



Submission to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance in Advance of
the 2025 Fall Budget

Submitted by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA)



Recommendation 1: Collective Impact Strategy

Invest \$750,000 in 2025–26, followed by \$500,000 annually for 10 years, to design and launch a national Collective Impact model—with CPRA as the backbone organization—to coordinate national efforts across the recreation and parks sector that advance shared prosperity, improve public health, foster national unity, and increase climate resilience.

Recommendation 2: Infrastructure Renewal

Create a \$100 million/year federal program to revitalize Canada’s aging recreation and parks infrastructure—delivered in partnership with CPRA as part of the national Collective Impact model—to promote public health, strengthen climate resilience, serve equity-deserving communities, and foster national unity by investing in inclusive, community-driven spaces where Canadians connect, belong, and thrive.

Recommendation 3: Crisis Preparedness Fund

Establish a \$2 million/year federal fund—delivered by CPRA as part of the national Collective Impact model—to enhance crisis preparedness and economic resilience by equipping sector professionals with the tools they need to provide vital support during emergencies and climate-related events.

Recommendation 4: Workforce Development

Position CPRA as a delivery partner in the forthcoming National Workforce Strategy—specifically through the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS)—to create good jobs (primarily for youth), expand the recreation and parks sector’s capacity to deliver programming, and keep young people engaged in community-based recreation that promotes wellbeing, builds protective factors, and reduces risk, including justice system involvement. This is a win-win-win: for youth seeking meaningful work, for employers facing staffing shortages, and for communities that benefit from inclusive, accessible programs.

CPRA | *Written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2025 Fall Budget*

Background

A vibrant, healthy, and resilient Canada is within reach—if we invest in the people and infrastructure that make communities thrive. In the face of rapid social and economic change, the recreation and parks sector stands as a powerful, yet persistently undervalued, driver of national wellbeing and prosperity.

Too often dismissed as a discretionary expense, recreation and parks are, in fact, vital public infrastructure. They generate economic growth, improve public health, reduce crime, and foster strong, inclusive communities. From green spaces and community centres to the professionals and programs that bring them to life, this sector is indispensable to Canada’s social and economic fabric.

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) is the national voice for this essential sector—a sector that delivers on federal priorities every day. Yet despite its far-reaching impact, recreation and parks remain chronically underfunded and lack a dedicated federal strategy. Much of the infrastructure is aging and deteriorating, requiring urgent investment to remain functional and effective.

Canada cannot afford to overlook the social, health, economic, civic, and environmental returns of this sector. The federal government now has a powerful opportunity—in partnership with CPRA—to recognize recreation and parks as the nation-building tools they are and achieve long-term impact through sustained investment and revitalized infrastructure.

By partnering with CPRA to expand sector reach, Canada can unlock billions in economic value and avoid costs down the line. Recreation and parks strengthen health outcomes, reduce pressure on justice and healthcare systems, and mitigate the impacts of climate-related emergencies. Implementing the following recommendations will result in a more productive, healthier labour force; revitalized community infrastructure; and a well-resourced frontline partner better equipped to contribute to crisis response, youth engagement, and climate resilience.

CPRA | *Written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2025 Fall Budget*

Detailed Recommendations

1. Launch a National Collective Impact Strategy for Recreation and Parks

Canada's recreation and parks sector is a proven partner in advancing public health, economic opportunity, social inclusion, and crisis response. But to fully unlock this potential, the sector needs a coordinated national strategy and a shared mechanism for alignment, delivery, and accountability.

Through extensive consultations with over 2,500 constituents in every province and territory, CPRA has heard a clear message: the sector is ready for coordinated national action but requires federal leadership and strategic investment to make it possible.

We recommend the Government of Canada support the adoption of a Collective Impact model for the sector—anchored by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) as the national backbone organization, in collaboration with our extensive network of partners and members, the thirteen P/T Associations who reach 95% of Canadian municipalities. This model will unite the sector around a common agenda, align investments, track progress, and advance federal priorities, including infrastructure renewal, workforce development, and climate resilience.



This initiative will:

- Create Community of Practice (CoP), a structured network of practitioners to exchange knowledge and develop tools to accelerate innovation, build capacity, and support better service delivery.
- Coordinate delivery of key federal programs—including infrastructure, workforce, and emergency preparedness.
- Launch a sector-wide Policy Research Collaborative, anchored by the Measuring Impact project, to identify research gaps, build a common evidence base, and equip decision-makers with data, tools, and insights that support smarter public policy across jurisdictions
- Build on the Framework for Recreation in Canada consultations and the Change the Pace campaign
- Deliver cost-effective, scalable solutions aligned with federal goals of improving public health, promoting inclusive economic growth, advancing climate resilience, and improving wellbeing
- Create a shared measurement system to assess impact, inform decisions, and demonstrate return on public funds.

