Rapid Review for the National Framework for Recreation in Canada

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Troy D. Glover, Ph.D.
University of Waterloo

Christa Costas-Bradstreet
CCB Consulting

CPRA.CA ↗

Rapid Review for the National Framework for Recreation in Canada

This rapid review was commissioned by the CanadianParks and Recreation Association (CPRA) to support the renewal of the National Framework for Recreation in Canada, originally finalized in 2015. The Framework Leadership Team (FLT), comprised of professionals from the recreation and parks sector across Canada, was tasked with guiding this renewal process, ensuring the Framework remains relevant and responsive to contemporary challenges and opportunities. This rapid review provides an overview of the academic and grey literature published since 2015 (with the inclusion of seminal sources where applicable) across six critical themes: (1) Community Health & Wellbeing; (2) Equity & Social Responsibility; (3) Operational Excellence & Safety; (4) Resilience & Sustainability; (5) Social Infrastructure; and (6) Tourism & Economic Impact. These themes were established by analyzing documents focused on future trends of sport, physical activity and recreation, some of which informed the Framework for Recreation in Canada Update (2024). There were a number of themes in the documents which were synthesized into six overall themes. While the review offers key insights and evidence-informed findings to guide the renewal process, please be advised it has been conducted within a condensed timeframe and therefore aims to provide a broad overview rather than an exhaustive or deeply analytical examination of each theme. As well, the focus for this review was on resources available in English.

Theme One: Community Health and Wellbeing in Recreation and Parks

Four key areas are explored within the theme of CommunityHealth and Wellbeing: (1) Physical Health Benefits; (2) Mental Health Benefits; (3) Social Connectedness; and (4) Spiritual and Holistic Health.

1.1 Physical Health Benefits

Recreation plays a critical role in addressing sedentary behaviour, a significant public health challenge in Canada, where 49% of adults aged 18 to 79 are considered physically inactive[1] (Statistics Canada, 2021). Evidence shows participating in structured and unstructured recreational activities enhances cardiovascular health,increases muscular strength, and improves overall physical function (Lear et al., 2017). Community-based programs, such as walking groups and fitness classes, are particularly effective in encouraging sustained engagement, especially among older adults (Franco et al., 2015). The integration of green spaces and outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hiking and cycling, has been linked to higher physical activity levels and lower obesity rates (Mitchell, 2013; ParticipACTION, 2022). This information underscores the criticalrelationship between parks,recreation, and physicalhealth, as outlinedin the key insights below.

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[1] Statistic derived from the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) conducted by Statistics Canada. According to the 2018 and 2019 CHMS data, approximately 49.2% of adults in this age group meet the recommended target of accumulating at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA), implying that about 50.8% do not meet this guideline.

Key findings from the literature:

Proximity to parks: Living near parks and recreational areas is generally associated with increased physical activity. People are more likely to engage in exercise, walking, and other physical activities when they have easy access to these spaces (Van Cauwenberg et al., 2015).

Supporting physical activity: Recreation and park settings are linked to various intensities of physical activity, including moderate and vigorous exercise (Rivera et al., 2024). These settings are particularly effective in promoting walking and utilitarian physical activities (Veitch et al., 2021).

Prescribing Parks: A park prescription intervention improves park use, physical activity in parks, recreational physical activity, and psychological quality of life (Müller-Riemenschneider et al., 2020).

Accessibility and Health: Accessible recreation facilities mitigate health disparities by providing equitable opportunities for physical activity, particularly for marginalized populations (Evenson et al., 2012) and older adults (Sato et al., 2019).

Recreation and parks are integral to fostering active lifestyles and addressing sedentary behaviours, which are prevalent public health challenges in Canada. Accessible and well- designed recreational spaces not only encourage physical activity, but also reduce health disparities by offering equitable opportunities for all individuals, including marginalized populations. These spaces play an essential role in promoting individual and community health, underscoring the importance of continued investment in recreational infrastructure and programs. By supporting physical activity through diverse and inclusive offerings, recreation and parks can contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of Canadians.

1.2 Mental Health Benefits

In Canada, approximately 1 in 4 people aged 18 and older experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (Statistics Canada, 2024a). Recreational activities significantly contribute positively to mental health by reducing stress, enhancing resilience, and improving mood. Recent studies emphasize recreation's role in promoting psychological wellbeing through activities such as yoga, gardening, and recreational sports, which have been shown to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression (Litwiller et al., 2018; ParticipACTION, 2022; Stanton et al., 2014).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor recreation demonstrated its importance, as participants reported greater psychological resilience and lower levels of mental distress (Pasanen et al., 2021). Evidence shows outdoor activityhelped reduce anxietyand improve wellbeing, especially among previously inactiveindividuals (Lesser & Nienhuis, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of recreation and parks in maintaining mental health during times of restricted indoor activities. Even under normal (i.e., non-pandemic) circumstances, nature-based recreation is generally positively associated with mental health improvements, reduced anxiety, and depression symptoms (Lackey et al., 2021). Similarly, recreational physical activity is strongly associated with better mental health, while non-recreational physical activity shows no consistent association with mental health outcomes (Zulyniak et al., 2020). More specifically, recreational sports promote mental health through positive social bonding (Pandey et al., 2023). These findings align with the Canadian Mental Health Association's emphasis on recreation as a key component of mental health promotion (CMHA, 2021). Collectively, research shows the multifaceted ways recreation supports mental health, as detailed in the key findings below.

Key findings from the literature:

Therapeutic Value: Access to natural areas in urban settings provides therapeutic benefits through relaxation, deep connection, and reflection (Cheesbrough et al., 2019). Integrating nature into urban design can therefore reduce stress, improve public health, and promote environmental protection (Hartig & Kahn, 2016).

Reduction in Anxiety and Stress: Leisure activities can help build resilience to stress by fostering positive emotions and promoting a sense of wellbeing (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017). Engaging in leisure activities such as exercise and communication with loved ones has been associated with lower prevalence of moderate to severe anxiety symptoms, especially during periods of social isolation like the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheong et al., 2024). Physically active leisure also helps mitigate stress-related health issues, contributing to better mental health.

Improvement in Psychological Wellbeing: Leisure participation, including physical activity, mindfulness, and vacation, can significantly reduce work stress and improve mental/emotional health (Aziz et al., 2023). Leisure activities can also enhance psychological wellbeing by providing a sense of purpose and structure, which is particularly beneficial for unemployed individuals. These activities help in maintaining a positive mental state by offering a structured routine and social interaction (Goodman et al., 2017).

Support for Vulnerable Populations: Leisure activities have been found to support mental health in vulnerable groups by promoting self-determination, generating positive emotions, and strengthening social connections (Ray et al., 2023). Additionally, organized leisure communities for young people foster mental health through social connectedness and skill development (Kusier et al., 2024).

Group wellness: Participation in group leisure activities, such as those in fitness centres, is linked to increased social and psychological wellbeing, highlighting the importance of social interaction in leisure settings (Heckel et al., 2024). Participation in social leisure activities is positively associated with mental wellbeing and reduces depression/anxiety symptoms, especially for individuals lacking social connectedness at work or school (Nielsen et al., 2021).

Recreation and parks are essential for enhancing mental health and psychological wellbeing, offering diverse opportunities to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression while fostering resilience and social connection. Evidence underscores their therapeutic value, particularly during periods of heightened mental distress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Recreation not only provides relief throughphysical activity, but also supportsvulnerable populations by addressing emotional stability and promoting social interaction. Continued investment in recreational infrastructure and programs is vital to ensuring equitable access and maximizing the mental health benefits for all Canadians. This commitment is integral to advancing a holistic approach to public health and wellbeing.

1.3 Social Connectedness

Social isolation remains a pressing concern in Canada, where more than 1 in 10 people aged 15 and older always or often felt lonely, with younger individuals experiencing loneliness more frequently than older adults (Statistics Canada, 2021). Additionally, a 2023 report by the National Institute on Ageing found that up to 58% of Canadians aged 50 and older have experienced loneliness, and as many as 41% are at risk of social isolation.

A growing literature unequivocally establishes a deficiency in social connection as an independent risk factor for premature morbidity and mortality from various causes, including immune response, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and dementia (Holt-Lunstad, 2022). Thus, the growing recognition of social isolation and loneliness as a public health crisis has led to initiatives such as the United States Surgeon General's advisory on loneliness and the World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission for Social Connection, which underscore the importance of fostering social bonds as a cornerstone of health and wellbeing.

Evidence shows recreation fosters social interaction and builds a sense of belonging, essential for reducing social isolation and strengthening communities (Glover, 2018). Not surprisingly, environments that encourage interaction enhance opportunities for social connection (Francis et al., 2012). Recreation spaces and parks serve as important venues for community gatherings and interpersonal connections, strengthening social bonds (Cohen et al., 2007). Recreation spaces provide third places (Yuen & Johnson, 2017)—not home (first place) or work/school (second place), but rather the place where community happens— and vital social infrastructure that enables social connection to occur and social ties to strengthen (Kuzuoglu & Glover, 2023). Inclusive recreation programs, moreover, play a crucial role in bridging social divides(Edwards et al., 2021). These findings underscore the essential role of recreation and parks in fostering social connectedness, as illustrated in the key findings below.

Key findings from the literature:

Benefits of Sociability: Sociable interactions among people, while engaged in leisure activities such as neighbourhood walking, help generate greater social connectedness and address the public health crises of social isolation and loneliness (Glover, 2018). Those who interact during such activities feel acknowledged by others and become more conscious of who belongs to their imagined community (Glover et al., 2023). A study in the Netherlands found that urban parks, through cursory interactions, shared experiences and an attachment to space, facilitated social cohesion between various ethnic groups. The study concluded that the park's design, its location (urban vs non-urban) and people's image of the park, combined with the cultural characteristics of the different groups can help plan intercultural interactions (Peters, Elands, and Buijs, 2010).

General Wellbeing: Participation in diverse leisure activities, such as cultural and social events, is associated with flourishing, which includes social wellbeing and a sense of belonging. Conversely, passive activities like excessive TV watching are linked to languishing (Smock & Smale, 2023).

Importance of Leisure in Combatting Social Isolation and Loneliness: Holt-Lunstad (2022) recognized the absence of leisure as an untapped opportunity to significantly influence population health. In doing so, she identified recreation as a sector with the potential to contribute positively to health through its impact on social connection and an opportunity for prevention and intervention across various domains of life.

Linking to Social Prescription: Recreation and social prescribing, a method that promotes belonging by connecting people to the social support they need, complement each other to promote social connection and build community capacity. Recreation is well-positioned to work together with social prescribing efforts to nurture socially connected communities when it focuses on building community capacity, facilitates welcoming and inclusive leisure and recreation experiences that foster regular social interaction, and adopts principles of community development as part of a social justice model of practice (Mahut & Fortune, 2021).

Newcomer Networks: Leisure activities, particularly those connected to faith and community, provide socialization and community-bonding for newcomers, helping to build social networks and mitigate stress (Hurly, 2019).

Recreation and park spacesare powerful tools for fosteringsocial connectedness and combating the growing epidemic of loneliness and social isolation in Canada. By providing accessible, inclusive spaces and programs, these settings promote social equityand create opportunities for diverse communities to build social bonds. From neighbourhood walking activities to adaptive sports and cultural events, recreation fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens community ties. To maximize these benefits, designing and programming recreational spaces with inclusivity and interaction in mind is essential. Investing in social infrastructure that prioritizes connection is critical for building healthier, more resilient communities (see more below).

1.4 Spiritual and Holistic Health

In recent decades, Canada has experienced a notable shift in religious affiliation and spiritual practices. According to the 2021 Census, 53.3% of Canadians identified as Christian, a decline from 67.3% in 2011. Concurrently, the proportion of individuals reportingno religious affiliation rose from 23.9% in 2011 to 34.6% in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). This trend reflects a broader move toward secularization, with many Canadians seeking spiritual fulfillment outside traditional religious institutions.

