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# Policy and program considerations for increasing sport participation among members of under-represented groups in Canada: A Literature Review

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**Sue Cragg Consulting**

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### Thank-you

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## Executive Summary

Sport should be available and responsive to the needs of all Canadian residents who want to participate. Sport participation benefits individuals and society overall through improved physical, psychological and social well-being, increased civic pride, engagement and cohesion, and increased economic development and prosperity. However, some women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, new Canadians, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ community, and Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions do not participate at the same rates as their mainstream counterparts. Inclusive policies and programming benefit members of these groups and other Canadian residents who may feel excluded from sport.

This report provides the Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Committee with a literature review to serve as a common evidence-base for collaborative policy and program development work aimed at increasing participation in sport, particularly among underrepresented groups, and promoting the health of Canadians through sport participation.

Sport is about more than training and performance, and participation is about more than just the number of participants who show up to a program. Sport participation includes experiential aspects related to inclusion and community

integration including, belongingness, engagement, meaning, mastery and challenge. The evidence for increasing participation in sport for underrepresented groups is organized in the report by these aspects and includes ideas for addressing these aspects.

While the report set out to focus on sport alone, the concepts of sport, recreation and physical activity are not exclusive of one another. Strategies to increase participation in physical activity or include members of marginalized groups in recreation are often applicable to increasing participation of the same groups in sport. Similarly, health promotion and sport for development activities share mutual goals with sport and each of these strategies have the potential to reinforce and support the goals of the others.

### *Developing physical literacy and cultural capital at any age*

While the Canadian Sport Policy focuses on early physical literacy and sport skill development, members of underrepresented groups may not have had these opportunities at a young age, due to socio-economic disadvantage, physical or health limitations, past residency in other countries (e.g., living in a refugee camp or in a country where sport is a privilege of the very few), cultural norms (e.g., particular sports are not played in their culture of origin, or women are not encouraged to participate) or marginalization due to other

reasons (e.g., homophobia, ablebodyism, racism). The lack of physical literacy development at a young age creates a significant barrier to entry for those who wish to participate. This lack means that potential participants may feel awkward, as they do not have the basic skills, or they may be excluded from teams who are focused on winning.

However, having physical literacy levels below those of one's peers are only part of the sport shortfalls that exclude some Canadian residents. Consistent early participation and experience also create cultural capital (abilities, values and desires celebrated in the sport). Without early sport opportunities, potential participants may feel that they are not familiar with the rules or strategies or that they don't fit in with the culture of the team. Such experiences may lead them to decide that sport is not for them.

While the underrepresented groups discussed in this report are diverse, both between groups and internally, there are many similarities in terms of the barriers and challenges to their participation in sport. In addition to lacking sufficient physical literacy and cultural capital, barriers can include fear of judgement and the attitudes of others, lack of relevant role models, lack of access to facilities, equipment, transportation, or information, and economic and time constraints. The solutions, while requiring tailoring to each group, fall into the same general categories.

### ***Identify and customise the right combination of solutions***

No single action will increase sport participation alone. For example, offering subsidies without providing a welcoming environment will not entice people to come or to stay. A holistic approach to increasing sport participation is needed. This involves addressing the whole person, including emphasizing the health benefits of sport; involving community members in suggesting and designing solutions, promoting participation and supporting participants; and building linkages with community partners, both by involving them in promoting sport offerings and by including sport in their broader programming.

It is imperative that policy makers and practitioners work with members of each target group they are hoping to serve, to gain an understanding of the group's culture, challenges and preferred solutions, and then tailoring a critical mass of solutions to the local context.

### ***Honouring reasons for participation***

To encourage participation at all levels, there is a need for sport leaders and organizations to support the delivery of fun, socially inclusive sport programs that support a healthy active lifestyle for all Canadian residents. It is important to understand, acknowledge and honour reasons for participating in a sport and not to enforce athletic development standards on those who are not looking for that type of experience. Accommodating all levels of

skill and competition and supporting choice of participation level provides the variety of experiences sought by different individuals.

### *Ideas for Action*

To improve sport participation among Canadians and particularly among members of underrepresented populations, stakeholders could consider:

- Developing programs to introduce basic skills and improve physical literacy for all ages, abilities and skill levels;
- Working with intersectoral partners including health and recreation;
- Recognizing the overlap between physical activity, recreation and sport.
- Providing professional development and mentorship opportunities to leaders and administrators;
- Encouraging peer leadership and mentorship;
- Ensuring physical access to facilities;
- Ensuring facilities are maintained and meet accessibility codes;
- Removing transportation barriers;
- Removing equipment barriers;
- Attracting participants with social and cultural experiences in addition to the sporting experience;
- Involving those for whom programs are being developed;
- Working with non-sport partners and community organizations;
- Celebrating and promoting diversity;
- Creating a welcoming environment;
- and

- Removing economic, social and other barriers.

### *Next Steps*

This report offers practical actions to create solutions and inspire ideas. The contents of this report can be used as a basis for consultation with multiple sectors to gather feedback to build upon the foundation it provides. Furthermore, there is a need to gather information about the unpublished types of policies and programs underway across the country. This information, along with that of existing reports on serving underrepresented groups, needs to be actively shared and promoted. Now is the time to find ways to share identified approaches broadly and support their implementation. Finally, efforts should be evaluated and monitored to gauge their impact and ways to improve, and to identify successful practice that can be shared with programmers and policy makers across the nation.



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## Introduction

Sport should be available and responsive to the needs of all Canadians who want to participate. Sport participation benefits individuals and society overall through improved physical, psychological and social well-being, increased civic pride, engagement and cohesion and increased economic development and prosperity.<sup>1,2</sup> However members of a number of groups do not participate at the same rates as their mainstream counterparts. Some women and girls, Indigenous peoples, persons with a disability, recent immigrants, new Canadians, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ community, and Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions face additional challenges to sport participation.

Three key Canadian documents, like many sport policies from around the world, have emphasized the importance of creating conditions that embrace sport participation for members of underrepresented groups:

- The *Canadian Sport Policy 2012 (CSP)* embraces inclusion and accessibility among its policy values and principles, along with clear direction that sport should play a bigger role as a driver for personal and social development. Its framework emphasizes sport participation which is inclusive of levels and participation contexts (introduction

to sport, recreational sport, competitive sport and high performance sport), diversity of participants, interests and abilities, and recognizes the role of sport as a tool for social and economic development. As part of the commitment to the Sport Policy, the federal provincial/territorial governments are committed to ensuring inclusion of traditionally under-represented or marginalized groups in sport.

- *A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015, Pathway to Wellbeing*<sup>3</sup> describes best practices\* for increasing participation and highlights the importance of engaging less active members of the community. A *Framework for Recreation* describes five goals and priorities for action under each goal. The second goal focuses on increasing “inclusion and access to recreation for populations that face constraints to participation.” Eight priority actions address gender, culture, Indigenous People, people who are economically disadvantaged, ethno-culturally diverse populations, older adults, people in rural and remote communities and those with a disability.
- *Active Canada 20/20*<sup>4</sup> identifies four Areas of Focus, all of which recommend policies, programs and communication

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\* The term *best practices* is commonly used to describe practices that have been identified as successful in achieving their goals. It does not imply

that there are other practices in use that are less valid.

efforts directed at populations “with the greatest needs and access issues.”(p.17-20)

While each strategy (and sector) has distinct responsibilities, there are a number of areas of overlap. Efforts have been made to align the three strategies.<sup>5</sup>

Around the world, other countries have highlighted the need for inclusivity and accessibility in their sport policies:

- Sport England<sup>6</sup> noted a commitment to “putting customers at the heart of what we do, responding to how they organise their lives and helping the sector to be more welcoming and inclusive, especially of those groups currently under-represented in sport” and to “prioritise demographic groups who are currently under-represented in terms of their engagement with sport and physical activity.”
- The Australian Sports Commission<sup>7</sup> declared sport a ‘consumer-driven industry’ and committed to ensuring that sport offers what its citizens want. Their target groups include women, Indigenous Australians, people with disability, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Australian strategy focuses on building capacity of National Sport Organizations to grow their sport’s participation base particularly with these groups.
- A report prepared for Sport New Zealand<sup>8</sup> identifies older adults, young people, deprived populations, ethnically

diverse populations (including Maori and Pacific Islanders), individuals with disabilities and those living outside of urban areas as populations to focus additional efforts. It also notes the need for recognizing sport as a consumer driven choice.

Similarly, Canadian Provinces, Territories, Municipalities, National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emphasized the need for policy and program focus on inclusion. For example:

- Nova Scotia<sup>9</sup> aims to target increased participation in underrepresented segments of the population, specifically, women, Aboriginal, disabled and financially disadvantaged, and remove barriers to participation for physically and developmentally challenged individuals.
- Ontario’s Game ON Strategic Plan for Sports<sup>10</sup> includes a focus on increasing participation among women and girls, children in low-income families, people with disabilities, older adults, Aboriginal people, LGBTQ Ontarians, and newcomers to Canada.
- BC has several documents that address sport and physical activity participation. The B.C. Sport Strategy<sup>11</sup> was developed in response to the Canadian Sport Policy. It focuses on Sport Participation, Sport Hosting, Sport Excellence, and Sport Funding. Sport participation investments target all British Columbians, but overtly targets girls,

youth not involved in sport, people with a disability, those in low-income circumstances, and Indigenous populations. The Aboriginal Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity Strategy<sup>12</sup> aims to make sport, recreation and physical activity a priority to help improve the health of Indigenous communities, families and individuals across British Columbia. The BC Physical Activity Strategy<sup>13</sup> is intended to guide and stimulate coordinated policies, practices and programs in physical activity that will improve the health and well-being of British Columbians. One of the key lenses on which the Strategy was created is that of inclusion.

- The vision of Active Alberta<sup>14</sup> is that “Albertans enjoy a high quality of life, improved health and wellness, strong communities, economic benefits and personal fulfillment, through recreation, active living and sport.”<sup>(p.1)</sup> Two of the guiding principles focus on accessibility and inclusion and citizenship.
- Québec en Forme<sup>15</sup> is an initiative that strives to increase physical activity (and healthy eating) by supporting communities and organizations throughout Quebec that encourage young people, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, to become more active.
- Skate Ontario names inclusiveness as one of its core values.<sup>16</sup>

- The Institute National du Sport du Québec (Sport Institute Quebec) has a Board Composition policy that specifies that the Board of Directors must be comprised of 40% women or men.
- CAAWS, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity provides expertise and has created resources for the sport and physical activity community that outline policy and program ideas for the inclusion of girls and women as participants and leaders across the life span. These resources specify the inclusion in sport of newcomers, Indigenous peoples, older women, low socio-economic status mothers and LGBTQ individuals.
- The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability provides tools, resources and support to communities and organizations which seek to be inclusive. It has developed “Blue Print for Action” which provides policy and program recommendations for successful engagement for individuals with a disability.