By investing to support the design, scoping, and early implementation—and committing resources annually for 10 years—the federal government will help establish a durable platform to deliver long-term, system-level change. CPRA is ready to lead. As the national voice for recreation and parks, CPRA has the trust of the sector, the network, and the relationships needed to scale innovation across jurisdictions. This is a timely opportunity to build a more coordinated, resilient, and inclusive Canada—one rooted in healthy, connected communities.

Therefore, we recommend the Government of Canada invest \$750,000 in 2025–26 to design and launch a national Collective Impact model for recreation and parks—establishing CPRA as the backbone organization—and commit \$500,000 annually for 10 years to sustain and scale the initiative.

2. Create a Recreation Infrastructure Renewal Program with \$100 Million in Annual Funding to Catalyze Community Revitalization Across Canada

Canada's recreation and parks infrastructure—arenas, pools, parks, trails, and community centres—is aging, increasingly failing, and often no longer fit for purpose. These facilities are essential to health, inclusion, economic resilience, and public safety. Yet despite their proven value, recreation infrastructure continues to be overlooked in federal infrastructure programs.

We recommend the Government of Canada create a Recreation Infrastructure Renewal Program, with \$100 million in annual funding to:

- Refurbish and modernize existing recreation infrastructure;
- Improve energy efficiency, accessibility, and climate resilience;
- Prioritize underserved and equity-deserving communities;
- Provide direct access for municipalities and community partners; and
- Unlock additional investment through public-private partnerships where appropriate.

While this program would focus primarily on renewing existing infrastructure, it can also serve as a catalyst—encouraging broader revitalization and community development. In this way, it echoes the spirit of the Centennial era, when strategic investment in community infrastructure helped build lasting national pride and unity.

Therefore, we recommend the Government of Canada establish a Recreation Infrastructure Renewal Program with \$100 million in annual funding, explicitly focused on recreation, directly accessible to municipalities, and designed to renew and modernize aging infrastructure while unlocking broader community revitalization and fostering national unity.

3. Establish a \$2 million annual fund to enhance crisis preparedness, response, and recovery through the recreation and parks sector

Recreation facilities and professionals play a vital—yet under-recognized—role in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. During wildfires, floods, heatwaves, and other crises, recreation spaces are rapidly repurposed as evacuation centres, cooling and warming shelters, and food distribution hubs. As Premier Wab Kinew noted during Manitoba’s recent wildfire evacuations: “...soccer fields, community centres, arenas. That’s what we’re looking at [to house evacuees]. This is about us quickly being able to turn, let’s say, a soccer field into a shelter facility for people who are fleeing from the very serious wildfires.”

Despite this critical function, most recreation facilities lack the infrastructure upgrades needed to operate effectively in crisis situations. Recreation professionals are also under-equipped and under-trained to deliver emergency services. This leaves communities vulnerable—and it undermines the federal government’s own goals around climate adaptation, economic resilience, and disaster risk reduction.

Every dollar invested in preparedness saves roughly four dollars in emergency response. Recreation is an untapped lever to strengthen community resilience. As part of the proposed Collective Impact model, CPRA is ready to help fill this gap. We propose a \$2 million annual federal fund to:

- Equip and train recreation professionals for emergency response;
- Support modest infrastructure upgrades to enable facilities to serve as crisis centres;
- Build regional capacity, particularly in rural and remote areas;
- Ensure alignment with federal priorities through strategic oversight and accountability led by CPRA and its partners.

Funding could be administered in part through existing federal programs such as the National Adaptation Strategy, the National Disaster Mitigation Program, or the Climate Change Adaptation Program.

Therefore, we recommend the Government of Canada create a \$2 million annual fund to enhance crisis preparedness and economic resilience through the recreation and parks sector, with a focus on rural and remote communities and strategic coordination through CPRA as part of the broader Collective Impact model.

4. Position CPRA as a national delivery partner for youth workforce engagement under the National Workforce Strategy through the Youth Employment Skills Strategy (YESS)

“Canadian graduates between the ages of 15 and 24 are facing the highest unemployment rate this country has seen since the mid-1990s, according to first quarter data from Statistics Canada.”

Creating good jobs for youth, particularly for new labour market entrants, while expanding the capacity of the recreation and parks sector is a win-win-win:

- For youth, who gain meaningful work, mentorship, and skills development;
- For employers facing growing staffing shortages;
- For communities, which benefit from inclusive and accessible programs that promote wellbeing and connection.