Recreation and park spaces have become integral to this pursuit, offering environments that foster spiritual wellbeing through connection with nature and community engagement. More specifically, recreation provides opportunities for mindfulness, reflection, and spiritual growth, contributing to holistic health. Activities like nature walks, meditation, and wilderness experiences enable individuals to connect with their inner selves and find meaning (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). The spiritual benefits of recreation often stem from immersive experiences in natural environments. Exposureto natural landscapes is linked to feelings of awe, gratitude, and transcendence, supporting mental and emotional wellbeing (Williams & Harvey, 2001).

In Canada, over 80% of people report feeling a sense of wellbeing after engaging in outdoor activities (Statistics Canada, 2023). Recreational spaces designed with contemplative features, such as quietgardens or waterfronts, serve as restorative environments that facilitate mindfulness and reduce mental fatigue (Hartig et al., 2014). These findings highlight how recreation and parks contribute to spiritual and holistic health, as detailed in the following key points.

Key findings from the literature:

> *Spiritual Experiences in Leisure*: Leisure activities can evoke spiritual experiences characterized by feelings of awe, appreciation, connection, and personal growth. These experiences can occur in various contexts and are often triggered by elements such as nature or novelty(Schmidt & Little,2007). Most studies show that leisure contributes to spirituality, but some also show that it can detract from it (Heintzman, 2022).

> *Leisure as a Coping Mechanism*: Leisure activities can serve as coping strategies to mitigate the negative effects of time pressure on spiritual wellbeing. This includes activities that promote sacralization, repression avoidance, and a sense of place Heintzman & Mannell, 2003).

Spiritual and holistic health are increasingly important dimensions of wellbeing in Canada, especially as more individuals turn to non-traditional avenues for spiritual fulfillment. Recreation and park spaces offer vital opportunities for Canadians to engage in mindfulness, reflection, and personal growth through connections with nature and community. Whether fostering awe and gratitude through natural landscapes or providing restorative environments for reflection, these spaces address the spiritual and emotional needs of a diverse population. Recreation's capacity to facilitate spiritual experiences, promote coping mechanisms, and create sacred moments underscores its essential role in holistic health. To further this impact, prioritizing the design and programming of spaces that support mindfulness and contemplation will ensure recreation remains a cornerstone of spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

Programs and Resources:

It would be accurate to say that all programs and resources delivered by the recreation and parks sector address the different aspects of community health and wellbeing. The following section presents several resources that further describe the benefits of recreation and parks on and/or illustrate the types of initiatives undertaken to enhance community health and wellbeing.

- The Role of Recreation in Promoting Mental and Physical Wellbeing. (Trust for Public Lands, 2024). This blog describes how recreation impacts mental and physical health and can lead to a more balanced lifestyle.
- How Parks and Green Spaces can Improve your Health. (NC State University, College of Natural Resources News, 2022). Professors Lincoln Larson and Aaron Hipp at NC State University provide an overview of how parks and green spaces can address health challenges in today's society.
- Accessing the Health Benefits of Parks. (Park People, 2021). Park People discuss how all parks are not created equal and certain factors or characteristics can influence health outcomes.
- Communities of all sizes create "master" or strategic plans to outline the delivery of services. An example of two are shared here that outline best practices and a number of contemporary issues facing parks and recreation departments throughout Canada: (1) Township of Woolwich Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2024) and (2) Strathcona County, Recreation and Culture Strategy. Trends and Best Practices (2019).

- Parks and Recreation Help Combat the Loneliness Epidemics. (ICMA, 2024). This article explores how to find creative ways for parks and recreation to help communities grow stronger and more connected.
- Parks, Recreation and Green Spaces. (CDC, 2022). This webpage provides parks and recreation professionals with strategies to promote safe, equitable and inclusive access to parks, trails, recreation areas and green spaces. It contains a number of other tools and resources to support implementation.
- The Power of Parks to Strengthen Community. A Special Report (Trust for Public Land, U.S., 2024). This Special Report, though addressing the loneliness epidemic in the US, can also apply to a Canadian context. Where many places have experienced controversy, parks remain a neutral public gathering place where people can come together and foster connections.
- The Canadian Summer Camp Research Project. Examining the outcomes of the Canadian Summer Camp experience. (Healthy Communities Research Network, University of Waterloo. N.D.). Professors at the University of Waterloo assessed the value of the summer camp experience through a three-phased project, beginning with interviews of sixty-five camp directors across Canada. The study found that campers experienced positive outcomes in the areas of (1) social integration and citizenship; (2) attitudes towards physical activity; (3) self-confidence and personal development; (4) environmental awareness and (5) emotional intelligence.
- Nature Connection in Recreation. (Alberta Recreation and Parks Association, n.d.). This resource supports Goal #3 in the Framework for Recreation in Canada (2015 and Update) focused on connecting people to nature.
- How Can Neighborhood Parks Be Used to Increase Physical Activity? Rand Health Q. 2019 May 16;8(3):4. Deborah A Cohen, Kristin J Leuschner
- Time to Shift to Relational Welfare. Reimagining Access (2023) argues for a shift from transactional welfare models to relational welfare, emphasizing social connections as fundamental to well-being. This approach highlights the role of recreation in fostering meaningful relationships that support individuals and communities, positioning parks and recreation as critical spaces for social infrastructure.

- <u>A Relational Turn for Recreation</u>. This resource advocates for a relational approach to recreation, moving beyond individualistic participation metrics to focus on how recreation facilitates deep social bonds and community cohesion (Reimagining Access, 2023). It calls for recreation policies and programs to prioritize relationships and belonging as key indicators of success, reinforcing the role of recreation in combating social isolation.
- The Canadian Alliance for Social Connection and Health developed the world's first <u>Guidelines for Social Connection</u>. These evidence-based guidelines provide straightforward strategies for healthy social connection and represent a key tool for clinical and public health practice.

1.5 Theme One Conclusion

Recreation plays a multidimensional role in promoting community health and wellbeing by enhancing physical fitness, supporting mental health, fostering social connections, and nurturing spiritual and holistic health. Importantly, the recreation and parks sector plays a crucial role in multi-sectoral health initiatives, such as mental health group hiking programs (Barnes et al., 2023). These programs leverage parks to promote physical activity and mental health, demonstrating the sector's relevance to public health.

Theme Two: Equity and Social Responsibility

Three key areas are explored within the theme of Equity and Social Responsibility: (1) Social Justice and Inclusion – Integrating equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in programming and policy; (2) Indigenous Reconciliation – Responding to Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, building partnerships with Indigenous communities; and (3) Addressing Homelessness – Role of recreation spaces in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness.

It was noted that "equity" can be interpreted as an overall concept – a beacon to strive for – rather than a separate theme. A key component to equity is the "sense of belonging" that one feels internally as a result of having access to opportunities and being included. Equity, as a critical tenant of recreation, is embodied in such adages as "recreation is a right not a privilege" and "recreation as a vital public good".

2.1 Social Justice and Inclusion: Integrating EDI in Programming and Policy

Equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and belonging remain pressing issues in recreation and parks, particularly as Canada's population becomes increasingly diverse. According to Statistics Canada (2022b), Canada's population is characterized by significant diversity, with over 450 ethnic or cultural origins reported in the 2021 Census. The largest racialized groups include South Asian (7.1%), Chinese (4.7%), and Black (4.3%) communities, collectively representing 16.1% of the total population. Immigrants represent nearly 23% of Canada's population, the highest proportion in over 150 years, necessitating inclusive and accessible services in public spaces. Yet, systemic barriers, including racism, ableism, and socio-economic inequities, persist in limiting participation.

The recreation and parks sector has recognized the importance of EDI. For example, in BC, the BC Alliance for Healthy Living and the Physical Activity for Health Collaborative (of which BCRPA is a founding partner) created the Everybody Moves Resource Hub. The Hub was developed for front-line staff, programmers, organizational leaders and others to access practical, resources and examples about how to make physical activity more inclusive for all members of the community. The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) in the USA established an Equity in Practice Resources Library made up of vetted and curated resources, including recommended articles, books, technical resources, podcasts, webinars, and activities that support learning regarding equity concepts in parks and recreation. Additional resources and articles are listed below.

Inclusive practicesare increasingly recognized as essential to fostering equitableparticipation in recreation and parks. EDI in recreation has been implemented through a variety of strategies, including addressing issues like gender, race, and sexuality, and promoting a diverse management approach (Dashper & Fletcher, 2013). Within the recreation and parks sector, it often involves specific programming for people of colour, communication, financial aid, youth programs, and internal administrative efforts (Lee et al., 2019). These efforts underscore the importance of integrating EDI principles into programming and policy to create truly inclusive and equitable recreation environments that reflect Canada's growing diversity.

Key findings from the literature:

Multicultural and Mainstreaming Approaches: Canadian municipalities have adapted their recreation, parks, and cultural services to address EDI, often aligning with multicultural planning practices. These efforts aim to integrate immigrant communities and recognize differences within public institutions (Tossutti, 2023).

Equity in Partnerships: Neoliberal strategies, such as partnerships with private organizations, have been scrutinized for their impact on equity. These partnerships can both challenge and promote social justice, d*epending on how they are managed(Pitas et al., 2022).*

Community Engagement: Effective parks planning requires shifting from equality-based to equity-based processes, ensuring diverse community engagement and support (Khazaei et al., 2019).

Assimilation vs. Inclusion: Programs for immigrants often adopt an assimilation approach, expecting newcomers to fit into existing frameworks. Successful inclusion requires culturally sensitive marketing, community partnerships, and addressing barriers to participation (Forde et al., 2015).

Economic Equity: Pricing policies in recreation and parks can either exacerbate or alleviate social injustice. Offering discounts to economically disadvantaged groups is crucial, but care must be taken to avoid inappropriate subsidies that do not target those in need (Crompton, 2020).

Policy Effectiveness: Recreation and park practices and policies sometimes inadvertently reinforce exclusions. A critical examination of these policies is necessary to ensure they do not perpetuate the very issues they aim to resolve (Peers et al., 2023). Tink et al. (2020) target the National Framework for Recreation in Canada as reinforcing systems that leave many people out, even as it aims to bring people in. The authors challenge recreation practitioners to stop focusing on "fixing" individuals who are seen as excluded or vulnerable and instead look at how their own policies and practices create barriers. By rethinking traditional approaches and breaking down these barriers, recreation can become more welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

The Canadian parks and recreation sector is actively working toward integrating social justice and inclusion into its policies and programs. While there are notable efforts to address diversity and equity, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring that policies do not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities. Effective community engagement, equitable pricing strategies, and critical evaluation of EDI policies are essential for advancing social justice in this field.

Programs and Resources:

- Active Parks! Implementation Guide: Increasing Physical Activity through Parks, Trails and Greenways. (NRPA, n.d.). Created to support parks and recreation and public health professionals, the Active Parks! Implementation Guide provides an overview of the recommendation by the Community Service Preventive Task Force to ensure all community members have equitable opportunities to get active. It also provides a process to implement it and case studies.
- A Framework for Assessing Equitable Health Outcomes of Parks. Guidance for Park Practitioners and Local Leaders (Urban Institute, 2022). The framework assists park practitioners with assessing how equitable their park system is and how it improves health outcomes and addresses health disparities.
- Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook (City of Ottawa, 2018). The Handbook is not specific to just parks and recreation but for all city staff, management and Council for the purpose of being consistent and coherent in their efforts to move equity and inclusion forward in the city.
- Everybody's Welcome. A Social Inclusion Approach to Program Planning and Development for Recreation and Parks Services (Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of BC and BCRPA, 2006). Though an older document, the Everybody's Welcome booklet was developed for parks and recreation providers in BC to support learning about social inclusion related to creating community facilities, programs and services that meet the needs of all community members.

