



Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Spring 2026 | Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA)
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Summary

Recommendation 1

Allocate \$4 billion over three years through a dedicated recreation and parks stream within the Build Communities Strong Fund to renew and expand indoor and outdoor infrastructure, including upgrades that equip facilities for crises and climate-related events.

Recommendation 2

Invest \$3 million annually to expand CPRA's role as a Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) delivery partner, creating approximately 600 additional youth employment pathways into recreation and parks.

Recommendation 3

Invest \$2.5 million in 2026-27, followed by \$2 million annually, to establish the national Collective Impact model identified during the consultation phase of the renewal of the Framework for Recreation and Parks in Canada, with \$1 million annually dedicated to CAN Active Insights as the national measurement platform.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen community resilience through (1) a \$3 million annual pilot over three years to equip recreation professionals to serve communities effectively during crises, and (2) re-investment of Community Sport for All through Playground to Podium, with \$3 million annually for CPRA to extend its Reaching Each and Every One program.

Preparing to Build Stronger, Healthier Communities

The Build Communities Strong Fund and the \$755 million Playground to Podium investment^[1] make a clear statement about what nation-building looks like in 2026. Not just ports, pipelines, and housing units. Communities: the places where Canadians live, work, re-create, and recover. The full value of these investments depends on local infrastructure, programming, and workforce capacity.

That infrastructure is under strain. Between 30 and 35 percent of Canada's recreational facilities are in fair, poor, or very poor condition, and in high-use categories including pools and community centres, more than 60 percent are at least 20 years old.^[2] Physical inactivity cost Canada \$3.9 billion in healthcare costs in 2022, dropping by \$629 million annually if 10 percent of Canadians increase their activity levels.^[3] Youth unemployment reached 14.6 percent in September 2025, the highest rate outside COVID since 2010.^[4]

These pressures have solutions. Recreation, parks, and trails are a necessary public good. They ease burden on healthcare, build social connection, and help communities attract the skilled workers Canada needs for the strongest economy in the G7. CPRA reaches 95 percent of Canadian municipalities through 13 provincial and territorial members. We are recommending government invest strategically in infrastructure, workforce, coordination, and participation. Each recommendation is targeted, evidence-based, and will generate measurable returns.

Recommendation 1:

A Dedicated Stream within the Build Communities Strong Fund

Allocate \$4 billion over three years from the Build Communities Strong Fund to a dedicated recreation and parks stream, supporting renewal and expansion of indoor and outdoor infrastructure, including upgrades that equip facilities for crises and climate-related events.

The investment should follow need: renewal where existing assets are at end of life, expansion where population growth and underservice demand it, response to growth in outdoor recreation, and new builds where rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities are historically underserved.

Recreation and parks infrastructure is underrepresented in current federal funding frameworks, despite its direct contribution to health outcomes, workforce participation, and community resilience. A dedicated stream would close that gap, accelerating project delivery, addressing state-of-good-repair needs, and generating measurable returns across all three.



The replacement value of facilities in poor or fair condition alone is \$42.5 billion. [5] As communities grow, the need for parks and green infrastructure has outpaced supply.[6] Renewing existing assets is cost-effective and extends service life; new builds, where required, complete the picture. The same logic applies outdoors. Trails, parks, and green spaces are how most Canadians experience nature, the community-level delivery vehicle for Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy; they also serve as natural climate adaptation infrastructure.

Investment at this scale prepares facilities and outdoor spaces for climate events now routine. Canada's National Adaptation Strategy estimates every \$1 invested saves up to \$15 across the economy.[7] Few public assets deliver return more directly than recreation infrastructure built for daily use and crisis response. Without federal leadership, municipalities cannot close this gap alone.

Fit for purpose now includes crisis-readiness. During wildfires, floods, and heat events, recreation facilities serve as evacuation centres, cooling hubs, and shelters. In May 2025, as Manitoba faced what Premier Wab Kinew called "the largest evacuation in many Manitobans' living memory," recreation centres opened their doors as hotels filled. Winnipeg arenas and parks ultimately housed thousands of evacuees.[8] Most facilities lack the upgrades to perform this function reliably. A dedicated stream would fund backup power, emergency supply storage, climate-adapted ventilation, and accessible emergency infrastructure, with priority for rural, remote, and northern communities.

A federal investment of this scale also generates demand for Canadian steel, aluminum, and lumber, creating jobs in every region. CPRA stands ready as a national delivery and coordination partner.

[5] CFLRI and CPRA (2023).

[6] Park People, 2024 Canadian City Parks Report: Bridging the Gap (Toronto: Park People, 2024). parkpeople.ca/2024-canadian-city-parks-report

[7] Canada's National Adaptation Strategy, cited in CFLRI and CPRA (2023).

[8] Premier Wab Kinew, Government of Manitoba news release declaring provincewide state of emergency, May 28, 2025; The Canadian Press, May 28-29, 2025; CBC News, May 28-30, 2025.

Recommendation 2:

Expand CPRA's Role as a National Youth Employment Delivery Partner

Invest \$3 million annually to expand CPRA's role as a Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) delivery partner beyond the Green Jobs Initiative, creating approximately 600 additional youth employment pathways into the recreation and parks sector.

Canada is facing a youth employment crisis. Unemployment among Canadians aged 15 to 24 reached 14.6 percent in September 2025, the highest rate outside COVID since 2010, with conditions deteriorating into early 2026.[9] Young Canadians bear the brunt of a labour market shaped by trade uncertainty, slower hiring, and a shortage of accessible entry points into meaningful careers. The recreation and parks sector faces persistent workforce shortages. Two pressures, one solution.