Given the public recognition in policy documents and the number of calls and recommendations for inclusivity and accessibility that have been made over the years, the next step is to look to the literature to investigate what actions will support implementation of these goals. The purpose of this report is to provide the Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Committee with a literature review to serve

as a common evidence-base for collaborative policy and program development work aimed at increasing participation in sport, particularly among underrepresented groups, and promoting the health of Canadians through sport participation. This report details the results of an overview of current Canadian and

international knowledge that examines these issues. A visual representation of the project scope, developed jointly with the consulting team and the Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Surveillance and Monitoring Group (the Work Group), is provided in Appendix A.



## Project Methodology

The review was based on the evidence-informed public health decision making process by the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools.<sup>17</sup> This process includes seven stages (define, search, appraise, synthesize, adapt, implement, and evaluate), however, for this project we used the first four stages.

Our search was generally limited to literature published within the last seven years, although some earlier seminal articles were also included. The process looked for academic and gray literature (reports, conference proceedings, dissertations and theses and white papers) on Canadian, international and inter-jurisdictional public policy considerations related to increasing sport participation. The search terms were developed jointly with the Work Group (See side bar). In addition to the electronic search, a call was sent out directly to known researchers in the field, through several listservs and via one twitter posting. A list of these sources is included in Appendix B.

Source credibility was verified and all documents were reviewed with a critical appraisal lens. Articles were included in the review if the full-text was available, if the language of publication was English or French, if they were relevant to the Canadian policy context, and if they referred to supporting or increasing sport participation for one of the identified groups, or the population as a whole, if it was felt that it would also influence at least

## Search Terms

**Sport Participation** OR Sport Opportunity OR Traditional Games OR Sport Inclusion OR Sport Diversity OR Sport OR Unstructured Play OR Competitive Sport OR Recreational Sport OR Organized Sport OR Team Sport OR Individual Sport OR Athletes OR Athletics or self organized

**Women** OR Girls OR Female

**Indigenous Peoples** OR Aboriginal OR Native OR First Nations OR Métis OR Maori OR Aborigines OR Inuit or Native American

**Disability** OR Persons with Disabilities OR Individuals with Disabilities OR Athletes with Disabilities OR Paralympics OR Special Olympics OR Physical Disabilities OR Intellectual Disabilities OR impairment OR visual OR mobility OR deaf or blind or mental health

**New Canadians** OR Immigrants OR Refugees OR Ethnic Diversity OR Ethno-cultural

**LGBTQ** OR Lesbian OR Gay OR Homosexual OR Transgendered OR Queer OR Questioning OR Two Spirited or bisexual

**Older Adults** OR Senior Citizens OR Retirees OR Seniors OR Mature OR Elders

**Discrimination** OR Racism OR Ageism OR Cultural Relevance OR Integration OR Inclusion OR Marginalization OR Vulnerable Groups OR Homophobia OR Accessible, equitable or inclusive underrepresented groups

**Rural** OR Remote OR Northern OR Northern Communities OR Northwest Territories OR Yukon OR Nunavut OR Northern Territories OR Northern Provinces OR Location OR location

**Facility** OR facilities OR Staffing OR Coaching OR Programming OR Leadership or Family Friendly OR Age Friendly OR Infrastructure OR recreation centres or parks or green spaces or equipment or outdoor spaces

**Health Equity** OR health inequities OR social determinants of health OR low income OR health status OR health determinants OR social isolation OR socioeconomic OR health disparities OR health promotion OR positive mental health OR psychosocial health OR health promoting behaviours

**Policy Approaches** OR Policy Intervention OR System Approaches OR Programming or sport program

one of the identified groups. Articles were excluded if they were not directly relevant to policy decision making around sport participation, or pertained only to competitive, elite or high performance sport. Articles that only referred to coaching or sport administration were also excluded.

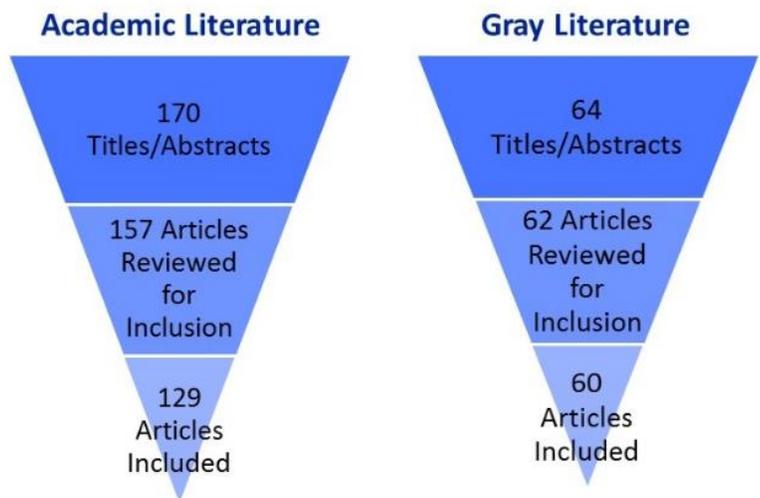
The time frame for undertaking this project and its potential scope excluded an exhaustive examination of all possible sources. This search, therefore, took rapid review approach. Once the search started yielding significant repetition, it was determined that the major trends in the thinking on the subject had been identified, and the search was concluded. While the net was cast widely, there are certainly articles and policy documents that were not included. Any omissions are unintentional and are not a reflection of the quality of the documents.

The identified articles were screened by a Research Assistant based first on their title, then on the abstract or executive summary. Members of the Project Team then reviewed this information to determine which ones were relevant for further review. Obtained articles were reviewed by a single reviewer (assigned by topic based on the reviewer’s area of expertise and experience) for both content relevant to the project and

quality of the information. As a quality control measure, the reviewers cross checked a selection of articles as the project rolled out. Figure 1 and Table 1 provide a description of the number of articles involved in the process.

An annotated list of references with the bibliographic information, target population, country of origin and relevant content of each article was created (see Appendix C). Brief one- to three-sentence ‘Policy Takeaway’ statements were written for each article. The team assembled to discuss the findings and extracted the key themes from the literature applicable to policy recommendations for increasing sport participation among members of underrepresented populations.

**Figure 1 Number of Articles Involved in Review**



*Table 1: Number of Articles Included for Review by Population*

	Academic Articles	Grey Literature
Indigenous	18	10
Older Adults	4	8
Low S.E.S.	13	5
Immigrants/New Canadians	12	4
People with disabilities	30	10
Women/girls	34	11
LGBTQ	13	2
Rural	2	4
Other	3	6



## Context

This section presents some of the key definitions, concepts and overview of the Canadian policy landscape as background to the sections that follow.

### Canadian Sport Participation Rates

When it comes to gauging the level of sport participation among Canadians overall and among sub-populations, various definitions have been used. The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's (CFLRI) Physical Activity and Sport Monitor (PAM) defines sport broadly as physical activities that usually involve competition and rules, and that develop specific skills. The survey asks survey respondents if they participated in sport in the 12 months prior to being surveyed.

Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS) asks respondents if they regularly participated in sports during the previous 12 months and defined "regularly" to mean that the respondent participated in a sport at least once a week during the season or for a certain period of the year. A sport was defined as an activity that involves two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition. In this definition, sport involves formal rules and procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills, and a high degree of difficulty and effort. The competitive nature of sport implies the development of trained coaching personnel. It does not include activities in which the performance of a motorized vehicle is the primary

determinant of the competitive outcome. Several physical and leisure activities were excluded, such as non-competitive aerobics, aqua-fitness, bicycling for only for recreation or transportation, body building/sculpting, car racing, dancing, fishing, fitness classes, hiking, jogging, lifting weights (non-competitive), motorcycling, snowmobiling, and non-competitive walking.



Both surveys' data are reported below, as neither has collected data across all groups of interest. The GSS definition is stricter than the CFLRI's but it includes a broader age group (CFLRI includes Canadians 18 and older, while the GSS collects data from Canadians aged 15 and older). In addition, the data are collected in different time periods. While the two rates are not

comparable in terms of absolute participation rates, the trends they demonstrate regarding disparities in participation among underrepresented populations when compared to Canadians overall are similar.

The Physical Activity Monitor reports that approximately one third (34%) of Canadians aged 18 and older report participating in sport in 2014-15.<sup>18</sup> This rate is similar to rates reported in previous years. Frequency and regularity of participation among adults also differ by age and gender but not by education or income status. Among children (aged 5-17 years), 74% participate in sport.<sup>19</sup>

The General Social Survey<sup>20</sup> reports that 28% of Canadians aged 15 and older participated in sport in 2010. This rate decreased slightly over time. The GSS also reports that the top ten most popular sports for Canadian adults are golf, ice hockey, soccer, baseball, volleyball, basketball, downhill skiing, cycling, swimming and badminton.<sup>20</sup>

Sport participation rates for members of underrepresented group are presented in the sections below. It is important to note that the data sources and definition of sport vary and are often not comparable to the overall rates noted above. Comparable statistics are cited where available.

## Key Definitions

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For the purposes of this report, the following definitions are used:

- **Physical activity** is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure. It is an overall term for any movement of the body.<sup>21</sup>
- **Sport** is a game, competition, or similar activity, done for enjoyment or as a job, that takes physical effort and skill and is played or done by following particular rules.<sup>22</sup>
- **Recreation** is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.<sup>23</sup>
- **Physical literacy** is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.<sup>24</sup>

## Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity

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There has long been debate about the definitions, similarities and distinctiveness of the sport, recreation and physical activity sectors. For example, is physical activity the umbrella under which sport and recreation fall, given that physical recreational pursuits and sport participation are ultimately all defined as being physically active, with the inherent benefits? Or is recreation the more expansive concept given that its mandate encompasses not only pursuits that are

physical in nature, but also those that are social, intellectual, creative and spiritual?<sup>3</sup> In Europe, the term “sport” means “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”<sup>25</sup> This concept encompasses not only the traditional meaning of sport, but also various forms of physical activity including spontaneous, unorganized games and regular physical activity or exercise, all of which benefit individuals and society.<sup>26</sup>

If, as in Canada, we maintain distinct definitions for each of the sectors, it is accurate to say that while each sector makes a unique contribution to the Canadian landscape (for example, the sport sector’s mandate to developing and supporting elite athletes through high performance coaching and competition), it is also true that all three fields have a common mandate to “enhance the wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment.”<sup>3(p. 160)</sup>

From a participant and data collection point of view, the boundaries between recreation, physical activity and sport are blurry. For example, swimmers may do laps for fitness or may be training for competition; “beer league” sports may be undertaken more for their social aspects than for their competitive or inherent sport value. Regardless, the physical and other benefits are similar for the individual.

However, data around participation rates do not account for these differences and they are all considered swimmers, baseball players, hockey players and overall sport participants.



### **Role of physical literacy for all types of sport activities**

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Two common themes in the literature that described the barriers to sport participation in the populations of interest were lack of skills and confidence. Both elements are fundamental to developing physical literacy. Physical literacy is a unique and lifelong journey<sup>24</sup> and although it is the entry point in the Long-term Athlete Development Model (LTAD),<sup>27</sup> there is a need to expand beyond focusing on children between the ages of zero to six and examine ways to teach, build and foster physical literacy at any time of life. While this is important for

all Canadians, it is critical for underrepresented groups, whether their aspirations are to pursue competition at an elite level, to enjoy the social and fun aspects of sport, or to be active for life. Some models of the LTAD, particularly those describing the sport experiences of individuals with disabilities, include additional stages of Awareness and First Involvement. These stages are likely relevant to all Canadian residents who did not have the opportunity to develop fundamental physical literacy skills at an early age, including members of underrepresented groups.