- <u>The Belonging Playbook</u>. Ottawa's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Hub for Sport. (Ottawa Sport Council. 2024). The Belonging Playbook helps community sport organizations remove barriers to access to foster more welcoming and inclusive environments. It focuses on (1) promoting diversity; (2) fostering inclusion; and (3) removing barriers to participation. It also presents a number of additional resources.
- Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Justice. A Toolkit for Parks and Recreation Organizations. (Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society, 2022). The Toolkit helps recreation practitioners create more equitable access to high-quality parks, programs and services and helps ensure all voices are represented.
- <u>Exploring Inclusion Policies in Canadian Municipal Recreation Contexts</u>. (Cassandra Manuel, Dalhousie University, 2021. This Master's thesis explores the concept of inclusion of people with disabilities within recreation and leisure contexts. The research focuses on understanding how persons with a disability are addressed in inclusion policy within municipal recreation contexts in Canada.
- <u>Best Practices for Inclusion in Parks and Recreation</u>. A Review of Existing Literature. (Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership, 2022). This research study was prepared to help the City of Guelph (ON), specifically the Culture and Recreation and Parks Departments to inform the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The report provides a number of best practices to address issues of equity inclusion from a variety of Canadian and US cities. Also by this group is <u>Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph.</u>
- <u>Equity-Deserving Groups, Sport, and Recreation in Calgary: An Analysis of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility-Related Policies</u>. (Andy To, M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 2024). This thesis examined EDIA-related policies and statements of 76 multi-sport facilities in Calgary (AB) drawing on the theory of intersectionality. The findings suggested that most statements and policies fell short of being effective or impactful for equity-deserving groups.
- <u>Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Resource Page</u>. (Canadian Parks Council and Parks+ Collective, 2024). This resource page provides information from an ongoing research project assessing equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization within parks and protected areas research management. Information about the actual project can be found <u>here</u>. A number of resources and findings are available on the website. The organizations also host a <u>Planning, Policy and Legislation Resource Page</u>.

- <u>Parks and Recreation as an Essential Service: Using a health equity lens to strengthen provision in Niagara</u>. Niagara Community Observatory Centre for Sport Capacity, 2021). As a result of COVID-19 and its negative impacts, this policy brief argues that a health equity lens is critical to ensuring parks and recreation services remain at the forefront of future regional and municipal policies and programs that address quality of life and social well-being.
- <u>Anti-racism charter in recreation</u>. (Recreation Nova Scotia, 2022). The Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation and supporting initiatives is a tool to address discrimination. It helps recreation professionals take a proactive and systemic approach to make recreation welcoming and inclusive for everyone in Nova Scotia. It features tangible tools and a supporting action plan to help facilitate change.
- <u>Play Fair. Anti-Racism in Sports Toolkit</u>. (Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network, 2024)
- The toolkit, created by diverse individuals working at all levels of sport, provides education, resources and guidance about fostering diversity and inclusion in order to empower the sport community to combat racism and discrimination and create safe, fun, inclusive spaces for sport and play. It covers topics such as racism, Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation, and 2SLGBTQIA+ and Trans inclusion.
- <u>Gender Equity in Recreational Sport</u>. CPRA, 2022). The website is dedicated to the learnings and resources that resulted from CPRA's four-year gender equity initiative. Resources from a number of local, provincial/territorial and national organizations that address gender equity can be found on this website
- <u>Backcountry women</u>. Backcountry Women empowers women and other marginalized genders to experience the mental and physical benefits of outdoor adventure through education, skill development, and year-round outdoor-focused recreation experiences.
- <u>Town of Aurora Gender Equity</u>. The Town of Aurora is doing leading-edge work in the area of sport and recreation for women and girls. This website provides insight and information related to their initiative.
- Canadian Disability Participation Project (various dates). The CDPP has a variety of resources related to disability participation:
  - <u>Canadian Physical Activity Report Card for Children and Adolescence with Disabilities</u>
  - <u>Sport and Exercise Participation and Disability. A Blueprint for Change</u>
  - <u>Rethinking the meaning of participation for people with disabilities</u>
  - <u>Tips and Tricks for Developing and Disseminating Physical Activity Information for Families of Children with Disabilities</u>.

- [Quality Participation on Playgrounds Resources](#)
- [A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [A Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children and Youth with Intellectual Disabilities](#)
- [The Blueprint for Building Quality Participation in Sport for Children, Youth, and Adults with a Disability including Quality Participation Checklist Audit Tool](#).
- [Volunteering in Disability Sport](#)
- [Disability and Physical Activity Program Evaluation Toolkit](#)

2.2 Indigenous Reconciliation: Responding to Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and Building Partnerships with Indigenous Communities

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada (2015), established in 2008, released 94 Calls to Action in 2015 to address the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation. Calls to Action 87 to 91 specifically pertain to sports and recreation, urging all levels of government and the sportscommunity to ensureIndigenous participation and leadership in these areas. The federal government has taken steps to implement these Calls to Action. For example, in 2017, Canada committed $18.9 million over five years to fund culturally relevant sports programs in Indigenous communities, with ongoing funding of $5.5 million every four years thereafter. Even so, most Canadian national sport organizations have not implemented the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, indicating settler silence (Rajwani et al., 2021). Lacrosse organizations in Canada, for example, often overlook Indigenous women and girls, yet gender should be a central organizing principle when implementing the TRC's Calls to Action related to reconciliation and sport (Holmes et al., 2024).

Building equitable partnerships with Indigenous communities involves integrating traditional knowledge and cultural practices into recreation spaces. Hartmann and Kwauk (2018) critique recreation programs that fail to engage with Indigenous worldviews, arguing that reconciliation efforts must prioritize decolonization practices and reciprocity. Decolonization, as Henhawk (2022) pointed out, is a metaphor not for the improvement of our societies, but for the repatriation of land and renewal of Indigenous cultures. Thus, for Henhawk, the question of decolonization is important to consider as non-Indigenous and Indigenous actors alike aim to deliver recreation and sport. With this in mind, Litwiller et al. (2023) call on the recreation and parks sector to reframe what they understand as Indigeneity by recognizing the systems in which they work that oppress and privilege, advancing Indigenous notions of relationality, and re-establishing a connection to the non-human world. These efforts highlight the need for meaningful collaboration, Indigenous self-determination, and the integration of traditional knowledge to advance reconciliation within recreation and park management.

Key findings from the literature:

Colonial Legacy and Current Challenges: Many Canadian national parks, such as Banff and Jasper, were established through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples , and current management practices often perpetuate colonial power dynamics. Efforts at reconciliation, such as consultation processes, have been criticized for being superficial and maintaining existing inequalities (Finegan, 2018; Johnston & Mason, 2020; Youdelis, 2016).

Indigenous-Led Conservation: There is a growing movement toward Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas(IPCAs), which are seen as a pathway to reconciliation. These areas are managed by Indigenous communities according to their knowledge and governance systems, challenging traditional settler-colonial conservation models (Mansuy et al., 2023; Townsend & Roth, 2023; Zurba et al., 2019).

Policy Shifts and Cooperation: Recent policy changes, such as those seen in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, indicate a shift toward recognizing Indigenous rights and incorporating Indigenous practices, such as hunting, into park management. This reflects a broader trend toward cooperation and reconciliation (Isbister, 2016).

Urban Parks and Indigenous Identity: The role of urban parks in supporting Indigenous identities and cultural activities is increasingly recognized. Parks can contribute to reconciliation by affirming urban Indigenous identities and addressing urban settler-colonialism (Finegan, 2021). Waterloo Region in Ontario is looking to transform park spaces, such as Huron Natural Area into places that better represent past and present Indigenous communities, art, culture and will reflect current Indigenous initiatives. Their goal is to create outdoor spaces that welcome Indigenous groups and Indigenous community members who want to host ceremonies, events and gatherings.

Frameworks for Reconciliation: Effective reconciliation requires a commitment to truth-telling, acknowledging past harms, and providing justice. Doing so involves not just incorporating Indigenous perspectives into existing structures but fundamentally rethinking these structures to centre Indigenous rights and knowledge (Reid-Hresko & Warren, 2021).

The literature underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how recreation and parks are managed in Canada, moving toward Indigenous-led models that respect and integrate Indigenous rights and knowledge. While there are promising developments, significant challenges remain in dismantling colonial structures and achieving true reconciliation.

Programs and Resources:

- Indigenous Sports and Recreation Programs and Partnerships across Canada: A Literature Review and Environmental Scan. (Julie Sutherland; National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2021)
- As one of the Common Vision Champions (through the Public Health Agency of Canada), the NCCIH prepared this report to inform their "Partnerships" project. This literature review outlines Indigenous sport, physical activity and recreation (SPAR) organizations across Canada; community and regional level SPAR initiatives, facilitators and barriers to SPAR participation in Indigenous populations; existing guidelines or best practices for improving participation in SPAR among First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) Peoples.
- Walking with Indigenous Communities (Alberta Recreation and Parks Association)

- The ARPA is dedicated to its reconciliation journey through working in partnership with Indigenous communities. In its Walking with Indigenous Communities webpage, there are resources to help the recreation and parks sector with actions and examples of how ARPA is engaging in this work.
- Indigenous Physical Activity and Cultural Circle (IPACC). The IPACC is a network of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who are involved in Traditional Activities, Fitness, Recreation and Sports. Its mission is to create a community of mentors, leaders, participants and supporters who promote physical activity as a way to health and wellness.
- Sport for Life. Sport for Life has a number of resources supporting Indigenous Peoples.
- Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (I-SPARC). ISPARC is a provincial organization established with the purpose of improving the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples by supporting and encouraging physically active individuals, families, and communities. The programs and services delivered by I·SPARC are designed to build capacity and increase access to sport, recreation, and physical activity in First Nations communities, Métis Chartered Communities, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, schools, and other delivery agencies throughout the province.
- Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (Outdoor Recreation Council of BC, ORCBC). The ORCBC is a charitable organization that serves as an umbrella group for over 100 outdoor recreation associations and organizations across BC. They share stories about how people and organizations work towards better representation and relationship building in BC's outdoor recreation sector in the spirit of reconciliation. ORCBC also offers a Guidance Toolkit for Engagement with Indigenous Communities (2024) to recreation organizations that is a roadmap for advancing reconciliation objectives.
- Manitoba Aboriginal Sports and Recreation Council Inc. This not-for-profit organization acts as a bridge between existing partners in the sport and recreation delivery system and Indigenous nations in Manitoba. Its focus is to work with Indigenous nations, organizations and individuals to develop sustainable programs that improve opportunities for Indigenous people in Manitoba to participate in sport and recreation.

CPRA ACPL

2.3 Addressing Homelessness

The number of individuals experiencing homelessness remains a significant concern, with over 235,000 Canadians experiencing homelessness annually (Gaetz et al., 2014). Homelessness challenges individuals' sense of self and ability to transcend it, with limited resources and societal stigma affecting their sense of self and ability to thrive (Harmon, 2021). Recreation spaces have emerged as critical sites for supporting unhoused populations, providing opportunities for connection, respite, and programming. Homeless people can use leisure activities to cope with urban poverty and maintain dignity, despite increased risk of illness and early death (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2016). Recreation programs for homeless youth create safe social spaces, cultivate relationships, reconnect with passions, and promote wellness (Crook et al., 2023). Recreation spaces, when managed inclusively, can play a pivotal role in fostering social integration, supporting mental health, and addressing the complex needs of unhoused populations.

Homeless encampments have become a significant concern in Canada, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2022 national survey reported that 94% of responding communities had current or historical homeless encampments, with 61% regularly tracking encampment data (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2023). Factors contributing to the rise of encampments include restrictive shelter rules, capacity issues, and safety concerns. Specifically, 85% of respondents indicated that restrictive shelter rules were a contributor or significant contributor to encampment use, 76% cited shelters being at or over capacity, and 61% mentioned safety and security concerns in shelters (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2023). Additionally, Dionne et al. (2023) reported 2.2% of the Canadian population had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, highlighting the broader context of housing instability in the country. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to address homelessness and the factors leading individuals to seek shelter in encampments.

Focus group interviews with people experiencing homelessness, housed members of the public, and park employees by Pitas et al. (2024) revealed the perceived role of municipal parks departments in managing encampments was largely focused on enforcement and quality control over parks and the recreation experience. Whereas park employees advocated for a more proactive approach to homelessness, people experiencing homelessness and housed members of the community favoured maintaining a limited role for the park department. Positive interactions mirrored those between park employees and other users, and were characterized by an emphasis on the essential humanity of people experiencing homelessness, and the formation of long-term familiarity and relationships. Negative interactions, in contrast, were largely related to enforcement of rules and regulations, and patterns of previous negative interactions. Safety was identified as the top priority by all three user groups, with the public also prioritizing a welcoming and aesthetically pleasing park environment. Key challenges included a lack of resources, and the complexity of the issue of homelessness.