In 2025-26, the Green Jobs Initiative invested \$693,600 to create 163 youth jobs at 154 organizations in every province and territory, with 70,802 hours worked over an average 14-week placement. Demand more than doubled supply, with \$1.65 million in funding requests. Ninety-nine percent of participants returned to school or secured employment after placement. Eighty-three percent faced barriers to employment, the program's highest proportion to date, and 35 percent came from rural, remote, or northern communities.[10] The model works, and demand is real.



At \$3 million annually, the same model scales to approximately 600 additional youth jobs with mentorship, transferable skills, and a credential. Early, stable labour market attachment reduces lifetime reliance on EI and social supports. For priority populations the program reaches, including Indigenous, Black, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+, low-income, newcomer, and youth with disabilities, it is also a prevention investment. Prevention at this scale costs a fraction of the interventions it displaces.

The expansion would open a dedicated stream for aquatics professionals. Lifeguard and swim instructor shortages force pool closures across the country and compromise safety on Canada's vast waterfront network. Each certified professional supports drowning prevention, swim instruction for children, and operating hours communities depend on. Closing a pool is a public safety failure measured in lives. Expanding CPRA's role as a national youth employment delivery partner is a practical, scalable investment that strengthens workforce participation, supports community safety and wellbeing, and creates meaningful pathways for young Canadians to build skills, experience, and long-term economic opportunity.



Recommendation 3:

Launch a National Collective Impact Strategy for Recreation and Parks

Invest \$2.5 million in 2026–27, followed by \$2 million annually, to establish CPRA as the backbone organization for the national Collective Impact model identified through the renewal of the Framework for Recreation and Parks. Of this total, \$1 million annually is dedicated to CAN Active Insights as the sector's national measurement platform.

Government and the sector are calling for the same thing. The mandate for one Canadian economy demands cross-jurisdictional alignment. The Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035 and the Future of Sport conversation name the same priorities: alignment, research capacity, reduced duplication, and more sustainable organizations. Through the Framework for Recreation and Parks renewal CPRA is leading, the sector has identified Collective Impact with CPRA as backbone as the path to all four.^[11] Federal investment brings it to scale.

Canada's recreation and parks system is decentralized by design. The 1987 National Recreation Statement established federal-provincial-territorial cooperation, with provincial primacy in recreation and a federal role on matters national in scope. Collective Impact is the modern operating model for that structure: a common agenda, aligned investments, shared measurement, and a single national backbone accountable for results.



CPRA is that organization. Through this model, CPRA would align infrastructure, workforce, resilience, and participation investments across jurisdictions, track outcomes against shared targets, strengthen accountability, and provide governments with the reporting needed to inform policy and demonstrate return on public investment. Established relationships across federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions position CPRA to ensure consistent, scalable implementation of programs and policy.

CAN Active Insights is the measurement platform that makes the model accountable, with each partner playing a distinct role: CPRA as backbone, with reach into 95 percent of Canadian municipalities, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) as research anchor, and the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) leading knowledge translation and mobilization.[12] The platform integrates facilities, participation, community needs, and economic impact data into the sector-generated evidence that major federal investment requires. The platform is currently underfunded relative to its potential. With sustained federal investment, it would deliver the evidence base Canada needs to guide policy, target investment, and demonstrate measurable outcomes across sport, physical activity, recreation, and parks.

A coordinated sector is a different policy partner than a fragmented one. When the government needs to move quickly, align delivery, or consult on policy, a coordinated sector responds at scale and speed. Duplication declines. Evidence builds. Thirteen distributed systems become one national delivery partner.

Recommendation 4:

Strengthen Community Resilience Through Investment in Recreation Professionals and Grassroots Sport

Strengthen community resilience through (1) a \$3 million annual pilot fund over three years to equip recreation professionals to serve communities effectively, and (2) re-investment of Community Sport for All through Playground to Podium, with \$3 million annually over three years for CPRA to extend its Reaching Each and Every One program.

Resilient communities are built by capable people and active participation. Two complementary streams address both.

Stream 1: Equip the Sector

Recreation professionals are the front line of community wellbeing. A \$3 million annual pilot over three years would equip them with tools and training for routine operations and emergencies: generators, communications equipment, and emergency response training. Trained, equipped professionals turn local facilities into reliable first-response infrastructure for wildfires, floods, and heat events. Priority would go to rural, remote, and northern communities. It is the human layer of the climate-resilient infrastructure outlined in Recommendation 1.

Stream 2: Reinvest in grassroots recreational sport

Through the Community Sport for All Initiative,^[13] CPRA has delivered funding to community-based organizations under its Reaching Each and Every One (REEO) program,^[14] removing barriers and increasing participation for Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQI+, low-income, newcomer, and disability communities. The \$755 million Playground to Podium investment is the policy moment to reinvest Community Sport for All within a coherent national strategy. CPRA recommends \$3 million annually over three years to extend REEO.

REEO drives participation among populations with the lowest physical activity rates and the highest downstream public costs. A 10-percentage-point reduction in adult inactivity translates to \$629 million in annual healthcare savings.^[15] Targeted programming for equity-deserving populations is one of Canada's most direct levers. The fiscal logic and the equity logic point to the same investment. Together, the two streams form a single resilience proposition: capable people, active communities.

Conclusion

These recommendations form a coordinated national strategy. They renew and expand infrastructure, build the workforce, coordinate the system, and strengthen the people and participation that make communities resilient. For more than fifty years, Canada's recreation and parks sector has argued that recreation is a public good equivalent to health and education, built in every community by meaningful human activity, and scaled through federal-provincial-territorial cooperation. It's time to act.

CPRA's purpose is to champion the vital role the recreation and parks sector plays in building healthy, vibrant, resilient communities. Through our thirteen provincial and territorial member associations, CPRA reaches every community in Canada. We are ready to partner with the government to put these investments to work for Canadians.