However, physical competence and confidence are not the only elements of physical literacy that are important for members of underrepresented groups. Many of the elements are interrelated. For example, engagement in physical activities for life “refers to an individual taking personal responsibility for physical literacy

by freely choosing to be active on a regular basis. This involves prioritizing and sustaining involvement in a range of meaningful and personally challenging activities, as an integral part of one’s lifestyle.”<sup>24</sup>(pg.2) When barriers to participation exist and those who would like to participate feel excluded, the personal responsibility aspect is thwarted. This then requires policy makers and other stakeholders to address the environmental and policy barriers that members of underrepresented groups face, so that they may have the opportunities to gain skills, build confidence and take personal responsibility for physical literacy.

Finally, one of the core concepts of physical literacy is that it is an inclusive concept and accessible to all. For this, as well as the other concepts discussed above, physical literacy is an important factor in increasing participation in sport, physical activity and recreation.



## Sport Participation in Underrepresented Populations

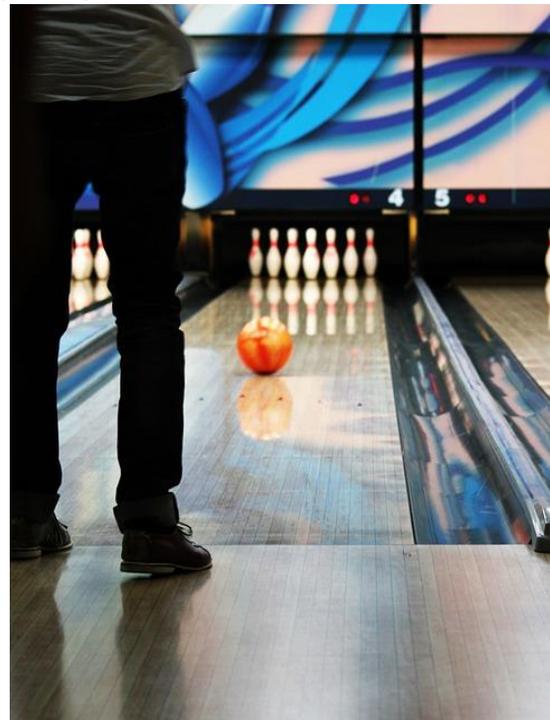
When it comes to sport participation in Canada, women and girls, Indigenous peoples, persons with a disability, new comers\* to Canada, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians, older adults, members of the LGBTQ community, and Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions participate at lower rates than Canadians as a whole. This section describes each of these populations in terms of the unique barriers, challenges and needs with respect to sport participation.

Some Canadians fit more than one group, for example an Indigenous woman, or a new Canadian with a disability. When addressing the needs of any group, it is important to acknowledge that some members have the characteristics of one or more additional groups at the same time. There may also be members of other groups who experience marginalization when it comes to sport participation that may not have been identified in the literature. However, many of the barriers and challenges are likely the same as those experienced by the groups discussed. Broadly applying the principles of inclusion will help to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of identity or group affiliation, feel more comfortable participating in sport.

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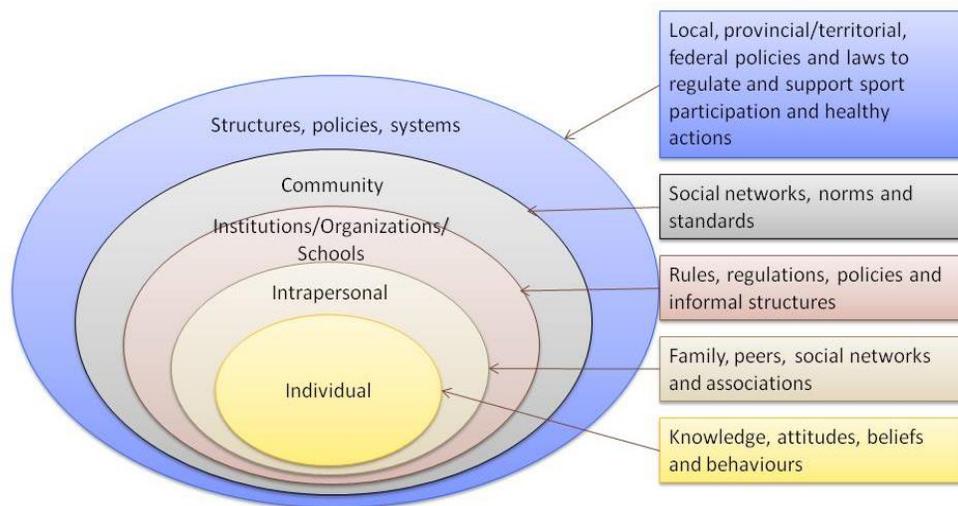
\* A newcomer is an immigrant or refugee who has been in Canada for a short time. For the purposes of simplicity, recent immigrants, refugees and new

A social-ecological model, depicted in Figure 2, illustrates the complex and multidimensional factors that facilitate and constrain sport, physical activity and recreation decisions and behaviour. It demonstrates how individuals influence and are influenced by those around them and depicts the relationship between behaviours and individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and social systems. The social-ecological model shifts policy focus from single issues, risk factors and linear causality to a more holistic way of examining the contexts in which people live and interact.<sup>28,29</sup> This report examines policy, programming and, to some extent, environmental interventions and practices that have the potential to encourage sport participation.



Canadians will be referred to as newcomers throughout the report.

**Figure 2: Socioecological Model of Sport Decisions and Behaviour**



## Women and Girls

Canadian females consistently participate in sport at lower rates than males, across all demographic categories, with a continual decline from one generation to the next. The PAM reports that while almost half of men (46%) participate in sport, only about one-quarter (22%) of women do the same and men participate in sport for more months of the year than do women.<sup>18</sup> Similarly the GSS<sup>20</sup> reported that 35% of men and 16% of women participate in sport.

Among children, the PAM<sup>19</sup> reported that more boys (79%) than girls (70%) participate in sport. Participation in regular organized sports of children aged 5 to 14, reported by the GSS, revealed that boys (56%) were more likely to participate than girls of the same age (45%).<sup>60</sup> Among those

who participate in school sports, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Report Card reported some evidence that the rate of boy's participation may be higher than that of girls.<sup>30</sup>

Evidence points to significant declines in sport participation in the transition to adolescence, with a sharper decline in girls' participation rates than boys at this stage of life.<sup>20,31</sup> Women and girls of low socioeconomic status, from ethnic communities,<sup>32</sup> and mothers and their families are further disadvantaged with respect to access to opportunities. Among Métis and off-reserve First Nations children aged 6-14\* more boys than girls participate in sport.<sup>33</sup> By 10 years of age, if a girl has yet to participate in sports, there is only a 10% chance that she will be physically active as an adult.<sup>34</sup> These issues have important

\* The study only examined only this age group.

implications to the health of girls and women.

Choice of sport also differs, along with participation rates. The top three for women are golf (15% of women who participate in sport), soccer (12%) and swimming (11%) while men prefer ice hockey (23%), golf (23%), and soccer (14%).

Sport participation by girls and women is often limited to female-specific sports and opportunities and there is limited access to coaching, training, equipment and facilities which embrace girls and women's specific abilities and skill levels.<sup>28</sup> Girls typically report more barriers to physical activity participation than boys<sup>35</sup> and this is likely also true of sport. Barriers include social pressure and lack of social support, encouragement, positive role models, self-confidence and money. Girls are often discouraged from participating when they feel they lack competence or fundamental skills in sport, or when they do not find value in the sport.<sup>36</sup>

A lack of female role models both among sport leadership positions - as administrators, executives, coaches, officials, volunteers and board members of sport organizations, where the participation rate of women is about one-third the rate of men - and due to lower levels of media coverage of women's sports, also affect sport participation levels of girls and women. There are many calls for policies requiring a minimum percentage of female representation on boards of directors of all sport and physical activity governing bodies

to increase female involvement in decision-making. Percentages called for range for 25% to 50%.<sup>1,28,37,38</sup> Once on the decision making boards it is important to be valued and respected; often there is a "chilly climate" that women experience where they do not feel welcome. Reviewing, developing and implementing harassment and anti-discrimination policies are critical to the safe and positive contribution of all. Increasing the active engagement of women and girls throughout the sport and physical activity system requires a variety of strategies that contribute to a holistic, comprehensive approach, as there is no single solution.



Women's participation as athletes, coaches, officials, and other leaders is often limited by responsibilities for child and elder care, so comprehensive family care and human resources policies are needed that look at

support, scheduling flexibility, job sharing and caregiver arrangements during training, competition, and professional development.<sup>28</sup> Transportation may also pose a barrier to some girls and women who may not feel safe using public transit, may not live near any transit routes, and may not drive. Older women (aged 55–70) face challenges related to their health status, obligations, interests and abilities. While older adulthood is a time of transition, not everyone is at the same stage at a particular age, posing additional challenges for stakeholders to easily engage this group in physical activity.<sup>39</sup>



## Indigenous Peoples\*

Among Indigenous people, participation rates, barriers and facilitators to participation and cultural factors vary among Métis, First Nations and Inuit peoples. The 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey reported that a little more than two-

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\* Consistent with The Canadian Government usage, the term Indigenous includes Aboriginal (First Nations and Métis) Peoples and Inuit Peoples. However in quotes or proper titles, the terms are used as they are mentioned in the original

thirds (69%) of Aboriginal children (66% of First Nations children living off-Reserve, 71% of Métis and 72% of Inuit children) participated in sports<sup>†</sup> at least once a week. These data are not comparable to the data for other Canadians reported by the PAM and GSS elsewhere in this report and differences in cultural interpretation of sport and different data collection methods may influence these rates.

Boys are more likely to take part than girls regardless of identity. Overall, children aged 9 to 11 tend to participate more than younger children, but among Inuit children, 12- to 14-year-olds are more active than 6-

to 8-year-olds.<sup>39,40</sup> A higher level of parental education, living in a two-parent household, living off-reserve, weekly contact with Elders and involvement in additional extracurricular activities are associated with higher levels of children's sport participation.

Factors such as migration between the city and reserve; colonizing attitudes and cultural insensitivity; different values, beliefs and cultural meanings of sport, physical activity and recreation (e.g., having a more holistic view and including traditional activities that are not classified as sports by the mainstream); systemic and overt forms of discrimination; a lack of

document. Please also note that the capitalized term Elders refers to Indigenous Elders.