Key findings from the literature:

Agency Roles and Public Perception: Parks and recreation agencies are increasingly involved in addressing homelessness, but their roles are often limited to enforcement and maintaining park quality. There is a call for more proactive approaches, although opinions vary among stakeholders, including park employees, the homeless, and the general public (Pitas et al., 2023; Pitas et al., 2021). Public attitudes toward agency actions supporting the homeless are generally positive, especially among younger, more affluent, and economically conservative individuals (Pitas et al., 2023). Adopting a human rights approach to housing and homeless encampments can effectively promote health and social justice, while ensuring basic determinants of health (Olson & Pauly, 2021).

Management of Public Spaces: The management of parks and public spaces involves balancing the needs of the homeless with those of other park users. Safety and maintaining an aesthetically pleasing environment are top priorities. Challenges include resource limitations and the complexity of homelessness (Pitas et al., 2021). In Ottawa, the spatial regulation of homeless people in parks is characterized by a dispersal approach, aimed at preserving public aesthetics and ceremonial nationalism (Walby & Lippert, 2012).

Recreation and Homelessness: Recreation programs are seen as beneficial for homeless individuals, providing opportunities for social interaction, reconnecting with past interests, and promoting overall wellness. These programs can help improve quality of life and coping skills (Crook et al., 2023; De Vries & Feenstra, 2019). Many shelters across Canada offer recreational activities, which are believed to counteract the demoralizing effects of homelessness and foster community connections (Dawson & Harrington, 1996). A unique pilot project in Markham (ON), called Rec on Wheels (hosted by Hockey Helps the Homeless) featured a mobile van that took recreation activities to the shelters given their reduced capacity to deliver the programming themselves (Hopper, Costas-Bradstreet & Spence, 2024).

The Canadian literature emphasizes the importance of parks and recreation agencies in addressing homelessness, highlighting both the challenges and potential benefits of recreational activities. While there is support for agency actions to assist the homeless, the need for more proactive and resourceful management strategies is evident. Recreation is recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing the well-being and social integration of homeless individuals.

Programs and Resources:

Articles about Homelessness and Recreation:

- Canada: How sports and arts can help prevent youth homelessness. (Tristan Hopper and Kaitlin Schwan, The Conversation, 2019)
- How can sport shift the narrative about homelessness towards prevention? (Jo Metcalfe, Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2024)
- You can change your life through sports' – physical activity interventions to improve the health and well-being of adults experiencing homelessness: a mixed-methods systematic review. (Jo Dawes, Raphael Rogans-Watson, Julie Broderick. British Journal of Sports Medicine, Vol. 58, Issue 8)
- Stringer C, Loosemore M, Moller E, et al. Promoting physical activity in vulnerable adults 'at risk' of homelessness: a randomised controlled trial protocol. BMJ Open 2019;9:e026466. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2018-026466
- Addressing Homelessness in Public Parks. Milo Neild, Jess Rose. Parks and Recreation. NRPA, January 7, 2019
- The Other Side of a Recreation Facility as a Gathering Location. Ontario Recreation Facilities Organization. May 2022

- Working with Unhoused People in Parks: Steps to Take in Your Community. Safe Routes Partnership. 2021
- How can sport, leisure and the physical activity sector support homelessness issues + social housing (Video podcast)

Additional Resources:

- Transforming Lives Through Physical Activity and Sport. How to use physical activity to combat loneliness and social isolation. (Sport England, the National Lottery, Single Homeless Project preventing homelessness transforming lives, n.d.)
- Possessions of Precariously Housed People. Belongings Matter. This report sheds light on the laws and regulations that govern people and their belongings, an issue of significant importance to precariously and unhoused people.

2.4 Theme Two Conclusion

Equity and social responsibility are fundamental pillars in fostering inclusive, accessible, and community-oriented recreation and parks services across Canada. The review highlights that while significant strides have been made toward embedding EDI in programming and policy, gaps remain in dismantling systemic barriers and addressing structural inequities. Indigenous reconciliation in recreation spaces requires ongoing commitment to decolonization, Indigenous-led partnerships, and transformative policy shifts that prioritize Indigenous rights and knowledge. Additionally, the role of recreation spaces in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness underscores the importance of trauma-informed, inclusive design and programming that balances diverse needs. Moving forward, it is essential to adopt comprehensive strategies that address these issues holistically, ensuring recreation and park services remain equitable and socially responsible.

Theme Three: Operational Excellence and Safety

Four key areas are explored within the theme of Operational Excellence and Safety:(1) Delivery Capacity and Workforce – Recruitment, training, and retention of a skilled workforce and volunteer base; (2) Technology in Recreation – Digital solutions and tools for enhanced user experience and operational efficiency; (3) Safety and Safe Sport – Ensuring safe participation, safeguarding against abuse, and building trust; and (4) Surveillance and monitoring.

3.1 Delivery Capacity and Workforce: Recruitment, Training, and Retention

The recreation and parks sector in Canada faces critical workforce challenges, with recruitment and retention as major concerns. Aging demographics and a lack of interest in entry-level roles have strained recruitment pipelines. Other factors, including recreation graduates pursuing careers outside the sector, challenges in retaining skilled staff, limited access to trained practitioners and instructors, and shortages of facility and trail operators, especially in rural and northern communities, have led to a diminished capacity to deliver programs and services. Moreover, findings from Turcotte (2016)indicate a notable decline in volunteerism in Canada, with potential implications for sectors that rely heavily on volunteer contributions.

Training and professional development remain critical for building workforce capacity. Addressing workforce challenges in the recreation and parks sector requires targeted strategies to enhance recruitment, retention, training, and overall workforce wellbeing.

Key findings from the literature:

Retention Strategies: Encouraging a strong identification with the organization and fostering positive attitudes toward the workplace are crucial. Promoting effective communication and hiring a diverse workforce are also essential strategies (Cloutier at al., 2015). These practices help create an inclusive environment that supports employee retention. Ensuring that employees are appropriately skilled for their roles and providing ongoing development and training programs can enhance job satisfaction and retention (Cloutier at al., 2015). Offering competitive salaries and benefits, along with fostering continuous professional development, are critical for retaining skilled professionals.

Volunteer Support: Implementing flexible and open-choice volunteering opportunities can attract more volunteers. Many individuals prefer volunteering with friends and appreciate rewards for their contributions, which can be incorporated into recruitment strategies (Obi et al., 2019). Volunteer managers need resources, time, and support to effectively manage volunteers. Establishing supportive and engaging management practices can lead to better volunteer retention and outcomes(Kappelides et al., 2020).

Workforce Diversity: Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) can foster inclusive workplaces by focusing on employee knowledge, motivation, and opportunities to contribute. It requires leadership involvement and a commitment to dismantling biases (Dandala, 2020). Municipalities also can and do adopt multicultural planning practices to address structural inequalities, which include mainstreaming diversity into public services (Tossutti, 2023). Training programs for employers to recognize and address racism in hiring and promotion processes are crucial (Intungane et al., 2024). Using dynamic models to understand feedback mechanisms in diversity can help identify barriers and opportunities for increasing workforce diversity (O'Brien et al., 2015). Employ targeted recruitment strategies, internships, mentorships, and professional development opportunities to retain diverse talent (Kung et al., 2020).

Canadian publicsector strategies to enhance diversity and inclusion involveimplementing cross- cultural policies, strategic HR management, and inclusive planning practices. Addressing systemic barriers through holistic admissions, training programs, and dynamic models can further promote diversity. These efforts collectively aim to create a more inclusive and representative workforce.

Programs and Resources:

- Recruiting and Retaining Young Adults to the Park and Recreation Workforce. (National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). 2022). This article examines the issues related to recruiting and retraining young adults in the USA.
- Workforce. (Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Association, n.d.). The Outdoor Recreation Workforce Hub has a number of resources and reports related to the outdoor recreation industry. Though US-based, it has many applicable resources and lesssons for Canadian parks and recreation professionals.
- Working in Play: Planning for a Career in the Recreation and Leisure Industry in Canada. (L. Whitehead, Fanshaw College). This open textbook introduces career possibilities in the Recreation and Leisure Industry and defines the industry through a job's perspective lens. An historical review of recreation and leisure in Canada sets the stage and then goes on to include topics such as how to job search, the importance of networking and types of interviews with interview tips for success.
- Recruitment Resources (BC Recreation and Parks Association). This website features current initiatives to support recruitment and retention of staff in recreation, parks and fitness. Another resources that can be accessed is the Careers in Parks. Careers in Recreation webpage.
- Community Compass (Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA). Community Compass is ARPA's workforce initiative that's mission is to raise awareness about career opportunities in the recreation and parks sector, support job seekers by showing pathways to employment, and help the sector foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workforce.
- Explore Post-Secondary Programs in Recreation and Parks (CPRA). This webpage on the CPRA website, features a comprehensive guide that presents a variety of post-secondary programs designed to get future parks and recreation leaders started.

3.1 Technology in Recreation: Digital Solutions and Tools

Digital transformation in recreation has accelerated, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The adoption of online booking systems, virtual programming, and wearable technologies has enhanced operational efficiency and user engagement.

Digital platforms such as recreation management software streamline tasks like registration, scheduling, and customer communication. Virtual and augmented reality technologies are increasingly used in recreation programming, providing immersive experiences for users.

Equity remains a challenge in technology adoption. Broadband access and digital literacy vary across socio-economic groups, with rural and Indigenous communities being more affected (Koch, 2022), thereby likely having implications for online recreation programs. In addition, concerns remain over data security and user privacy (Scassa, 2020). The integration of digital tools and technologies has transformed recreation service delivery, but underscores the need to address equity and privacy challenges to ensure inclusive access and security.

Key findings from the literature:

Operational Efficiency: The application of automation and AI-driven analytics has the potential to significantly enhance resource allocation and decision-making within recreation management. AI can optimize scheduling, predict maintenance needs, and analyze usage patterns to improve service delivery. For instance, AI-driven resource allocation utilizes advanced algorithms and machine learning to optimize how organizations allocate resources like personnel, equipment, and budgets, thereby improving resource utilization, reducing costs, and boosting productivity (Sravanthi et al., 2023).

User Experience: Personalized mobile apps and gamification enhance engagement, particularly among youth and tech-savvy populations. Research indicates that integrating gamified elements increases user motivation and interaction (Sailer et al., 2017).

Digital Divide: Programs must address disparities in digital access to ensure equitable participation. The digital dividesignificantly impacts the gap in consuming leisureamong digital users, with implications for entertainment, leisure, and social inequalities (Ragnedda & Mutsvairo, 2016). This challenge is particularly significant in rural and underserved communities (Koch, 2022).

The use of digital solutions in the management of parks and recreation services has revolutionized operational efficiency and service delivery. Tools such as recreation management software, online booking platforms, and AI-driven analytics have streamlined administrative tasks, optimized resource allocation, and improved customer communication. However, the implementation of these technologies also highlights challenges, including the digital divide, inequitable access to high-speed internet, and concerns about data privacy. Further concerns include an increase in visitors in sensitive areas and off-trail activities (Mangold, et al., 2024). Addressing these barriers will be critical for ensuring that technological advancements contribute to equitable and secure management practices, ultimately enhancing the accessibility and quality of recreation services across diverse communities.

Programs and Resources:

- The Digital Transformation of Parks and Recreation. National Recreation and Parks Association, 2019). This article describes the changing face of the great outdoors as a result of digital technology
- Impacts of technology in outdoor recreation and adventure. (excerpt from Outdoor Adventure Education in Human Kinetics, n.d.). This article discusses the five areas (access and transportation, comfort, safety, communication, information) in which technology has played a significant role in outdoor recreation and adventure and their pros and cons and how they have affected public policy.
- Tech Trends in Parks and Recreation: 2023 and beyond. (CivicPlus, 2023). This article shares the top trends (for 2024) as learned at the 2023 NRPA conference and the evolution of technology that is critical to the sector's ongoing engagement and relevancy (note that this article does focus on product promotion).
- Parks Using Technology to Engage and Inspire. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2017)

- This article explores the extent to which technology belongs in a park.
- Leveraging Technology to Improve Community Engagement and Accessibility in Parks and Recreation Programs. (Rec Desk, n.d.). This article describes the tools offered by technology to improve community engagement and make programs more accessible to a broader audience. This site features additional articles on the topic.
- Using Gamification to increase visitors and outdoor engagement. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2024. This blog/story describes the success of a digital scavenger hunt in a Conservation District.
- Gaming and gamification in nature. (Three Rivers Park District, 2019). There is overlap between those interested in nature and gaming and connecting to nature through technology, such as Pokémon GO, Harry Potter: Wizards Unite, iNaturalist, Merlin Bird ID, and others, can have its benefits according to the author.

