverse beneficiaries invite governments to move beyond traditional approaches that involve sport ministries and departments alone, to adopt more horizontal, cross-governmental approaches that engage the full range of ministries and departments interested in harnessing sport's potential.

Despite the crucial importance of these contributions, the quality and ultimate impact of community sport finally comes down to individuals — the athletes, parents, coaches, administrators and volunteers whose ideas, attitudes and behaviour determine whether the sport we have is, in fact, the sport Canadians want.

When high-performance athletes compete, they capture our attention and carry our hearts and hopes with them. They are our champions, but also beneficiaries of our support and resources, de facto ambassadors for our communities and country, and highly visible and influential role models for our young people. As such, they have a particularly important choice to make in terms of their behaviour and the messages they send publicly about sport. By reinforcing the positive power of sport and the True Sport Principles in their words and actions, on and off the playing field, they can inspire, champion and give back, closing the gap between the sport we have and the sport we want, and further increasing the power of sport to instill character, strengthen our communities, and make Canada better.

All Canadians and communities make this same choice, in one form or another. Every game we play, every match we organize, every race we run, large or small, can help build a stronger Canada for the future. By intentionally making the right choices, together we can all ensure the sport we have is the sport we want — True Sport.

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