<sup>†</sup> Children played sports (including taking lessons) at least once a week, as reported by the parent. Less frequent involvement was classified as non-participation.

sport opportunities, coaching capacity and sport infrastructure; economic difficulties; lower educational outcomes; health and social problems; and social, geographical (creating transportation and travel expense challenges, access to expertise and even access to nutritious food) and economic isolation all present challenges to sport participation among this population.<sup>39,41,42,43,44,45</sup>

Jurisdictional issues are different for this population than any other Canadian population. For all other populations, recreation, physical activity and sport promotion are provincial and municipal responsibilities. For on-Reserve Indigenous populations, all activities fall under federal jurisdiction and for off-Reserve residents, jurisdictional responsibilities are very complex. This often means a lack of sports and recreation in on-Reserve schools and a debate over funding responsibility for urban Indigenous peoples' centres.<sup>44,46</sup> In addition, policies from different ministries may conflict and undermine each other or at the very least, do not benefit from horizontal cooperation on issues that cross a variety of departmental mandates.<sup>44,46</sup>

In the past, mainstream sport played a part in the cultural policies of colonizing governments to eliminate Indigenous culture and encourage them to embrace mainstream values and cultural practices.<sup>47</sup> Policies such as the Indian Act, and the practices of

residential schools and institutional authorities, promoted Euro-Canadian sports and games as the most appropriate forms of physical expression and used sport and games to exert power and control over Indigenous peoples.<sup>41,45</sup>

In recent years, Canadian Indigenous leaders have worked towards self-determination through sport, in particular through the North American Indigenous Games and the World Indigenous Games.<sup>47</sup> Recently, a greater level of resources have been dedicated to increasing the percentage of Indigenous children who become physically literate, to create pathways for Indigenous athletes into high performance sport, and to increase the rate of physical activity in this population.

## Persons with Disabilities

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Information about the incidence of disability in Canada as it relates to sport participation is difficult to ascertain, as the construct of disability in society is different from the technical rules defining eligibility to compete. In addition, Canadian surveys



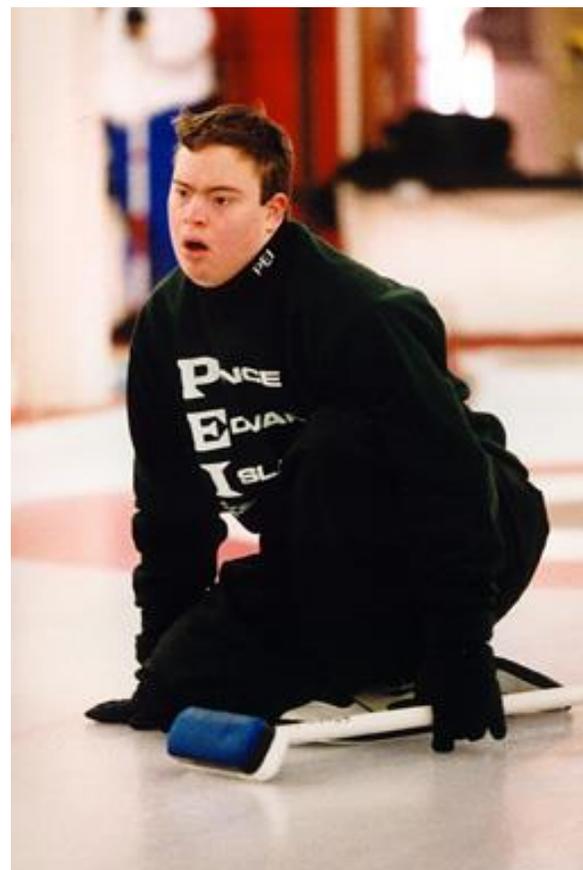
that have attempted to collect information about sport participation rates among persons with disability have suffered from a lack of clarity around the definitions of sport participation and disability.<sup>48</sup> Some data are available from other countries. In terms of physical activity (not sport), 21% of Americans with physical disabilities report achieving the recommended 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity compared with 54% of people without disabilities.<sup>49</sup> Data collected in 2015-2016 via a British national survey data found that 40% of adults without a disability reported at least one session per week of sport or exercise, compared to just 17% of adults with a disability.<sup>50</sup> Among Canadian children and youth, 3% of those with disabilities participate in organized sport compared to 36% of able-bodied individuals, while 24% of young people with disabilities never take part in unstructured activities, compared to just 2% of their able-bodied peers.<sup>51</sup>

Personal history and the severity of disability can have a significant impact on one's sport experience. Children born with a disability are often sheltered, discouraged from perceived physical risk and typically have fewer opportunities to develop fundamental movement and overall physical literacy skills. Those with a higher degree of disability may be assumed to be incapable of participating in sport, or the lack of additional supports required to facilitate their participation (such as the availability of support staff, specialized

equipment or programming) may further lessen their opportunities.

Over the past few decades the number of opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport has grown, through the Paralympics, the Special Olympics and the Deaflympics. Some of these movements are focused on building community and fostering individual development using sport as a tool, while others emphasize performance outcomes.

Canada has been a leading nation in the development of both Paralympic sport and the Special Olympics. Throughout the 1990s there was a strong emphasis on gaining recognition for athletes with a disability as “real” competitors and highlighting



competition opportunities, for example at the Canada Games. This focus is shifting towards developing coherent development systems, through the implementation of Canadian Sport for Life and the No Accidental Champions supplement. While there is no evidence that the Paralympic movement increases participation among individuals with disabilities, it does positively affect public attitudes regarding people with disabilities.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, sport for those with a disability changes both public and personal perceptions.<sup>53</sup>

Barriers include a lack of physical access to facilities, access to specialized equipment, lack of knowledge among providers on ways to adapt sports for different types of ability, or of how to make sports inclusive, and even transportation challenges (for example, priority of paratransit services being assigned to doctor's appointments over recreational activities in some cities).<sup>54</sup> People with disabilities need opportunities in both integrated sports and those tailored to their needs to establish physical literacy and experience success.<sup>55</sup> This includes providing children with disabilities the opportunity to acquire physical literacy skills at the same time as their able bodied peers, suggesting that mandatory school physical education should be extended to include children with disabilities.<sup>56</sup> Finally, interprofessional collaboration, for example, among health and recreation

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\* Immigrants, new Canadians and refugees are collectively referred to as newcomers to simplify the text.

professionals, increases participation among people with disabilities.<sup>57 58</sup>

## **Newcomers\* to Canada**

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Overall, immigrants and new citizens (defined as immigrants who have been in Canada for at least three years and have attained Canadian citizenship<sup>59</sup>) are generally less likely to participate in organized sports than Canadians who were born in Canada.<sup>39</sup> Only 26%<sup>†</sup> of new citizens engage in sports at least once per week.<sup>59</sup> However, 63% manage to participate in sport occasionally during their first three years in Canada.

Similar to the participation trends for Canadian-born citizens, female sport participation is lower than male.<sup>20</sup> Children of immigrants who had been in Canada for less than 10 years are less likely to participate in sports than children of Canadian-born parents.<sup>60</sup>

The most popular sports newcomers play in the first few years are those easy to access or common to their country of origin: swimming (35%), running (31%), cycling (25%), soccer (23%), badminton (15%) and tennis (15%).<sup>59</sup>

Newcomers face many of the same challenges common to Canadians but these challenges have particular characteristics unique or additional to those of Canadian-born residents. These challenges include

<sup>†</sup> These data are from a different survey from rates reported elsewhere and cannot be directly compared. In addition, varying cultural interpretations of sport may influence the data.

having other priorities (e.g., settling in and finding employment, a place to live, organizing schools and other services), having enough time (e.g., there are additional demands on time when adapting to life in a new country), and constraints due to the cost of participating. Other factors include lacking someone to play with, opportunities, interest, insufficient language capability, racism or not feeling welcome or comfortable, and unfamiliarity with some sports (e.g., rules, skills), the way sports are organized, how to get involved, or with Canadian sports infrastructure.<sup>59</sup>

Canada, like many countries, views sport as a vehicle through which newcomers can learn about Canadian culture and meet other Canadians with similar interests, serving as a natural, “universal” connection point that may be more welcoming and better at integrating new comers than many other social structures.<sup>59</sup> Sport involvement provides new citizens with opportunities to learn more of the informal aspects of Canadian culture such as slang terms, humour, acceptable behaviours and gestures, how to handle conflict in the Canadian context, and the opportunity to discuss Canadian politics and history.<sup>59</sup> Integration and meeting new people are also important reasons for participating, with competition being rated the lowest reason. Newcomers also participate in sport and physical activity to be healthy (including stress reduction and family time), fit and have fun.<sup>59</sup> Community centres serve not only as venues for sport and recreation programs, but as places where newcomers

can meet other people in their community, thereby reducing social isolation, participating in healthy activities, and learn about their communities.<sup>61</sup>



### **Socio-economically Disadvantaged Canadians**

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Socioeconomic factors are likely the most important determinants of sport participation.<sup>62</sup> Children who lived in households with the lowest incomes, and whose parents had not graduated high-school are less likely to play sports. While four in ten (44%) of children in the lowest adjusted income quintile participated in sport in 2005, seven in ten (68%) of those in the highest quintile were participants<sup>60</sup> Two in ten (22%) children whose parents have not graduated high school are likely to be sport participants, compared with four in

ten (42%) of those whose parents have a high school diploma and six in ten (60%) of those whose parents have a graduate of first professional university degree. Similarly, fewer adults living in lower income households (14%) participate in sport compared with adults living in households with incomes of \$40,000 or more (at least 32%).<sup>18</sup>



Children from disadvantaged households face numerous barriers to participating in sport. Families are less likely to be able to afford the cost of registration fees, equipment and transportation to local and out of town games. In addition, in families where both parents work, and in single parent families, finding the time to support children's sport participation can be a challenge.

Similarly, adults themselves who work long hours or more than one job have less leisure time in which to pursue participation

in sport. For adults, barriers may also include lost opportunity to have developed the necessary skills as children and the related feelings of awkwardness in trying to learn them as an adult, along with economic and transportation barriers.<sup>63</sup>

Barriers to those living in low-income circumstances go beyond economic capacity. There are other hidden requirements that disproportionately impact those living with lower incomes, involving early participation and the development of particular abilities. Cultural capital includes the need for particular abilities, values and desires that are celebrated in the various sporting fields.<sup>64</sup> In addition, youth may feel that the sports offered do not resonate with them or that they do not belong.<sup>64</sup>

Early and consistent participation helps to develop abilities required to address skill level, belonging, and the cultural capital needed for inclusion and an enjoyable experience. Programming for this group can be inconsistent and lack continuity. Grants provide for short term programs on an intermittent basis and there is little opportunity to continually develop skills on an ongoing basis. Regular enrollment and uninterrupted opportunities to develop and improve skills is something that more privileged families can afford. In addition, if the broader cultural capital barriers are not acknowledged, the presence of fee assistance programs is not likely to be sufficient in addressing the more deeply

rooted processes of exclusion that impact the sport experiences.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, socio-economically disadvantaged Canadians often miss out on opportunities of their more privileged peers and do not then learn the rules, basic skills (such as ball-handling skills, offensive strategy, etc.) or ways of conforming to a sports' etiquette at an early age. Without these necessary forms of ability, young people experience exclusion from and within sport.<sup>64</sup>

The material conditions of life circumstances of these individuals also mean that they are likely to place a lower value on sports participation than their more privileged peers and furthermore, sporting tastes can be shaped by class. Members of this group sometimes feel that without the benefits of fitting in and feeling a sense of belonging, the effort of overcoming the obstacles is not worth it.<sup>64</sup> Youth from low-socioeconomic circumstances experience exclusion because they are denied entry into sport, have less-than-meaningful experiences within sport, or they make choices not to participate.<sup>64</sup>

While schools work to provide opportunities for sport participation, a US study found that a higher percentage of students from high socioeconomic status (SES) schools participated in interscholastic and intramural sport than those from low SES schools.<sup>65</sup> Another US study found that

students from low income circumstances who attended a school that provided intramurals were more likely to participate in sport than children from low income homes attending a school with inter-scholastic teams.<sup>66</sup>



Addressing the participation levels of people from lower income circumstances poses particular challenges. The constant pressure on municipal services to be self-sustaining or contribute to a city's overall cost savings or revenue generation conflicts with the need to serve the most vulnerable. However, " ... there is growing evidence that the cost of providing increased opportunities to participate may be offset and, in some cases, more than pay for itself in terms of reduced costs in other areas of public spending such as physical and mental health, crime, and education."<sup>62</sup> (p. 203-204)

Though most municipalities, non-profit fitness and recreation facilities and various other initiatives offer subsidy programs or other assistance, they are viewed by many, particularly the intended recipients, as demeaning, embarrassing and stigmatizing

and are thus often under-utilized. Finally, some programs do not have sufficient means to help everyone and some potential participants are left without this assistance.