3.3 Safety and Safe Sport: Ensuring Safe Participation

Safety in parks and recreation has emerged as a priority, particularly in the context of safe sport. A 2023 survey revealed that 20% of Canadians aged 15 and older reported experiencing or witnessing inappropriate behaviours, such as threats or harassment, in community sports over the past five years (Statistics Canada, 2024b). In December 2023, the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, announced the creation of the Future of Sport in Canada Commission. This independent body was tasked with conducting a forward-looking review of Canada's sport system to ensure all participants enjoy a safe, inclusive, and welcoming sport experience.

The Safe Sport Program launched by Sport Canada (Government of Canada, 2024) addresses abuse, harassment, and discrimination in sport settings. Additionally, community-based interventions, including youth mentorship and peer-support programs, have shown promise in reducing risks associated with unsafe recreational activities (Tolan et al., 2014). Ensuring safety in parks and recreation, particularly in sport settings, has gained increasing importance as communities seek to create environments that prioritize both physical and psychological wellbeing. Continued efforts are needed to foster inclusivity, implement safeguarding practices, and address any barriers to equitable participation.

Key findings from the literature:

Policy Alignment: Recent studies have highlighted that uniform adoption of codes of conduct fosters greater confidence among participants, officials, and communities, further strengthening the integrity of the sport environment (De Waegeneer et al., 2017).

Training and Education: Staff and volunteer training in recognizing and addressing abuse is essential for effective safeguarding. Comprehensive, ongoing education ensures that individuals in leadership roles are equipped to respond appropriately to concerns, reducing incidents of abuse and improving overall safety (Adriaens et al., 2024). Furthermore, organizations are beginning to integrate more robust training on recognizing subtle forms of psychological abuse, such as bullying or emotional manipulation, which are often harder to detect but equally harmful (Shaikh et al., 2021).

Inclusive Practices: Safe spaces for marginalized groups require targeted efforts to address barriers and stigma (Powers et al., 2020). Research has shown that creating an inclusive environment goes beyond policy, requiring deliberate action such as safe space protocols, leadership that reflects diversity, and a commitment to promoting psychological safety for all participants (Vella et al., 2024). Additionally, recent studies underscore the importance of addressing intersectionality when designing inclusive programs, ensuring that individuals from multiple marginalized groups are specifically considered (Bi, 2011).

Overall, the literature emphasizes the importance of a multifaceted approach to ensuring safety in recreation spaces, for everyone. This means aligning policies, training staff adequately, and creating inclusive environments that actively engage and support all participants, particularly those from marginalized groups. The implementation of these practices is essential for fostering trust, enhancing participation, and ensuring the long-term success of safe sport initiatives.

Programs and Resources:

- Code of Conduct, City of Burlington. The City of Burlington is committed to providing safe, comfortable and enjoyable recreation spaces for everyone. Its Code of Conduct for city spaces has standards for each type of recreation facility and includes our Public Conduct Policy.
- Creating Safe Spaces in Recreational Sport: A Mental Health Perspective. (J. Stcliffe (on SIRC), 2024). An overview of the role of sport and recreation in ensuring safe spaces.
- I·SPARC's Commitment Statement to Safe Participation. The Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (I·SPARC) is committed to creating, promoting and maintaining positive, inclusive, safe and respectful sport, physical activity, recreation, and wellness environments for all participants, that are free from all forms of maltreatment, prejudice and discrimination. Improving the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples across BC can only be achieved by proactively taking measures to prevent harm, to respond appropriately when incidents do occur, and build strong communities together.

3.4 Evaluation and Monitoring in Parks and Recreation

Evaluation and monitoring have become critical components of public sector management, including recreation and parks, to ensure accountability, transparency, and the efficient use of resources. Undoubtedly, data can play an important role in creating conditions that improve public services (OECD, 2019). In Canada, municipal governments and public sector organizations increasingly rely on evidence-informed decision-making to assess program effectiveness, measurecommunity impact, and justify publicinvestments. Evaluation practices in recreation and parks have traditionally focused on measuring participation rates, financial performance, and program satisfaction. However, the scope has broadened to include social, environmental, and health impacts, reflecting a shift toward more holistic evaluations.

Despite this progress, challenges persist. First, municipalities often face financial and staffing limitations that hinder comprehensive evaluation efforts (Januszkiewicz, 2016). Second, many public sector employees continue to lack training in advanced evaluation methodologies (McDavid & Huse, 2007). Third, the availability of consistent, high-quality data remains a barrier, particularly in smaller municipalities and rural areas. This review highlights the current state of evaluation and monitoring in the recreation and parks sector, exploring key advancements, challenges, and opportunities since 2015.

Key findings from the literature:

Performance-Based Approaches: Municipalities are adopting performance-based management frameworks that incorporate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for parks and recreation services. Municipal performance evaluation improves government responsiveness, service efficiency, and strengthens government departments' sense of responsibility, fostering closeness with grassroots organizations and the public (Yang& Yang, 2020).

Outcome Evaluation: The emphasis has shifted from outputs (e.g., number of participants) to outcomes (e.g., improved physical health), aligning with broader public goals and benefits (Dal Mas et al., 2019).

Equity-Focused Evaluation: Incorporating equity metrics, such as access for marginalized populations, has become a priority in light of Canada's growing diversity (Tossutti, 2023).

Technology-Driven Monitoring: Recreation management software is being used to track participation, manage reservations, and generate real-time analytics on program performance. Additionally, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are increasingly utilized to monitor park usage, assess accessibility, and identify gaps in service delivery (Azzam & Robinson, 2013). Some municipalities are even piloting wearables to collect data (Trenholm & Lawrence, 2018).

Incorporating Stakeholder Engagement: Evaluation practices increasingly emphasize community input to ensure programs align with local needs. Participatory evaluation models involve stakeholders in setting evaluation priorities, designing metrics, and interpreting findings, fostering greater transparency and accountability (Vitálišová et al., 2021).

Partnering with Universities: Community-university partnerships can effectively support evaluation capacity building in community-based organizations, leading to improved practice and stakeholder communication (Suiter et al., 2020).

Evaluation and monitoring are indispensable for ensuring accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in Canada's recreation and parks sector. The growing adoption of performance-based approaches, equity-focused evaluations, and advanced technologies underscores the sector's commitment to aligning its practices with broader public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity goals. However, significant challenges, including resource limitations, inconsistent data quality, and inadequate training in evaluation methodologies, hinder the sector's ability to fully realize the benefits of evidence-informed decision-making. By leveraging partnerships, integrating technology, and prioritizing community engagement, recreation and parks organizations can enhance their capacity to evaluate programs holistically, ensuring equitable and efficient service delivery.

Programs and Resources:

- Recreational Needs Assessments – How do they work for a community? (Atlwest Communications, 2022). This blog discusses the role of recreational needs assessments as one component to planning for recreation and for the purposes of guiding resource allocations. The Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA) and the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) are working together to develop indicators for the purposes of developing an evaluation strategy and guiding the development of SPRA's strategic plan.
- Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI). CFLRI, established in 1980, is a national research organization whose mandate is to monitor physical activity and sport participation of Canadians. As the only organization in Canada uniquely focused on surveillance and monitoring of physical activity, sport and recreation, the CFLRI provides credible data and works with policy- and decision-makers, practitioners and researchers to translate and exchange knowledge that informs and affects evidence-based policy and practice across Canada. The Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA) is working with CFLRI to help guide the evaluation and outcome measurement of their strategic plan.

3.5 Theme Three Conclusion

In summary, Theme Three underscores the critical importance of operational excellence and safety in the recreation and parks sector. Addressing workforce challenges, harnessing the potential of digital technologies, ensuring safety for all participants, and considering the ethical implications of surveillance are pivotal to the growth and inclusivity. As the recreation landscape continues to evolve, the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance workforce capacity, improve user engagement, safeguard participants, and balance safety with privacy concerns becomes increasingly evident. The following recommendations for updating the national framework reflect these priorities and provide actionable steps to strengthen the sector in the face of emerging challenges and opportunities.

4.1 Climate Adaption in Recreation Spaces

Climate change is significantly impacting Canada's environment, economy, and society. The Government of Canada's "Canada in a Changing Climate: Synthesis Report" emphasizes that climate change is affecting all regions, with notable impacts on infrastructure, human health, and ecosystems. Its findings underscore the pressing need for comprehensive adaptation and mitigation strategies to address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change in Canada. The impacts of climate change have implications for recreation facilities and parks. Extreme weather events, such as floods, heatwaves, and wildfires, have intensified, placing significant pressure on public spaces and recreation infrastructure. Municipal recreation departments recognize the need to adapt to these changes by implementing strategies to mitigate risks, protect natural spaces, and promote environmental sustainability.

Nature-based strategies show promise in managing climate change impacts in cities (Hobbie & Grimm, 2020). In addition, green infrastructure, such as green roofs and urban forests, plays a pivotal role in creating resilient recreation and park spaces that help manage urban heat islands and reduce the risk of flooding. At the same time, municipalities are exploring policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable transportation options, such as biking and scooters, to reduce the carbon footprint.

Key findings from the literature:

Green Infrastructure: Research demonstrates that green infrastructure offers substantial environmental, economic, and social benefits. Urban forests, for instance, not only provide cooling benefits, but also enhance air quality and support biodiversity (Duinker et al., 2015).

Balancing Conservation and Recreation: Park managers need to find a balance between ecological integrity and visitor use in a way that ensures commercialized tourism development is limited, educational material is prioritized, and ecological integrity is maintained (Weber et al., 2019).

Community Engagement: Involving the community in sustainability initiatives can strengthen environmental stewardship and foster a deeper sense of connection to natural spaces. Multi-stakeholder processes must formally feed into decision-making forums, or they risk being viewed as irrelevant by policy-makers and stakeholders (Fraser et al., 2006).

As the effects of climate change continue to unfold, parks and recreation services must prioritize climate resilience by incorporating green infrastructure, sustainable planning practices, and community-based environmental initiatives.

Programs and Resources:

- Parks as a solution to climate change. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2019). This article provides a strategies to create healthy, prepared communities with climate-smart parks.

- Recreation. (Climate Change Response Framework, 2024. The Climate Change Response Framework is a collaborative, cross-boundary approach among scientists, managers, and landowners to incorporate climate change considerations into natural resource management. The Framework is a joint product of the USDA Northern Forests Climate Hub and the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, a collaborative, multi-institutional partnership led by the USDA Forest Service and comprised of federal, forest sector, conservation, higher education, and tribal organizations. The Climate Change Response Framework is a collaborative, cross-boundary approach among scientists, managers, and landowners to incorporate climate change considerations into natural resource management. The purpose of the resource is to help land managers anticipate climate change impacts and identify adaptation actions. Currently Adaptation Strategies and Approaches for outdoor recreation infrastructure and activities are being created.
- Climate change and recreation. Story Series. (Outdoor Recreation Council of BC, 2022). This series is made up of a number of articles including (1) A warming planet will change how we play (2) Impacts to recreation infrastructure; (3) Why Biodiversity Matters; (4) What You Can Do; (5) When will you go out in the woods today?. How Changing Climate will Impact Recreation and Parks. (SPRA, 2022). This article discusses climate impacts as well as solutions/strategies that can be implemented. Further, there are a number of additional resources related to this topic.
- Sports at Risk: Addressing Climate Change in the Canadian Sport Sector. (The Sport Ecology Group, 2021). This article outlines the ways in which sport is vulnerable to climate change and provides actions that the sector can take to deal with the implications.
- The Sport Ecology Group. The Sport Ecology Group is a community of academics seeking to share their research with a broader audience than traditional academic journals will allow. Their mission is to produce high-quality research in sport ecology, catalyze industry-academy knowledge exchange, raise public awareness of sport ecology-related topics, and create opportunities for students to learn and grow as professionals.