CPRA has a proven track record of delivering national workforce initiatives, including Green Jobs, Youth Employment Experience, and National Safe Swimming Recovery, which have placed thousands of youth in Canada’s recreation and parks sector. These programs build protective factors, strengthen community ties, and reduce risks—including involvement with the justice system—by keeping young people engaged in positive, community-based activities.

As the federal government develops its National Workforce Strategy, CPRA is ready to scale its successful youth employment programs to meet national priorities. With dedicated funding through the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) and alignment with other federal workforce initiatives, CPRA can:

- Expand employment and skills-training opportunities for youth across rural, remote, and equity-deserving communities who are disproportionately represented in recent unemployment figures;
- Support the sector in addressing staffing shortages;
- Deliver mentorship and recreation-based programming that enhances youth wellbeing and community resilience.

Youth engagement programs reduce the number of young people entering the justice system, while promoting economic and social benefits. Incarcerating a youth can cost in excess of \$200,000 per year. Even minor interactions with the justice system impose significant societal costs. Employment, mentorship, and skills training provides a more effective and economical solution. Evidence shows that Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs) reduce arrests by 17% and can save \$3.2–\$5.5 million per youth diverted from criminal activity.

Also, programs that support physical activity have enormous benefits. For example, physically active employees take 27% fewer sick days and are 12% more productive, helping to ease strain on both the healthcare system and employers.

Therefore, we recommend the Government of Canada formally position CPRA as a delivery partner within the forthcoming National Workforce Strategy, with expanded YESS funding to create good jobs, build sector capacity, and engage youth in community-based recreation that promotes wellbeing and reduces risk.



Conclusion

Together, these four recommendations represent an actionable roadmap to unlock the full potential of Canada’s recreation and parks sector. By investing in coordinated national leadership, renewing critical infrastructure, enhancing emergency preparedness, and creating meaningful employment opportunities for youth, Canada can advance goals around health, climate resilience, public safety, and inclusive economic growth. CPRA and its network of partners are ready to deliver—ensuring every federal dollar has maximum impact in communities across the country.



Who We Are

Our Purpose

To champion the vital role the recreation and parks sector makes towards creating healthy, vibrant, and resilient communities across Canada.

Our Future

A Canada where vibrant public spaces, parks, programs, and services thrive, enrich every community, and enhance the wellbeing of all who live in Canada.

Our Approach

Sector Collaboration and Leadership (Community)

We convene, connect, and create a community of practitioners, municipalities, and individuals, empowering them to strengthen local recreation and parks efforts through partnership and engagement.

Support and Development (Resources)

We provide essential knowledge, tools, and funding programs—such as Green Jobs, the National Safe Swimming Recovery Program, and Reaching Each and Every One—to support effective planning, management, and innovation, empowering communities and increasing equitable access to recreation and parks opportunities.

Advocacy and Influence (Voice)

We advocate for public policies that yield healthy, vibrant, accessible parks, public spaces, programs, and services, which improve community health, vitality, and resilience.

CPRA | *Written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2025 Fall Budget*

Who We Are

Our Pledge

We pledge to foster collaboration, share resources, and build connections that empower communities to thrive and create a healthier, more resilient Canada. Through the development, promotion, and implementation of public policies and initiatives, we commit to enhancing lives, sustaining our sector, and protecting our shared natural and community resources

Our Alliance

CPRA exists to advance the national interests of the recreation and parks sector in Canada in service of enhancing individual and community wellbeing, sustaining our sector, and protecting our shared natural and community resources. We are committed to supporting our members—the 13 provincial and territorial recreation and parks associations. By bringing these associations and their extensive networks together, CPRA connects with over 95% of Canadian municipalities, amplifying our collective impact across the country.



CPRA | Written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2025 Fall Budget

What We Value

Recreation and Parks

Championing recreation and parks as a public good, essential to public health, quality of life, and social connection.

Recreation and Parks Professionals

Honouring the dedication, expertise, and passion of the professionals who bring our programs, facilities, and communities to life. Their invaluable contributions are the foundation to creating a brighter, more sustainable world where we can live, work, play, and thrive—a world we are proud to pass on to future generations.

Inclusion and Equity

Creating accessible recreation and parks opportunities for all. We are committed to fostering an environment where participants, professionals, practitioners, and volunteers have equal opportunities to participate fully.

Sustainability

Advocating for sustainability in all aspects of recreation and parks, including the sustainability of the sector itself. We are well-positioned to contribute to a wide range of issues, including mitigating climate change, enhancing climate resilience, and contributing to the economy through the creation of green jobs.

Measuring Impact

Measuring the profound contribution recreation and parks make to public health, social cohesion, and our overall wellbeing.

CPRA | *Written submission to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2025 Fall Budget*