Common interventions aimed at those in low-SES circumstances have been ineffective and there is a need to address more than the obvious economic barriers to the quality of sport engagement.<sup>64</sup> The development of ability is based on early, concerted and consistent opportunities in a specific sport context. Existing financial assistance may be irregular and unreliable (for example, a program or subsidy may be available for a short term only, or the individual may not qualify for a subsidy but still not be able to finance participation) causing inconsistent participation and sporadic opportunities to improve ability and develop the cultural capital acquired by their peers through early sport participation. These factors may evoke feelings of not belonging, provide a lower quality experience and result in lack of interest or encouragement join.

### **Canadians living in rural, remote and isolated regions**

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Rural\* children aged 5 to 14 have lower levels of sports participation than their peers who live in small cities and towns.<sup>60</sup> While about half (49%) of Canada's rural children, and a similar proportion (47%) of

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\* Statistics Canada defines rural as territory lying outside population centres. It may include small towns, villages and other populated places with less than 1,000 population and also remote and wilderness areas.

children in Canada's three largest cities (Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver) and in mid-sized census metropolitan areas (51%) regularly took part in sports during the previous 12 months, 58% of those living in smaller cities and towns (populations between 10,000 and 50,000 did so.<sup>60</sup>

Rural and remote environments present unique barriers to sport participation. Key reported barriers include physical distance to facilities to practice or compete, transportation, social isolation, lack of facilities and community offerings and, a lack of human capital to sustain initiatives (e.g., having a sufficient population base to create a team, or from which to draw coaches and other officials).<sup>67</sup> In the North,<sup>†,68</sup> access is even more restricted by both the distance from cities, and limits to outdoor sport activities due to the fewer hours of daylight during the school year and extreme weather conditions.

Barriers are experienced differently by low-income children in the North than in southern communities, for example cost (of user fees or equipment) is not cited as a barrier with the same frequency as it is in the south because most programs and access to equipment are subsidized or free. The most significant barriers (those perceived as limiting participation most frequently) among all three Territories were lifestyle (e.g., smoking, substance use,

† "North" typically refers to locations in the Territories, whereas "north" refers to the northern regions in the provinces. The term "isolated" generally refers to communities that are accessible only by airplane.

screen time); social issues (e.g., drinking, gambling, family violence); family issues (e.g., parents lack social skills to encourage their children to get involved; parent(s) are too busy working; family needs compete for time); loss of volunteers due to burn out or moving away; a perceived lack of skills; and a lack of government understanding of local needs.<sup>69</sup>

A lack of indoor facilities may further add to these limitations, particularly in the North. Schools are sometimes the only facility for children and youth to participate in sports in a rural environment and supports such as late busing are needed to ensure rural youth can participate in after-school opportunities.



## LGBTQ Canadians

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Sport participation by people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning (LGBTQ) is affected by attitudes, discrimination, sexual harassment and abuse. Data on sport participation rates among members of this group are non-existent given the sensitivity of collecting the data. However qualitative research<sup>70</sup>

indicates that sports participation rates among LGBTQ people may be strongly gendered with gay men less likely to engage in organized sports and lesbian women more likely to.

An increasing number of Canadians, and at a younger age than in the past, are identifying as LGBTQ. An estimated 5 to 15% of the adult population and one-quarter of high school students identify as LGBTQ.<sup>71</sup> Younger athletes and younger coaches are feeling more comfortable with sexual and gender diversity, as evidenced by the fact that more LGBTQ athletes and coaches are coming out during their sport career, rather than waiting until they retire. While participation numbers are unknown,

for a youth-based team of 15-20 players, this could translate into five or more athletes. In addition, same-sex parents expect their children to experience all of the benefits of sport, free from any discrimination associated with parental sexual orientation.

Equality issues around sexual orientation and gender identity are still seen differently from

comparable issues on race, gender or disability and the underlying prejudices are different. Much of the prejudice and negativity around LGBTQ issues in sport can be traced back to the application of gender stereotypes and perception of masculinity and femininity.<sup>70</sup> Gendered language in sport is also linked to sexuality, and can include narrow preconceived notions of

what ‘men’ and ‘women’ who participate in sport are ‘supposed’ to be (macho or feminine). Locker rooms that are places of intimate team bonding and associated initiation rituals for rookies, which can be homophobic and sexist, both in language and behaviour, can still make participation in sports very uncomfortable and sometimes unsafe for LGBTQ individuals.

For girls and women, homophobia in sport presents an obstacle to participation for both gay and straight females: lesbians who are not welcomed and heterosexual girls and women who are reluctant to pursue sport activities to avoid a lesbian label. Thus, the existence of homophobia is a two-edged sword, working against the full participation of all females in the sport experience.<sup>72,73</sup>



The sport community has recently taken an increased interest in looking for policies regarding transgendered participation in sport.<sup>74</sup> The social issue of inclusion of LGBTQ athletes and coaches does not have the same urgency as the development of rules and policies for including trans participants. There is a need for

considerable education for the sport community to embrace diversity and offer a positive sporting experience, free of discrimination to all LGBTQ participants.<sup>74</sup>

## Older Adults

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The CFLRI reports decreasing rates of sport participation with increasing age (57% of 18-24 year olds participate, while 14% of adults aged 65 and older do so). Only 14% of Canadians aged 65 years and older participate in sport.<sup>18</sup> Masters sports welcome Canadians over the age of 35 but for the purposes of this discussion, older adults are considered to be over 55 and, more generally, over 65 years of age.

Continued engagement in sports activities as one ages is one way to realize the health benefits of active living, along with

maintaining social engagement. Older adults’ participation is influenced by previous sport engagement, the level of participation in their lives to date (athletic identity), confidence in abilities, program offerings, cultural background, social engagement and peers with whom to participate, the level of competition offered, the opportunity for intergenerational experiences and transportation.

Prevailing cultural attitudes and stereotypes, which in North America tend to be predominantly negative towards seniors, and the interaction of gender, language, religion and ethno-cultural identity can play a significant and complex role in the sport participation of older adults.<sup>75,76</sup> For example, many older women

have been discouraged from exercise during their youth.<sup>77</sup>

Many older adults who attend physical activity programs drop out within six months, citing reasons such as: illness, joint and muscle problems, pain, limited mobility or loss of ability to perform activities of daily living, reluctance to leave home, an inconvenient program location, loss of interest in the program, logistical issues

such as schedule conflicts, weather and transportation, caregiving responsibilities, vacations, and the preference to exercise in one's own home.<sup>76</sup> Finally older adults may face barriers related to care giving responsibilities of grandchildren or partners. To increase participation in physical activity programming, older adults need help to get started and encouragement to stay involved.<sup>78</sup>

## Increasing Sport Participation Among Members of Underrepresented Groups

Sport is about more than training and performance and participation is about more than just the number of participants who show up to be counted. Sport participation includes experiential aspects related to inclusion and community integration including autonomy, belongingness, engagement, meaning, mastery and challenge.<sup>57</sup> While these aspects are introduced in literature focused on inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities, they can be applied to the experience of members of all underrepresented groups. This section provides the evidence for increasing participation in sport for underrepresented groups within five of these experiential aspects. The evidence is followed by example of actions that are meant to inspire the imagination over and above the provision of a few concrete practical suggestions.

None of these actions is the answer alone. For example, offering subsidies without providing a welcoming environment will not entice people to come or to stay. A holistic, locally tailored approach, with a critical mass of actions, that support each other in a way that is stronger than the individual components, is needed. Choosing the right combination applicable to the local context and a particular community or population will be up to individual providers, who have

consulted with, and are advised by, members of the target community.

### Mastery and Challenge

To be comfortable and feel at home in sport participation, a certain level of skill is needed. For the purposes of this report, mastery entails having a minimal level of competency and physical literacy to feel comfortable participating with one's peers. While the Canadian Sport Policy has focused on physical literacy and sport skills in the early years, many members of underrepresented groups may not have had the opportunity for skill development at this age level, due to socio-economic disadvantage, physical or health challenges, past residency in other countries (e.g., living in a refugee camp or countries where sport is a privilege of the very few), cultural norms (e.g., particular sports are not played in their culture of origin, or women are not encouraged to participate) or marginalization due to other reasons (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity, physical limitations). Inclusive recreation programs,



that welcome players of all levels of skill and ability, encourage participation.<sup>79,64</sup>

When physical literacy is not at the level of one's peers, an individual has difficulty accessing opportunities to improve. They may be the last one picked for a team, discouraged from joining or benched during a game where the focus is on winning. On a more personal level, they may not feel that they have sufficient skills to even think of joining up. This is particularly true for those with low socioeconomic status.

Policy makers and others need to start to challenge the various ways sports privilege a few young people over a great many others. They can begin this process by providing programming that consistently improves skills and confidence through ongoing programming rather than sporadic initiatives.<sup>64,79</sup>

Along with mastering physical literacy and the cultural capital needed for sports participation, the development of leadership skills for coaching, refereeing, or participating in an administrative capacity, is closely tied to the concepts of challenge and mastery. Pathways for members of underrepresented groups for developing these attributes are needed.<sup>28,37,38</sup>

### **Offering a Range of Opportunities**

Opportunities for skill development for different ages and skill levels increase self-confidence and participation levels. Programmers should consider offering a variety of activities from introductory or skills development programs and providing



the opportunity to try different sports and hone physical literacy.<sup>80,81</sup> In schools, intramural sports with no-cut policies offer opportunities for skill development<sup>82,65,66</sup> among children and youth. Outside of school, offering and funding ongoing consistent programming, provides for continual skill development.<sup>64</sup>

### **Providing Challenge**

There needs to be a societal balance between focusing on the development of elite athletes and a sport-for-all focus that enables all Canadian residents to participate at the level of their choice. Individuals vary in the types of factors that motivate them. While some thrive on increasing levels of challenge, competition and advancing in

sport, others just want to go out and have fun with their friends. It is important to understand motivation for participation and honouring a participant's reasons. Consider, for example, the case where three girls sign up for an activity together. If one is told she is 'too good' for the level they signed up for and forced to join another, more advanced class at a different time, there is a very real risk of all three girls dropping out altogether, because their reason for participating has not been respected and the social aspect and sense of belongingness have been taken from them.