- On Thin Ice: Winter Sports and Climate Change. David Suzuki Foundation. This report examines how our response to climate change, including choices to reduce carbon dioxide (fossil fuel-based) emissions and implement adaptive measures, will ultimately affect the future of winter sports and the role they play as part of Canada's identity, natural heritage, and economy. The report concludes with recommendations about how winter sports stakeholders can take action on climate change and begin to adapt to the changes in Canadian winters already underway.
- Resilient Parks, Resilient City. (Park People, 2017). This report is described as a Park People Park Solutions Brief and discusses the role of green infrastructure and parks in creating more climate adaptive cities.
- Climate Resilient Parks. NRPA. This webpage contains a number of resources, frameworks and tools related to green parks and sustainability.
- Advancing sustainable cities: The role of resilient parks in the fight against climate change. (Exp., 2024). This work highlights work being done in Montreal and Quebec.
- Eight Climate-Resilient Canadian Park Projects. Park People, 2021. The Canadian City Parks Report contains a series of stories on climate resilience, natural restoration, and parks. It features stories addressing climate resilience through an environmental justice lens, the power of partnership-based projects, the ways parks help with climate change mitigation and adaptation, and how climate change is impacting park planning and maintenance.
- The Power of Parks to Address Climate Change: A Special Report. (Trust for Public Land. 2022). This report outlines climate practices and case studies.
- National Active Transportation Strategy 2021-2026. Government of Canada. The Strategy, In Motion, is Canada's first strategy to promote the construction and use of pathways, trails and cycling lanes.
- Canadian Health Association for Sustainability & Equity (CHASE). CHASE is a Canadian non-profit organization that works to incubate changes needed to transform our society. They collaborate with non-profit organizations, public health units, municipalities and other organizations to promote innovative policies, programs and technologies that help create healthier and more sustainable communities. CHASE is dedicated to research, policy development and promotion.

- <u>Cycling and walking can help reduce physical inactivity and air pollution, save lives and mitigate climate change</u>. (World Health Organization, 2022). The article describes how cycling and walking help reduce air pollution (and the deaths associated with it) and shows that investments in policies that promote safe cycling and walking can play a crucial role in shaping health, mitigating climate change and improving the environment, according to a new WHO publication.

4.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Recreation

Recreation has an essential role to play in advancing the SDGs, which aim to promote inclusive, sustainable, and equitable development globally. Spence et al. (2024) highlights the synergies between Canada's national strategies for sport, physical activity, and recreation (SPAR) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They suggest that integrating SPAR strategies with SDG indicators could enhance the effectiveness of both, particularly in areas like health, gender equality, climate action, and sustainable communities. For recreation and parks providers, aligning efforts with the SDGs could improve outcomes related to public health, environmental sustainability, and community well-being, while fostering more coordinated policy development. In Canada, recreation and parks align closely with SDGs such as (but are not limited to) SDG 3 (Good Healthand Wellbeing), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) Recreation facilities and parks provide essential opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and mentalhealth support, contributing directly to healthoutcomes. As the Canadian public becomes more focused on sustainability and wellbeing, recreation services are increasingly viewed as essential to fostering resilient, healthy communities.

Research on recreation and sustainability in Canada has highlighted the significant role that public parks and green spaces play in enhancing quality of life and achieving environmental sustainability goals. Recreation, particularly outdoor activities, is a direct means of engaging the public in climate action and environmental stewardship.

The SDGs also emphasize the need for inclusive and equitable access to green spaces. In Canada, disparities in access to recreational facilities are often linked to socio-economic and geographic factors. Rural communities, for example, often lack adequate recreational spaces, which can hinder health and wellbeing (Oncescu& Robertson, 2010). Therefore, integrating the SDGs into recreation planning involves addressing these inequities, ensuring that all communities—regardless of income, location, or background—can access green spaces and recreational opportunities that promote both health and sustainability.

Key findings from the literature:

Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3): Research consistently shows that access to recreational opportunities improves physical health through regular exercise, enhances mental health by reducing stress, and promotes overall well-being (Zulyniak et al., 2020). For instance, outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, and nature-based recreation are linked to improved cardiovascular health and reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Hartig et al., 2014). Parks and recreation services are essential to achieving these health outcomes, especially in urban areas where access to natural spaces may be limited.

Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11): Urban parks and recreation services are important amenities associated with the 15-minute City concept, an idea that promotes sustainability by planning neighbourhoods with amenities within a 15-minute walk of residents' homes (Moreno et al., 2021). The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) highlights that urban natural infrastructure, such as trees and green roofs, can remove pollutants like carbon monoxide and ground-level ozone from the air, while also absorbing rainwater to reduce pressure on stormwater systems. Additionally, green roofs can lower energy consumption by providing insulation and cooling, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Restoring wetlands in parks aids in stormwater management by absorbing excess rainfall and filtering pollutants. Connecting parks and green spaces creates ecological corridors that promote biodiversity and further mitigate urban heat islands. Green spaces, when designed inclusively, offer opportunities for marginalized communities to connect with nature and each other, fostering a sense of belonging and wellbeing (Rigolon et al., 2020).

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Climate Action (SDG 13): Recreation and park services engage communities in climate action by raising awareness, encouraging sustainable practices, and fostering environmental stewardship. Outdoor recreation activities often provide hands-on learning experiences related to biodiversity conservation, sustainability, and climate resilience (Winter et al., 2019).

Equity and Access to Recreation: Achieving the SDGs requires addressing equity, ensuring that all individuals have access to the benefits of parks and recreation, regardless of their socio-economic background. Disparities in access to green spaces are evident across Canada, however. Residential greenness in urban Canada is lower among immigrants, visible minorities, lower-income households, and tenants, potentially contributing to health inequities (Pinault et al., 2021). Interestingly, green spaces show stronger protective effects on physical health for lower-income and racially/ethnically minority individuals, potentially advancing health equity (Rigolon et al., 2021). Addressing these disparities can help reduce health inequities and promote social inclusion, contributing to the achievement of multiple SDGs.

Programs and Resources:

- 17 Sustainable Development Goals in One Park. (One planet network, 2021). This press release announces a colorful new public recreation park that is under construction in Stockholm, Sweden. The aim is to raise awareness for Agenda 2030 and the UN's 17 SDGs.
- Enhancing the Contribution of sport to the Sustainable Development Goals. (Commonwealth Secretariat. 2017). This guide builds on previous Commonwealth publications related to sport and sustainable development to recommend evidenced and balanced policy options to support the effective and cost-efficient contribution of sport towards six SDGs.

These findings underscore the integral role that recreation and parks play in achieving the SDGs, not just as spaces for physical and social activities, but as key contributors to health, sustainability, and equity. By focusing on accessibility, environmental stewardship, and community engagement, recreation services can help advance a wide range of global and local sustainability goals.

4.3 Theme Four Conclusion

The theme of Resilience and Sustainability underscores the importance of addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges to ensure the long-term viability of parks and recreation services in Canada. Climate change adaptation, sustainable infrastructure planning, fostering community resilience, and developing financial sustainability strategies are essential components of a resilient recreation system. Moving forward, parks and recreation departments must prioritize these areas, implementing strategies that ensure public spaces are adaptable, inclusive, and financially secure.

Theme Five: Social Infrastructure for Recreation

Three key areas are explored within the theme of SocialInfrastructure for Recreation: (1) Indoor Spaces and Facilities – Accessibility, modernization, and inclusivity in design; (2) Outdoor/Nature-Based Spaces– Parks, trails, and green spaces that promoteconnection to nature; and (3) Community Design and Placemaking – Creating inclusive, adaptable, and attractive spaces for gathering and recreation.

5.1 Indoor Spaces and Facilities: Accessibility, Modernization, and Inclusivity in Design

Indoor recreational spaces, such as community centres, gyms, and swimming pools, play a vital role in fostering physical activity, social interaction, and community well-being. The design and accessibility of these facilities significantly influence their effectiveness as social infrastructure, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of diverse communities.

Research underscores the importance of modernizing aging recreational facilities to align with contemporary standards and user expectations. Enacted in 2019, the Accessible Canada Act aims to create a barrier-free Canada by 2040. It mandates federally regulated entities to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers in various domains, including the built environment. Resultant investments in universal design—including ramps, elevators, and sensory-friendly spaces—have significantly enhanced the inclusivity of public facilities. Such improvements ensure that Canadians with disabilities can access and enjoy recreation services without barriers.

Equally important are designs that prioritize cultural inclusivity, such as spaces for intergenerational activities and culturally specific sports, which help serve increasingly diverse populations.

In addition to accessibility, technological advancements are driving the modernization of indoor recreational facilities. Innovations such as smart lighting, energy-efficient HVAC systems, and user-friendly digital booking platforms enhance operational efficiency, sustainability, and overall user experience. These technologies reflect a growing need for facilities to be both environmentally responsible and adaptable to emerging trends.

As communities continue to prioritize recreational spaces, achieving modern, inclusive, and sustainable indoor facilities requires a multifaceted approach that integrates thoughtful design, technological innovation, and strategic partnerships. This comprehensive perspective ensures that recreational infrastructure remains effective and relevant to the people it serves.

Key findings from the literature:

Universal Design and Accessibility Innovations: Universal design in indoor spaces ensures accessibility for both disabled and abled users, reducing human error, increasing efficiency, and improving safety (Chuah & Bahauddin, 2022). Modernization and Sustainability: Green building strategies, such as energy performance optimization and innovative architectural designs, are key to achieving higher LEED certification levels for recreational facilities (Kim et al., 2017).

Emerging Technologies in Indoor Facilities: Virtual reality technology can improve the quality of indoor space design and environmental art design, offering new ideas and methods for enhancing indoor space performance Yuan et al., 2021).

Partnerships and Collaborative Models: Partnerships with community organizations can assist in gaining public support for a referendum to fund cultural, recreation, and sports facilities, despite a substantial increase in property taxes (Carey & Mason, 2014). In addition, new arenas in small- to mid-sized cities can be leveraged as assets for achieving broader development goals through event hosting, with key stakeholders focusing on opportunities, benefits, competitiveness, partnerships, and collaboration (Mason et al., 2018).

Programs and Resources:

- Using Universal Design to Embrace Difference in Sport Planning. (Inclusive Sport Design, 2019). This (Australian-based) website is dedicated to improving accessibility, equality and diversity in sports. Inclusive Sport Design (ISD) offers services to help SPAR organizations remove barriers, create opportunities and make inclusion part of the way in which clubs, recreation centres and sport organizations reflect a community's diversity.
- Universal Design: Parks and Plazas. (American Society of Landscape Architects, ASLA). This article makes the case for why and how universally designed parks and plazas benefit communities. They make the case that by designing with people with disabilities and older adults, landscape architects and designers can create spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for all. The ASLA also has similar articles related to Neighbourhoods and Playgrounds.
- Universal Design. (Sport and Recreation Victoria (AU). Sport and Recreation Victoria is committed to building a thriving inclusive and connected sport and active recreation sector. The information on this web page defines universal design and seven universal design principles. The National Recreation and Parks Association (2022) also describes the seven universal design principles: Principles of Inclusive Playground Design.
- Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails. (US Forest Service, US Dept. of Agriculture, n.d.). This article describes the fundamentals of outdoor recreation and trails accessibility.
- Universal Design. (Everybody Moves Resource Hub). The EverybodyMoves Hub is a place for front-line staff, programmers, trainers, coaches and organizational leaders to find practical, useful resources and examples on how to make physical activity more inclusive for more of the community. This web page provides links to a number of resources that address Universal Design.
- Universal Change Rooms – Canada Games Centre, Halifax, NS. This is an example of one recreation centre that has employed universal design principles. The Canada Games Centre in the Yukon has also made universal design renovations.
- Meeting Modern Demands: Transforming Recreational Facility Design. (Little Architect Firm, 2023). The article outlines current trends in design including multi-generational recreation facilities, wellness and well-being facilities for higher education, and sports tourism facilities.

- <u>Sustainability in My Recreation Facilities – Are You Serious</u>? (Tim Hanna, SPRA, 2019). The article describes what sustainability is and how these practices apply to recreation facilities.
- <u>Sustainability in Recreation and Parks: Building a Better Future</u>. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2024). The article examines the environmental impact of daily-used tools and activities and describes how to put sustainable practices in action.
- <u>Kitchener building greenest rec facility in Canada</u>. Daily Commercial News by ConstructConnect, 2024). This news article describes a new multi-purpose indoor recreation facility being build in Kitchener, ON.
- <u>Ecological Integrity</u>. (Ontario Parks, n.d.). The webpage provides information related to protection, ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation, education, and research. <u>Eco-Friendly Parks: 8 Best Practices and 7 Great Examples Worldwide</u>. (ClimateSort, 2025). This article presents some environmentally friendly practices to consider and where to find green parks worldwide.
- <u>Sustainable Recreation Site Design Guide</u>. US Dept. of Agriculture. Forest Service. April 2024. The "Sustainable Recreation Site Design Guide" (SRSDG) is a technical guidebook that describes the best practices and processes for implementing sustainable recreation design into U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service recreation projects at the site scale. The SRSDG helps field staff with planning and designs for new construction and for reconstruction of existing recreation facilities and sites, while also considering the three spheres of sustainability—social, environmental, and economic. The SRSDG offers the tools, examples, and context necessary to guide Forest Service staff in their efforts to develop a sustainable recreation future
- <u>Ultimate Guide: Sustainable Recreation</u>. (Successfully Sustainable, n.d.). This article, and others on the website, are geared more to individuals to educated them about how to prepare for a sustainable outdoor adventure.
- <u>The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2017: Designing Healthy Living</u> (Government of Canada, 2017. In her 2017 report, the Chief Public Health Officer focuses on how to design healthy communities because of the impact that the built environment has on people living in Canada to live healthier lives.

- Dialog Architects. Visit this website to see the work they are doing in recreation facilities. Further, they increasingly focus on designing communities that are welcoming, sustainable, and comfortable for their occupants. One important contribution, that demonstrates the link between design and wellbeing is the report, in partnership with the Conference Board of Canada: <u>Community Wellbeing: A Framework for the Design Professions</u>, and the free <u>Community Wellbeing Framework report</u>.

5.1 Outdoor/Nature-Based Spaces: Parks, Trails, and Green Spaces That Promote Connection to Nature

Outdoor recreational spaces, including parks, trails, and natural reserves, are critical components of social infrastructure. These spaces not only provide opportunities for physical activity and leisure but also promote mental health by fostering a connection to nature. They serve as vital community assets that support public health, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

In Canada, the benefits of outdoor recreational spaces are widely recognized. Studies have shown that access to urban green spaces can reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall health (Kardan et al., 2015). Parks and trails act as gathering points for diverse groups, encouraging social interaction, promoting social cohesion, and helping reduce social isolation.

Innovative designs are transforming outdoor spaces into multifunctional, inclusive environments. Natural playgrounds and eco-friendly trails are becoming increasingly popular, as they enhance the aesthetic and environmental value of parks while providing accessible spaces for all ages and abilities. Moreover, efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the planning, design, and management of parks and green spaces reflect Canada's commitment to reconciliation and cultural inclusion. These initiatives foster a deeper appreciation for Indigenous knowledge systems, strengthening both cultural connections and ecological stewardship.

The growing emphasis on sustainability has also led to emerging trends, such as smart park technologies, rewilding efforts, and temporary green spaces, which offer innovative ways to adapt outdoor recreational infrastructure to evolving community and environmental needs. These trends align with broader goals of improving the quality of life, increasing biodiversity, and fostering resilience to climate change.

Key findings from the literature:

Biophilic Design in Public Spaces: Biophilic design promotes human connection with nature, fostering emotional attachment and responsibility for both human and natural communities (Cabanek et al., 2020; Richardson & Butler,2022). It can improve health and quality of life while addressing climate change and strengthening a sense of place (Andreucci et al., 2021). Additionally, biophilic design in green open spaces has been shown to improve children's physical and mental health and enhance resilience to pandemics and other diseases (Russo & Andreucci, 2023).

Digital Integration and Smart Parks: The integration of smart technologies is improving urban parks by enhancing sustainability, user experience, and environmental management. Smart parks incorporate features such as real-time monitoring, energy-efficient lighting, and app-based amenities to improve safety, accessibility, and visitor engagement (Turna & Bhandari, 2023; Elnahas & Botros, 2022). The City of Vaughan launched a pilot project in 2022 that created new and innovative ways to enhance the delivery of service excellence to residents. It is able to access amenity and facility bookings, report a problem such as litter and request services using a QR code (see resource section below).

Rewilding and Biodiversity-Focused Design: Rewilding and regreening in cities can strengthen urban resilience and slow biodiversity decline, contributing to urban wellbeing and quality of life (Lehmann, 2021). Rewilding the Detroit, Michigan, USA-Windsor, Ontario, Canada metropolitan area, for example, has increased biodiversity and restored natural ecosystem processes, fostering personal attachment to the environment and inspiring stewardship ethic (Hartig, 2023).

Temporary and Pop-Up Green Spaces: Green placemaking and green-planning approaches can transform temporary spaces into permanent places by introducing green initiatives like city trees, green roofs, and green graffiti (Cilliers et al., 2015), offering innovative ways to address limited access to recreational opportunities in dense urban areas. In addition, temporary urban pop-up parks can promote physical activity and attract people to visit downtown business districts, potentially solving limited access to public physical activity recreation spaces in urban areas (Salvo et al., 2017).

Programs and Resources:

- <u>Biophilic Design: How to Grow Urban Spaces with Nature</u>. (Citygreen, 2021)
- This article describes how biophilic design has been gaining interest within the construction and urban planning industries and how incorporating nature into buildings and public spaces helps promote people's health and wellbeing, as well as creates spaces with sustainability built-in.
- <u>Vaughan's SmartParks connects residents with city services on the go</u>. (Municipal World, 2022)
- The article describes the Town of Vaughan's pilot project and argues that tecchology can facilitate access to information, provide convenience, and ensure the welfare of citizens, tourists, and other stakeholders.
- § <u>Pop-up Parks in Urban BC: Temporary Green Spaces</u>. (Island Earth landscape Services. Ltd., n.d.)
- The article describes how temporary green spaces transform underutilized urban areas into vibrant, community-focused environments. In this blog, the writers explore the definition and purpose of pop-up parks, their benefits for urban commercial regions, real-world examples in British Columbia, how they are implemented, the potential challenges, and future trends.
- § <u>Pop-Up Urbanism and Tactical Urbanism: Temporary Projects to Engage Communities and Test Ideas</u>. (Healthy Sustainable Communities, 2024)
- Pop-Up Urbanism and Tactical Urbanism are transformative approaches that leverage temporary projects to engage communities and test innovative ideas in urban environments. These dynamic practices are reshaping cities, enhancing public spaces, and fostering community involvement. This article delves into the concepts of Pop-Up Urbanism and Tactical Urbanism, their significance, and examples of successful initiatives that have made a lasting impact.
- § <u>8 Examples of Portable Parks around the world</u>. (Rethinking the Future, n.d.)
- Due to minimal space available to accommodate extensive parks, designers, town planners, and landscape architects came up with creative and feasible solutions- Portable parks or Pop-Up Parks. These parks are an attempt to restore some semblance of community and recreation in dense and dead sections of the city. They are often temporary, built with modular elements that are easy to install and dismantle. Listed in this article are eight design ideas for Portable and Pop-Up Parks.

- Places and Spaces: Kitchener's park and open space strategy. (Engage Kitchener, n.d.). This website has all the information related to the work the City of Kitchener is doing to animate places and spaces.
- <u>Parklets – Your Guide to Creating a Pop-up Park on Your Street</u>. (Our Place, n.d.). This guide provides community leaders with tips and hints about how to create their own parklet.
- <u>Popup Parks Reveal the Nature of Cities</u>. (The nature of cities, n.d.). This essay explores the increasing recognition of the importance of green spaces and biodiversity that cities can provide, the strong call for an effective evidence-base that will contribute to improved outcomes for people and nature, and the need to incorporate designed experiments into current investments in pop-up parks in order to address critical knowledge gaps.

5.1 Community Design and Placemaking: Creating Inclusive, Adaptable, and Attractive Spaces for Gathering and Recreation

Placemaking is a collaborative approach to designing public spaces that prioritize community needs, values, and identities. In the context of recreation, placemaking fosters the creation of vibrant, inclusive, and adaptable spaces that encourage people to gather and engage in leisure activities.

Canadian municipalities have increasingly embraced placemaking initiatives to enhance social infrastructure. Creative placemaking strategies can promote inclusive and sustainable urban landscapes by fostering social integration in open urban spaces (Duconseille & Saner, 2020). These initiatives not only improve the aesthetic and functional qualities of public spaces but also strengthen community bonds by providing venues for events, performances, and informal gatherings.

Adaptable designs—such as multi-use sports courts, outdoor seating areas, and seasonal spaces for ice skating or markets—are particularly valuable in maximizing the utility of social

infrastructure. Flexibility in design ensures spaces can evolve alongside changing community needs and demographics. However, ensuring these spaces remain accessible to all, including marginalized and underserved populations, remains both a challenge and a priority.

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To better meet diverse community needs, placemaking strategies increasingly emphasize inclusive design principles, equitable programming, and continuous engagement processes that ensure public spaces remain dynamic and responsive.

Key findings from the literature:

Animating public spaces: Animating public spaces through festivals, events, programmed activities, or pop-up leisure can transform urban landscapes and imbue them with collective meaning, highlighting the complexity of place meanings and values (Glover, 2015). However, it can both transform urban life and potentially create discriminatory outcomes, there in highlighting the complexity of these efforts (Glover, 2019).

Continuous placemaking: Programming of public space enables continuous involvement throughout the lifespan of a space by facilitating the ongoing alteration of places to better meet the needs of community members, usually by community members themselves (Silberberg et al., 2013).

Designing and Programming for Social Connection: Public spaces with diverse design approaches can promote cross-cultural encounters and social cohesion in diverse urban contexts (Aelbrecht & Stevens, 2023). Dynamic edges formed by moveable furniture and the fixed edge of a visual landmark consistently attract more social interaction and group activities in outdoor public spaces (Loo & Fan, 2023). Optimal design of community public spaces can increase residents' social capital and sense of life happiness by focusing on diversification, humanization, suitability, and inclusiveness (Guan & Wang, 2023).

Defensive placemaking: Defensive architecture—features of the built environment designed to deter certain individuals (unhoused individuals, skateboarders) and behaviours (e.g., loitering, squatting) in public space— are increasingly being used by local authorities (Chellew, 2019), including recreation and parks. Ethical considerations regarding its usage ought to be adopted to avoid exclusivity in public spaces.

Placemaking with diverse populations: Municipal planning authorities need to better understand and encourage community engagement and placemaking in ethnic suburbs to better support immigrant and racialized communities and build inclusive communities (Zhuang, 2021). Post-COVID, built environment interventions can promote healthequity by addressing structural determinants of health and rethinking community engagement processes through equity-based placemaking (Hassen, 2022).

Indigenizing space: Indigenous cultures are being infused into public spaces in Canadian cities, such as Ottawa, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, but more inclusive placemaking is needed to increase the visibility of Indigenous cultures in the built environment (Nejad & Walker, 2018).

Working together: By focusing on values such as partnership, inclusivity, creativity, accessibility, and intentionality, public spaces can "flip the script" and embrace people and behaviours regarded as so-called nuisances (e.g., skateboarding) by seeking to engage, as opposed to deter (Glover et al., 2022).

Programs and Resources:

- Community Resilience Through Parks. Park People. 2021. This article addresses the ways in which we can learn from the pandemic to strengthen parks as social infrastructure in times of crisis
- Social Cohesion through Sport. (Social Cohesion Hub, n.d. The goal of the project is to promote peace and security. Through Sport for Development, the project promotes tolerance, inclusion reconciliation, and the agreement of and compliance with rules. Conflict management and violence prevention are further key issues that will help to achieve social cohesion, particularly in relation to host communities in the context of displacement and migration.