Along with a focus on funding and developing international excellence at the elite level, there needs to be ongoing well funded sport opportunities that focus on fun, social inclusion and sports' role in supporting a healthy active lifestyle for all Canadian residents. It is important to understand, acknowledge and honour reasons for participating in a sport and not to enforce athletic development standards on those who are not looking for that type or experience. Accommodating all levels of skill and competition and supporting choice of participation level provides the variety of experiences sought by different individuals.

### **Promoting Access**

To improve skill levels, potential participants need to have places to practice and compete. Offering programming in centralized facilities that are distant from



many potential users or hard to get to can create barriers to participation. For residents of rural and remote areas, specialized facilities may be sparse or non-existent. Access to nearby quality barrier-free infrastructure and facilities, such as schools, ball fields, green spaces, workplaces, natural amenities, places of worship, community halls, or indeed any facilities in more remote areas and on-Reserve, will increase participation.<sup>63,67,83,106</sup> Agreements that provide access to such places will improve availability.

Many of Canada's sport and recreation facilities are aging and in need of repair and upgrades to meet modern accessibility standards. The original construction of many came from funding stemming from Canada's centennial celebrations. This means they are approaching 50 years old. Others, built since then, are still aging and they too, require ongoing maintenance and upgrades.<sup>84,85</sup> Infrastructure funding to support these costs will help ensure that facilities are available, accessible and inviting.

Economic barriers to access can include the cost of registration, equipment, transportation both to local facilities and for out-of-region competition (especially for those living in remote areas), clothing, coaches and trainers.<sup>62,61,86,87 63, 88,89</sup>

Improving access via addressing transportation barriers can take the form of ensuring that public transit is accessible, offers direct routes, feels safe (e.g., lighting and security), of providing late bussing after school, or of creatively funding longer distance transportation.

Offering food in general and traditional foods for some participants ensures both a social and cultural component, as well as ensuring that athletes are sufficiently nourished to participate.<sup>3,45,80</sup>

## **Improving Mastery and Creating Challenge**

The development of mastery at any age can be supported by ensuring that people in all age groups, ability levels and backgrounds are provided the opportunity to develop physical literacy, cultural capital, and mentorship abilities. Provision of such opportunity requires teaching and coaching, and the space to practice. Increasing access to can involve opening many types of buildings and facilities, ensuring physical and operational access and addressing equipment, economic, and transportation barriers. Suggestions for stakeholders to consider for improving the mastery of all Canadian residents are offered below.

## Improving Mastery and Creating Challenge - Ideas for Action

### **Develop to introduce basic skills and improve physical literacy for all ages, abilities and skill levels**

- ✓ Recognize that many children, youth and adults have not had the opportunity to build basic physical literacy skills between ages 0 and 6.
- ✓ Offer programs that teach movement skills and provide opportunities to practice skills to build physical literacy in, for all who have not had the opportunity to develop these skills at a young age.
- ✓ Consider offering introductory baseball, soccer and other popular sport skills programs, along with adult learn-to-skate or learn-to-swim programs. For example, baseball for teens, adult introductory basketball or sledge hockey for youth and adults.
- ✓ Ensure introductory and skill development programs are designed to be welcoming and engaging.
- ✓ Consider updating the Long-Term Athlete Development model to reflect entry at any age.

### **Fund programs on an ongoing basis**

- ✓ Support financial access for all those who wish to participate.
- ✓ Avoid interruptions in skills development and participation for those to whom the cost of fees is a barrier.
- ✓ Investigate and implement respectful and dignified application processes for membership/participation subsidies. Ensure that subsidy programs provide long-term support.

### **Work with intersectoral partners in health, and fitness, education, transportation, planning justice, social services, settlement organizations, daycares, libraries**

- ✓ Create program offerings outside of mainstream sport to build skills and open doors to greater levels of participation.
- ✓ Work with health professionals to educate program delivery people about the needs of older adults (e.g., possible changes in range of movement and ability) and ways to accommodate and adapt programming.

### **Recognize the overlap between physical activity, recreation and sport**

- ✓ Offer a range of sports and levels within them from introduction and basic skills (e.g., learn to skate or learn to swim) to friendly games to intramural and house leagues (with no-cut policies,) to more competitive (interscholastic, competitive leagues) to elite

## Improving Mastery and Creating Challenge - Ideas for Action

- ✓ Offer new sports to try and encourage members of all groups to try new tasks, movement skills and sports and recognize how acquisition of new skills in one area creates confidence within and across sports.
- ✓ Offer drop in or trial sessions to minimize initial commitment and encourage experimentation.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for newcomers to teach their neighbours new games, sports, skills and activities.
- ✓ Provide increased support to both intramural and interscholastic sport teams, irrespective of skill levels, to ensure that all students can participate.
- ✓ Ensure all kids have fair and equal playing time, regardless of skills, attendance or other factors.
- ✓ Ensure a variety of sport experiences are available to people of all circumstances.

### **Support professional development and mentorship opportunities for members of underrepresented groups.**

- ✓ Support professional development and mentorship opportunities for staff, coaches, officials, educators, and volunteers from underrepresented groups to increase their skills and confidence.
- ✓ Ensure access and encourage interest and participation in training programs and leadership opportunities among members of all groups.
- ✓ Offer opportunities at local facilities, parks or programs in need of trainers, coaches as part of the training.
- ✓ Create registers or databases of women in professional or volunteer management in sport at the local, regional, and national levels so that female candidates are made visible for further recruitment. Consider extending this policy to other groups, where it is equally applicable.

### **Encourage Peer leadership and mentorship**

- ✓ Provide peer mentorship opportunities to develop leadership skills and improve physical literacy, cultural capital and sports skills.
- ✓ Encourage new-comers to share their knowledge and skills of their home-country sport with others of their cultural background and beyond.
- ✓ Encourage more highly skilled participants to coach and mentor those who do not have the same level of skill.

## Improving Mastery and Creating Challenge - Ideas for Action

- ✓ Consult with members of underrepresented groups to determine what sport skills and knowledge they can share and actively involve them in developing a program to disseminate them.

### Ensure physical access to facilities

- ✓ Promote the shared use of rural or community school recreation facilities, providing safe and affordable places for community members to be active.
- ✓ Encourage and support the use of conventional sport facilities and non-conventional facilities such as basements of places of worship, community halls and other public spaces.
- ✓ Establish sustained and continued funding programs that support the upgrade, expansion, maintenance or placement of recreational facilities, parks and trails.
- ✓ Create local outdoor rinks and equip local parks with soccer fields, tennis courts, baseball diamonds and other facilities to meet the expressed desires of the local community.
- ✓ Fund additional costs of opening facilities for new uses or extending current operating hours or days of the week. For example, funding additional facility staffing needs such as registration, janitorial or security, including those associated.
- ✓ Look for and promote innovative ways to share or reduce costs associated with shared use and work to ensure equitable access. For example, exploring cost effective ways to fund liability protection across multiple venues.
- ✓ Provide school boards and other community organizations with templates to remove the barriers associated with developing policies and guidelines for shared use. Such guidelines would outline roles and responsibilities of users and providers of spaces and guide equitable space allocation.
- ✓ Create policy statements that can be easily adapted or readily incorporated into local school board policies.
- ✓ Provide information that addresses liability and insurance issues.

### Ensure facilities are maintained and meet accessibility codes

- ✓ Provide funding for repair and upgrades to ensure that facilities are safe, accessible and inviting.

## Improving Mastery and Creating Challenge - Ideas for Action

### Remove transportation barriers

- ✓ Support after school activities (including late bussing), providing transportation to students who want to participate in after school intramural or interschool sports opportunities.
- ✓ Explore and encourage private and not for profit investment in transportation, considering innovative ideas for transporting potential participants to facilities and working with other community organizations to combine transportation to another community event with transportation to a sporting opportunity.
- ✓ Provide transportation to family members and other supporters who will encourage participation.

### Remove barriers to the cost of equipment

- ✓ Explore and encourage private and not for profit investment in equipment.
- ✓ Consider providing an equipment lending program at local soccer fields, baseball diamonds and similar facilities.
- ✓ Consider equipment lending programs at local libraries, as many newcomers and older adults go to libraries.
- ✓ Provide arenas with sledge hockey equipment and provide community centers with wheelchairs designed for basketball to enable able bodied peers to play with their wheelchair using friends.

### Offer a broader cultural experience including offering food as part of the programming

- ✓ Attract participants with social and cultural experiences in addition to the sporting experience. For example, get people to come out and try a traditional sport by including it as part of a cultural expo or festival, or offer a celebration of traditional foods with a tournament for a traditional sport.
- ✓ Offer food to ensure participants (for example, those who may not have as much to eat at home) have the energy to participate.

## Engagement and Meaning

Members of underrepresented groups have experienced marginalization in many aspects of their lives. “Religious persecution, colonization, homophobia, racism, poverty, ageism and gender inequality are just some of the other areas that can begin to be addressed through effective sport and recreation inclusion policy.”<sup>90(p.389)</sup> In addition, underrepresented groups experience a greater number of barriers to sport and physical activity than mainstream Canadians.<sup>91</sup>

### Co-creating Programs

For members of underrepresented groups to feel comfortable in participating, they need to feel engaged in meaningful activity and have a sense of ownership and emotional investment. Involving group members in the programming at the design stage through an advisory group or in-depth consultation ensures sport programming is tailored to meet their needs and preferences, contributes to an understanding and addressing of their particular barriers, and is developed in culturally sensitive, locally tailored ways.<sup>42,91,92,61,93,8694,95,96,97,98,99,63100,88,80,41,124,101,83</sup> An example of tailoring facility use as a result of community consultation is the use of softball fields for cricket in Scarborough, Ontario. Many countries (for example, England and Australia) have expressed a goal of developing sports

programming that is consumer driven in their approach to becoming more inclusive.

Decisions about whether to become physically active and remain engaged are influenced by existing program offerings. Programming decisions are often made by program administrators who have their own perceptions of what might be appropriate and may be influenced by cultural norms and stereotypes.<sup>77</sup> Program leaders need to consult with their target audiences to determine what types of programs and activities they might like. For example, in welcoming newcomers and providing sport opportunities, a critical distinction must be made between assimilation (characterized as a top-down approach, encouraging newcomers to conform to and/or adapt to their new country’s values and norms)<sup>102</sup> and interculturalism (a reciprocal sharing and learning of cultural practices that promotes understanding of individuals and groups).<sup>61</sup>



Engagement with members of target audiences must be undertaken in ways that are respectful of community members' knowledge and cultural ways of understanding sport and sport leadership.<sup>42</sup> For example, sport promotion to Indigenous peoples should embrace their meaning of sport<sup>45,103,104</sup> and focus on the contribution of physical activity to the improvement of emotional, physical, and spiritual health.<sup>27,45</sup> In consulting with the community, sports organizers and administrators need to be flexible, adaptable, willing to yield and share their power, and open and committed to change, and to questioning their assumptions and stereotypes.<sup>61,77,90,103,105,106,107</sup>



### **Taking a Holistic Approach**

A social-ecological model encourages a shift from a “focus on single issues, risk factors and linear causality, towards an holistic concern to develop supportive contexts in the places that people live their lives.”<sup>28,108</sup>

A holistic approach to the creation of

programming addresses all aspects of the participant's experience and recognizes the different influences on an individual, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, environment and policy related factors. It can be established through the engagement of numerous community groups and support networks, and the creation of cross-sector, interprofessional, multi-level and cross-cultural partnerships and communication.<sup>27,57,67,86,88,90,98,109,111,110</sup>

Involving a broad cross-section of the community, including parents, siblings, Elders, school administrators and other community members are also key a holistic approach<sup>45,111,42,41,82</sup> Better coordination of cross government departmental mandates would also contribute to a holistic approach<sup>136</sup> and needs to extend across jurisdictions and ministries.<sup>58</sup> This includes involving other departments such as Health Canada and Justice to create a broader focus that embraces issues that impact sport participation but that fit within their mandate.<sup>111</sup> A greater level of communication will enable other communities and organizations to utilize these successful practices for themselves. Sport England committed to joining up effectively across sectors to ensure that sport is designed to meet the demands of consumers, who each have different motivations and engage with sport in different ways.

## Using Sport for Development in a Holistic Approach

Sport for Development uses sport as a vehicle for economic development and social change, including issues related to humanitarian, cultural, ethical and peace-building causes.<sup>2</sup> Though such opportunities are often associated with international efforts, there are organizations that are including the power of sport to engage underrepresented groups in their efforts in Canada. Sport for development, “involves tapping into what sport can do ‘intentionally’” to address a range of community priorities, such as community building; promoting good citizenship; enhancing leadership, social and conflict resolution skills; developing positive peer relations; health promotion; teaching rules norms and values; promoting positive self-esteem and self-worth; decreasing antisocial behaviour; engaging marginalized youth; stimulating economic revitalization; and supporting newcomer settlement.<sup>112,119</sup> Further, it can contribute to coaching and leadership training, the contribution of youth to society, and help to create a cohesive society, irrespective of culture, socio-economic circumstances, religion, age and sexual identity.<sup>113</sup>

Implementation and evaluation of Canadian Sport for Development initiatives<sup>114,115,116</sup> has yielded key lessons applicable to promoting sport participation among members of underrepresented groups:



- Community sport programs have a significant impact on health and educational outcomes for young people.
- Sport programs help recent immigrants to integrate into Canadian communities, provide an alternative to gang behaviour, and foster community participation.
- Program effectiveness can be enhanced by recruiting and training teenaged volunteers to coach younger children. Almost half of all volunteers in Canada begin their volunteering through sport and recreation; it is a catalyst for a whole range of volunteer activities later in life. Therefore, the active participation of young volunteers can improve program impact and make a longer-term contribution to the voluntary sector.
- Community sport initiatives bring together people working in health promotion, crime prevention, immigrant settlement and education,

encouraging holistic approaches to community development.

- This initiative has proven highly successful, both in local communities and at the national policy level. Embedding promising approaches into the structures and mindsets of the institutions that fund and govern sport in Canada (e.g., national sport and recreation organizations and coaching associations) remains a challenge; it represents a shift from gatekeeper to facilitator.
- Some community sport practitioners are moving from a service-delivery model in which outside experts organize sports for people, to an approach in which citizens draw upon their own talents and resources to build their own programs and communities. In a similar vein, there is an untapped capacity for young people to design and run their own programs. This represents a significant shift for the task oriented sports community.
- Academics and sport practitioners adopt very different approaches to research and its use; it would be to everyone's advantage to bridge the gap between these two cultures.

As with all approaches, Sport for Development initiatives must consider the principles on which they are built. While the intent is based on the will to help and support others, there is always the danger of power differentials among coordinating groups and the population target. Those

who are involved in the planning cannot entirely be removed from the day-to-day experiences of those for whom the initiative is meant. Partnerships must be based on mutual respect, equality, and valid contributions and commitment from all members.<sup>117</sup>

### **Using Health Promotion in a Holistic Approach**

While the benefits of Sport for Development initiatives contribute to health in its broadest definition, sport in and of itself is a logical vehicle for health promotion. For example, youth sport clubs are ideal settings for health promotion, but not just by virtue of engaging children and youth in sport and the inherent physical benefits that come from being active in sport.<sup>119</sup> Health promoting sport has the potential to address some of the negative aspects of sport, including injuries, eating disorders, pressure to win, doping, substance abuse, aggressive parents, and early specialization. The development of these skills and attributes through sport depend on participation, which means they must have access. Access by members of underrepresented groups needs to be addressed as part of any strategy.

A comprehensive health promotion strategy needs to be developed with multiple partners from different sectors, for example public health. Sport organizations can take a whole health approach<sup>118</sup> and work with others to build healthy policy, create supportive environments, strengthen community action, develop personal skills,

and reorient health services. Sport clubs can become supportive and healthy environments in all aspects of the way they function and through an eventual change in the culture that will impact participants, coaches, volunteers and parents.<sup>119</sup> The impact can reach beyond just the club to impact the community, schools, other recreation clubs, businesses, traditional health-promoting and care settings, and even influence work at different jurisdictional levels. Health promotion is a responsibility of all organizations, sectors, and community leaders – both traditional and non-traditional, and sport clubs are no

exception, but, in fact, can be a logical place to start.

### **Creating Engagement and Meaning**

To create an environment of engagement and meaning to improve sport participation, sport leaders need to work in close consultation with community groups and intersectoral partners to integrate sport activities into a broad range of programming within and beyond sport and recreation mandates. Ideas for Action for each of these areas of focus are provided in the table below.



## Ensuring Engagement and Meaning - Ideas for Action

### **Involve those for whom programs are being developed**

- ✓ Establish an advisory committee for each target audience, involving partners and community members from various sectors, professions and range of potential participants.
- ✓ Create a safe space for committee members to contribute and share their knowledge, skills, desires and beliefs and to co-create program offerings that would be interesting, fun and meaningful to their community.
- ✓ Listen to appreciate culturally- appropriate, ability-appropriate and gender-appropriate understanding of sport and participation.
- ✓ Co-create communication vehicles and messages that will resonate with the target community.
- ✓ Ensure community member engagement is ongoing and provides mechanisms to respond to feedback and tweak programming.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for committee members to observe, support and interact with participants.
- ✓ Avoid a top down approach in developing programs where programmers presume to know recreation and assume what members of various groups would enjoy or need.
- ✓ Conduct meetings in the language(s) of the cultural groups consulted.

### **Work with non-sport partners and community organizations**

- ✓ Work with cultural and settlement organizations who have direct contact with newcomers.
- ✓ Build capacity through allocating resources to existing community personnel and volunteers for continuing education.
- ✓ Collaborate with partners to promote sport's contribution to supporting a healthy lifestyle jointly with the health department or ministry and work collaboratively in including sport as part of broader health promotion program.
- ✓ Work with community leaders and partners (including non-sport participants) and encourage them to support sport programs and cheer on their participants.
- ✓ Identify and promote community champions and create a sense of community ownership.
- ✓ Promote multiple champions to reflect many voices of the community and so that there is a role model to reflect the motivational needs of many.

## Ensuring Engagement and Meaning - Ideas for Action

- ✓ Coordinate efforts between jurisdictions, ministries and different levels of government. Think outside of the box to establish new ways for federal, provincial/territorial and municipal jurisdictions to support and promote each other's efforts in serving underrepresented groups and increase participation.
- ✓ Demonstrate the value of sport to community partners, such as those working in the areas of justice, homelessness and leadership.
- ✓ Explore for various departments to work together to create a broader more holistic approach to participation in sport, physical activity and recreation.

### **Recognize the overlap between physical activity, recreation and sport**

- ✓ Understand that different cultures define the distinctiveness of these concepts in varying degrees. Recognize a broad definition of sport and offer a range of sports, recreation and physical activity opportunities that are culturally appropriate and open to all.
- ✓ Provide multiple opportunities for unstructured or pick-up sport/recreation/physical activities to support those whose priorities are focused on settling in their new country and may have limited time to attend specific team activities.
- ✓ Allow newcomers to try different activities at no or minimal cost.
- ✓ Invite already established Canadians to also come out and try a new sport or learn from the newcomers.
- ✓ Examine registration systems to ensure the process is easy to navigate.
- ✓ Provide intergenerational and family oriented programs. For example, create programs beyond parent-and-me introductions for young children and welcome families and participants of all ages and abilities to participate together.
- ✓ Invite newcomer parents to planning and consultation sessions to ensure their views are incorporated into program and policy planning and to help reassure them of the intentions of the policy/program.
- ✓ Integrate sport into other social or community programs, such as after-school programs, cultural programming, library programs, art gallery and museum events, community festivals, etc.
- ✓ Encourage summer or March break non-sport camps to include some sport (i.e., Computer camp with floor hockey game, or snowshoeing).

## Ensuring Engagement and Meaning - Ideas for Action

- ✓ Collaborate with public health, cultural organizations, social services, police and justice, environmental groups, health charities, etc. to determine ways to use sport to address issues related to their issues.
- ✓ Consider offering activities that combine scholastic endeavours with physical activity to accommodate parents who feel their children's main priority is school, rather than sport.
- ✓ Work in partnership with city council and economic development organizations to create a sport hosting policy that will increase business in communities.
- ✓ Enhance trail systems, bike paths, and other recreation facilities or areas to help increase tourism.
- ✓ Work with health and fitness partners to develop health promotion strategies within sport programs.
- ✓ Create program offerings outside of mainstream sport to build skills and open doors to greater levels of participation.
- ✓ Include consideration of the connections between recreational policy and other social policies, and how the change of one entails the change of another.



## Belongingness

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To feel comfortable participating in a sport, or even coming in the door of a recreation centre, all Canadian residents, and particularly members of underrepresented groups need to feel that they are welcome, that they belong and that they are offered relevant programming. Creating a sense of belongingness is more than just opening doors and removing physical or social barriers for participation in mainstream programs and activities.<sup>90</sup> "... The problem with this approach is that sport policies and practices that have excluded people in the first place are left unexamined and unchallenged... this can leave responsibility for social inclusion to those who have been historically excluded and require them to figure out how to include themselves into a system that does not necessarily meet their needs."<sup>90(p.392)</sup> In addition to welcoming sport participants, a culture of inclusion recognizes, respects, values and utilizes the talents and contribution of all the organization's people,<sup>120</sup> ensuring that its values are reflected in its staffing and demonstrated to its public.