- <u>Building Resilience in Your Community</u>. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2021). This article outlines out how parks serve an important societal function with physical and mental health benefits that build resilience. Further, learn more about the <u>Community Resilience Initiative</u>.
- <u>Recreation's Role in Community Resiliency</u>. Jacquelyn Oncescu, University of Manitoba. This slide presentation provides an overview of what community resilience is, why it's important and the role of recreation. It includes case studies and best practices.
- <u>Trails as Resilient Infrastructure. Guidebook 2023</u>. US Department of Transportation. Federal Highway Administration. This guidebook ("the Guide") demonstrates how trails are part of resilient transportation infrastructure, how trails can be planned and designed to be resilient and sustainable, and how trails have a role in emergency planning and response. Trails of all kinds are places for recreation, exercise, and time outside., are used for active transportation (to work, leisure, etc.) and during events and emergencies. Trails are also a crucial tool for making communities more resilient in the face of climate change and other emergencies.
- <u>Activate Your Neighbourhood</u> (CPRA, 2023). This web-based tactical guide helps community members and leaders reimagine, rethink and repurpose spaces in neighbourhoods to support and encourage physical activity and social connections.
- <u>Canada's Placemaking Community</u> / <u>The Power of Placemaking</u>. Canada's Placemaking Community is a hub for people who believe that inclusive spaces and experiences can connect communities. Placemaking experiences help people feel that they belong to a place and that the place belongs to them. This Hub has a number of resources and stories. The Power of Placemaking provides snapshots of activities and provides evidence for people to make the case for placemaking work. This resource is produced in partnership with Happy Cities.
- Project for Public Spaces. This <u>website</u> features articles, programs, training, publications and more.
- Happy Cities. Happy Cities has a number of resources related to placemaking, including <u>Power of placemaking: Research and engagement</u> and the <u>Public Life Study Tool</u>.
- <u>Placemaking</u>. City of Waterloo. / <u>Placemaking. Love my Hood</u>. This webpage and its how-go guides help the citizens of Waterloo initiate placemaking activities.
- <u>The Transformative power of tactical urbanism in public spaces</u>. (Nadigroup, n.d.). This website defines Tactical Urbanism and provides examples.

Community design and placemaking remain vital to creating public spaces that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of residents. By prioritizing adaptable, inclusive, and dynamic spaces, municipalities can foster environments that encourage social interaction, cultural exchange, and a strong sense of belonging. Looking forward, continuous engagement, innovative design, and equitable programming will be key to ensuring that public spaces serve as effective social infrastructure that supports both individual well-being and community resilience.

5.4 Theme Five Conclusion

Social infrastructure for recreation plays a critical role in fostering equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities across Canada. Through well-designed indoor spaces, thoughtfully maintained and innovative outdoor/nature-based spaces, and dynamic approaches to community design and placemaking, municipalities can strengthen the physical, social, and cultural well- being of residents. Modernizing indoor facilities with universal design principles, advancing sustainability goals, and integrating new technologies ensures these spaces remain accessible and adaptable to diverse needs. Similarly, outdoor spaces that prioritize nature connection, biodiversity, and innovative design offer essential opportunities for public health and social interaction. Finally, community design and placemaking strategies that focus on inclusivity, adaptability, and ongoing engagement create gathering spaces that reflect local identities while addressing structural barriers to participation. Moving forward, collaboration, innovation, and equity-based approaches will be pivotal to ensuring that recreation infrastructure serves as a cornerstone of vibrant, connected, and healthy communities.

Theme Six: Tourism Development & Economic Impact

Two key areas are explored within the theme of Tourism and Economic Impact: (1) Tourism Development– Opportunities to attract visitors through recreational assets; and (2) Economic Benefits – Contributions of recreation to local economies, job creation, and quality of life improvements.

6.1 Tourism Development: Opportunities to Attract Visitors Through Recreational Assets

Recreational assets play a pivotal role in shaping a destination's appeal and attracting visitors, positioning tourism as a significant driver of local development. Natural landscapes, cultural events, and outdoor recreation opportunities provide unique experiences that draw tourists, bolster regional economies, and enhance community visibility.

Canada's vast and diverse recreational resources, including parks, trails, waterfronts, and cultural festivals, present significant opportunities for tourism development. Currently, the economic value of Canada's national parks and marine conservation areas are estimated to be between $156 billion and $588 billion annually due to ecosystem services and natural capital (see Mulrooney & Jones,2023). Additionally, CPRA highlights that municipal investments in trail systems and greenways not only enhance community infrastructure but also attract visitors seeking hiking, cycling, and outdoor leisure opportunities (CPRA, 2021).

Event-based tourism also demonstrates considerable potential. Recreational festivals, sports tournaments, and cultural events foster a sense of place while attracting significant visitor traffic. Research shows that well-executed events can lead to lasting economic impacts through increased spending in local businesses, accommodations, and dining establishments (Getz & Page, 2016). Moreover, recreation-driven tourism can spotlight smaller or rural communities, offering unique cultural and heritage experiences that differentiate these destinations from urban centers.

To maximize tourism opportunities, partnerships between municipalities, local businesses, and tourism agencies are essential. Collaborative planning and marketing initiatives ensure that recreational assets are effectively promoted, while investments in infrastructure, such as signage, accessibility features, and visitor services, enhance the overall experience for tourists.

Key findings from the literature:

Nature-Based Tourism Benefits: Nature-based solutions (NBS) in city redevelopment projects improve environmental conditions and increase tourism, delivering social and economic benefits while addressing climate change and local environmental issues (Rice, 2019).
Events as Tourism Drivers: Event tourism, involving festivals, conferences, sports, and cultural holidays, is growing rapidly due to their strategic use in attracting tourists and promoting the tourism industry (Akhundova, 2024). Cultural and recreational events can boost tourism by attracting visitors to smaller or rural communities, fostering long-term economic benefits and strengthening regional identities (Getz & Page, 2016).

E-Sports Events as a New Tourism Trend: E-sports events can positively impact the tourism sector by bringing players and viewers to destinations, increasing touristic recognition (Dulgaroglu, 2023).

Trails and Recreation Infrastructure: Recreational trail tourism contributes to economic development, with infrastructure and service development being key determinants (Lukoseviciute et al., 2022). Tourism routes and trails contribute to economic growth, social and cultural development, and shape and develop territories, especially in rural, mountain, or remote areas (Ward-Perkins et al., 2020).

Collaborative Tourism Strategies: Adopting and implementing collaborative forms and strategies can significantly contribute to the development and success of tourism businesses (Sotiriadis, 2018). Trust building, education, and clear guidelines are crucial for engaging stakeholders in collaborative governance in tourism destinations (Erdmenger, 2015).

Recreational assets serve as valuable cornerstones for tourism development, providing opportunities to showcase local culture, natural beauty, and community identity. Through targeted investments, strategic partnerships, and enhanced infrastructure, municipalities can effectivelyleverage their recreational assets to attractvisitors, stimulate economicgrowth, and position themselves as desirable destinations.

Programs and Resources:

- Tourism and Parks: Better Together. (National Recreation and Parks Association, 2023). This article examines a community that thrived by merging parks, recreation and tourism functions.
- How cities use parks to Promote Tourism. City Parks Forum. This article provides key points related to how city parks can promote tourism.
- Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality in BC. Chapter 5. Recreation. (Don Webster, Open BC Open Textbooks, n.d.). The chapter discusses the concept of recreation in tourism and hospitality.
- The Economic Benefits of Nature-Based Tourism. (World Bank Group, 2024). Nature-based tourism can help countries achieve their development goals while promoting biodiversity conservation.
- Nature-based tourism: a growing sector of world bioeconomy. (BioGateway, 2024). This article defines nature-based tourism and discusses issues related to its sustainability, how it fits and its benefits.

6.1 Economic Benefits: Contributions of Recreation to Local Economies, Job Creation, and Quality of Life Improvements

The economic benefits of recreation extend beyond tourism, contributing significantly to local economies, job creation, and overall quality of life. Investments in recreational infrastructure and programs stimulate spending, support businesses, and improve community wellbeing, positioning recreation as a fundamental component of economic development.

By contributing to improved quality of life, investments in local recreational amenities attract businesses, residents, and skilled workers. Access to parks, trails, and cultural venues enhances

community livability, positioning cities as attractive places to live and work. Amenities and quality of life play a significant role in the location decisions of skilled individuals (Florida, 2010). Furthermore, recreation promotes physical and mental health, reducing healthcare costs and contributing to long-term economic savings (Sato et al., 2019).

Key findings from the literature:

Recreation and Economic Growth: Recreation contributes to economic growth by stimulating entrepreneurial activity, promoting job creation, and developing infrastructure (Musostov et al., 2023). Urban park development results in annual economic benefits, including avoided physical inactivity costs, mental health savings, and improved air quality (Wilson & Xiao, 2023).

Attracting Businesses and Residents: Quality of life improvements associated with recreational opportunities make communities more attractive to businesses, residents, and skilled workers, supporting broader economic development goals (Florida, 2010).

Health and Economic Savings: Higher per capita spending on parks and recreation is associated with decreased mortality rates, regionally, suggesting a potential link between parks and recreation and improved health outcomes (Mueller et al., 2019).

The economic contributions of recreation are far-reaching, encompassing tourism revenue, job creation, and community development. By investing in recreational infrastructure, programming, and amenities, municipalities not only stimulate local economies but also foster vibrant, livable communities that attract businesses and residents. Recognizing the role of recreation in economic resilience and quality of life highlights its importance as a strategic priority for sustainable growth.

Programs and Resources:

- Measuring Impact. (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 2022). The Measuring Impact website has a number of useful resources, research studies and tools that support the report: "The Price of Inactivity: Measuring the Powerful Impact of Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation in Canada". It delves into the profound and multifaceted contributions of the sport, physical activity, and recreation (SPAR) sector to our communities and nation. The full report can be found at www.Measuring-Impact.ca, as well as infographics and downloadable social media assets. This report not only underscores the substantial positive impact of SPAR but also provides tangible data that can be utilized to inform policy, drive engagement, and advocate for increased support and investment in the sector. The insights presented in this report have the potential to shape the future of sport, physical activity and recreation in Canada, guiding strategic planning, resource allocation, and advocacy efforts.
- Outdoor Recreation Economic Report. (Protect Our Winters Canada, 2024). This POW Canada Outdoor Recreation Report represents a first-of-its-kind, Canadian report highlighting the importance of Outdoor Recreation. By combining the best available information on the collective economic activity generated by 23 outdoor recreation activities in Canada, POW has estimated Canada's outdoor recreation economy at over $101 billion annually.

6.3 Theme Six Conclusion

Recreation serves as a powerful driver of tourism and economic impact, offering substantial benefits to communities through increased visitation, job creation, and enhanced quality of life. By leveraging recreational assets, such as parks, trails, events, and cultural amenities, municipalities can attract visitors,stimulate local economies, and position themselves as thriving destinations. Investments in recreational infrastructure, strategic partnerships, and tourism promotion further amplify these benefits, creating resilient, sustainable, and economically vibrant communities. Recognizing the interconnected nature of recreation, tourism, and economic development is essential for fostering inclusive growth and long-term prosperity.

Conclusion

This rapid review underscores the transformative role of recreation and parks in addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities across Canada. By enhancing physical and mental health, fostering social connectedness, supporting economic development, and promoting environmental sustainability, the sector remains pivotal to community wellbeing. However, emerging issues like workforce shortages, climate adaptation, and equity barriers require strategic updates to the National Framework for Recreation in Canada.

To remain relevant and impactful, the Framework must reflect these evolving dynamics by embedding inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability into its strategic goals. This includes prioritizing Indigenous reconciliation, leveraging digital transformation, and positioning recreation as a cornerstone of economic and social recovery.By integrating these evidence-based recommendations, the Framework can effectively guide the recreation and parks sector in creating equitable, vibrant, and resilient communities for generations to come.

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