### Taking a Human Rights Approach to Inclusion

Sport and recreation departments are mandated to offer programming that will attract participants, have full registrations and generate sufficient revenue. Offering specialized programs to underrepresented groups that may have low registration (e.g., women only swim times) may conflict with

this mandate. Programming that is offered on the basis of providing human rights (i.e., all citizens have a right to sport programs) and where assimilation into mainstream sports is not the goal, would ensure provision of appropriate programming.<sup>90,93,121,129</sup> Sport participation can be increased among underrepresented groups when leaders at all levels recognize and systematize the human rights perspective in considering program offerings and use moral or ethical guidelines as a basis for promoting social inclusion.<sup>99,90</sup> These include thinking in terms of equal rights (e.g., to sport participation and leadership), equal value (e.g., of different abilities and cultural practices) and equal treatment (e.g., a lack of discrimination).<sup>90(p.394)</sup>

### Parallel Opportunities and Reverse Integration

Promoting and encouraging diversity rather than just removing barriers to participating in mainstream sports opportunities means providing opportunities that would appeal to many cultures and providing access to a range of activities. Such a system would include both new experiences and traditional experiences open to newcomers and long-term Canadians from that culture to provide access to cultural experiences. Newcomers may bring different types of sport literacy or coaching skills, related to the sports from their home country, and have something to offer both other Canadians and newcomers.

Opening participation in such a variety of cultural sports or physically adapted sports can ensure there are sufficient numbers for a program or league and ensure friends and supporters can join in.<sup>61,122,103,123</sup> For example, opening Indigenous sports opportunities to all can promote cross-cultural experiences and understanding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand, for some groups, for example women and girls, comfort is achieved through participation with members of their own group alone. Offering programs or program times that are open only to girls and women can encourage members of this group to participate.<sup>86,80</sup> What is important is asking members of underrepresented groups how they would like to participate and designing programs that meet those needs and desires.

For persons with a disability, choice is paramount. While some individuals may choose to engage in community sport programs, others may have more success, or be more comfortable participating in a program designed to for their particular abilities. For some, acquiring the skills required to master an activity in a segregated setting may instil confidence to participate in the mainstream sport system.

The Gay Games were initially created as an opportunity for gays and lesbians to show the world that their skills and competitive spirit were equal to the rest of humanity, as often LGBTQ sport participants felt they had to hide their sexual orientation. The Gay

Games are an opportunity to participate in sport in a supportive, welcoming atmosphere. The Games are intended to build bridges, strengthen community and bolster self-esteem. Their goals are to promote the spirit of inclusion and participation, as well as to promote the pursuit of personal growth in a sporting event.

For Indigenous peoples, a double helix model of parallel and mainstream sport systems with cross links at various levels of achievement and competition has been proposed.<sup>111</sup> Both systems advance athletes through their own structures. It illustrates a system for Canada's Indigenous Peoples that is equal to the mainstream system, self determined, separately funded, and culturally owned, relevant and appropriate. The cross bars are points where the Canadian mainstream system connects and contributes to the Indigenous sport system but where, to date, the power is unequal<sup>111</sup> and navigating the crossing of these connecting points pose challenges for some Indigenous athletes and officials as they deal with cultural tensions.<sup>82</sup> The Indigenous Games pathway increases participation at all levels<sup>45,136</sup> through the provision of cultural sporting experiences, training for leaders, volunteers, recreation directors, coaches. It



Figure 3 Double Helix

## **Promoting to target audiences**

Information about available programs should be provided in ways that portray them as culturally diverse and welcoming, and promote benefits of participation.<sup>122</sup>

Program offerings should be promoted directly to the target audiences in the language of the target community.

Communications should be co-created with members of the target audience to ensure they reflect that population's perspective and are culturally safe and relevant.<sup>124,63</sup>

Appropriately trained and promoted champions can be strong role models and advocates for creating a more welcoming and accepting environment.<sup>125,80,126</sup> Role models can help with promotion and creating a sense of belongingness, but should be relatable members of the underrepresented group rather than from the mainstream. For example, recent media coverage of elite soccer has provided role models for some underrepresented groups.

However, while role models can be inspirational, they can sometimes be intimidating, which may turn potential participants away from sport if they do not identify with them. For example older adults or others with ability limitations can be intimidated when the role model's abilities do not match what they think they can personally achieve.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, media studies have brought attention to the "supercrip" image which portrays disabled athletes as heroic within the boundaries of the world of disability;<sup>127</sup> some disabled athletes have strenuously resisted in an

effort to portray themselves as a part of the larger society. Family members, community members, Elders and others may be appropriate role models as well as elite sport participants.<sup>128,28,129,130,131</sup>

In addition, generating appropriate positive media coverage that shows members of underrepresented groups participating in sport and enjoying themselves will both promote that these experiences welcome all members of the community and promote public acceptance of that participation. For example, media coverage and hosting of events such as the Paralympic Games has been shown to change public attitudes.<sup>132</sup>

## **Promoting Social Engagement and Fun**

Social barriers include the family responsibilities of caring for other family members, including children, younger siblings or grandchildren, dependants with a disability, and in the case of older adults, spouses. Provision of programming for other family members at the same time, such as child care or sport or recreation activities at minimal cost, can address this barrier.<sup>91,86,122,61,28,88,62</sup>

Sport provides opportunities to strengthen community and social ties<sup>45</sup> and bring communities together to be active in cultural or social activities,<sup>124</sup> improving the sense of belongingness. In turn, community and family support can encourage participation.<sup>88,41,69,133</sup> Opportunities for intergenerational and whole family participation<sup>86,69</sup> are appropriate to many

cultures, provide alternatives to providing separate activities or care for other family members, and provide support and encouragement to participation.

Among Indigenous peoples, involvement of Elders in games and activities will support the spiritual aspects and will assist in the revitalization of traditional games, sports, and activities. Their leadership will bridge the gap between the generations, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and enhancing cultural experiences.<sup>45</sup>

### **Setting a Welcoming Tone**

All members of the sport community should be tasked with ensuring that members of underrepresented groups feel welcome to participate.<sup>98, 106</sup> Administrators, coaches, front desk staff and volunteers are among the people that set the tone of the sport participation experience and inclusivity. To ensure a positive environment, staff at all levels should be supportive, culturally competent, inclusive, and look for ways to build positive relationships and experiences with participants and their supporters (e.g., cross-cultural collaboration and inclusion in cultural activities)<sup>134,109,80,61,88,41,120,135,79,136</sup> and should denounce inappropriate language.<sup>137,138</sup> Coaches and others who are in regular contact with participants, may need training on cultural competency,\* anti-harassment, the effects of stereotyping, and

coaching approaches that are applicable to each of the populations.<sup>139 140,28,138,141,142,143</sup> If they work with older adults, their education should include information about arthritis, heart conditions and osteoporosis and adapting programming to address associated needs, injury prevention and skill levels.

Boards of directors and the administration of sport organizations should have both female representation<sup>144,145</sup> and members from other underrepresented groups<sup>100</sup> to create a positive environment for participation of other group members in the sport as athletes, coaches and volunteers.

### **Creating a Sense of Belongingness**

Key principles identified in the literature that will create a sense of belongingness include celebrating diversity and ensuring that sports participation experiences are positive, social, fun, inclusive, non-judgemental and free of harassment and inappropriate language. In addition, belongingness is created when programmers honour and support participant choices regarding type and level of involvement, competition and scheduling. Finally, programming should be offered to members of underrepresented groups based on human rights rather than revenue generation. Ideas for action are provided below.

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\* Cultural competency refers to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for providing quality service to diverse populations. This involves knowing one's

own biases, understanding the sociocultural aspects of participation, and effective communication skills.

## Creating a Sense of Belongingness - Ideas for Action

### **Celebrate and promote diversity.**

- ✓ Promote sports that embrace diversity and open them to all participants regardless of culture or background.
- ✓ Offer familiar sports to new Canadians while providing long-term Canadians an opportunity to try a sport that connects them with their ethnic or cultural background.
- ✓ Provide traditional Indigenous games and open them to non-Indigenous Canadians to provide an opportunity for cross cultural understanding.
- ✓ Allow friends without disabilities access to adapted sports equipment and skills development so that they may play and compete with peers who play these sports (e.g., sledge hockey or wheelchair basketball).
- ✓ Pair individuals with intellectual disabilities with partners without intellectual disabilities on teams for training and competition in schools and elsewhere.

### **Create safe spaces.**

- ✓ Create a 'positive space' where sport is practiced. This involves publicly declaring, through visible signs, that physical premises such as your offices, team rooms, locker rooms, classroom, or the entire facility, are 'positive spaces' for LGBTQ participants. Respect is mandatory in such a space and lesbian and gay persons and other minorities can expect to feel welcome and secure in a safe space.
- ✓ Launch and promote free and low-cost community female-only sport opportunities such as open houses or try-it days to expose females to new sports in a safe and supportive environment.

### **Ensure diversity in governance and participation.**

- ✓ Ensure diversity in leadership (e.g., cultural representation among coaches, policies specifying a minimum of 40% of women and men on executive boards and committees of sport governing bodies).
- ✓ Invite girls and women specifically to participate in a sport opportunity, to take a training course, serve on a Board or become a coach.
- ✓ Link with the community educational organizations (e.g., Indigenous schools, Indigenous or foreign language programs) to showcase sport opportunities.
- ✓ Link sport participation with traditional knowledge and ways of knowing and with cultural learning.

### **Promote programming in the languages and through the channels of the target community(ies).**

- ✓ Translate documentation about program offerings to make them accessible to those who do not have English or French as their first language. Include information about the benefits of sport participation, physical activity and other information that committee members have identified as relevant to the target population.
- ✓ Use pictures of members of the target community participating in the promoted sports to illustrate promotional materials (e.g., persons with a disability, members of ethnic groups, women).
- ✓ Promote benefits of sport participation in ways that will resonate with the target community.
- ✓ Reach out to newcomers through a central online hub and through Welcome packages, English classes, libraries, and settlement organizations with all information pertaining to sport and the recreation infrastructure.
- ✓ Recruit and train newcomers to provide outreach, teaching/coaching and other forms of expertise to share with others.

### **Generate media coverage, host events and create public awareness of programming that targets members of underrepresented groups.**

- ✓ Share good news and success stories with the media (e.g., about creating community involvement, of creating leaders, of a successful athlete from the target group, about refugee participation).
- ✓ Provide photo opportunities with members of the target community(ies) participating in the promoted sports.
- ✓ Host events or ensure media coverage of elite level sports where members of underrepresented groups are participating (e.g., Paralympics, Special Olympics, National Aboriginal and Indigenous Games, Canadian Women's Hockey League) and non-mainstream sports (e.g., Cricket, Futsal).
- ✓ Increase coverage of women's elite events to normalize women playing sport and make women part of our sporting culture.
- ✓ Tell stories of real women who play sport using images that are the complete opposite of the idealised and stylised images of women we are now used to seeing in the media. (i.e., as promoted in the Sport England 'This Girl Can' Campaign).

### **Use social media and social networking as appropriate to the target audience.**

- ✓ Make sports participation and healthy lifestyles 'cool' and attractive.

- ✓ Create an accepting environment by allowing peers to show off their own participation.

**Adopt and adapt sport marketing techniques to promote to all Canadians, including underrepresented groups.**

- ✓ Use a consumer drive approach to ensure that programs meet the needs of potential as well as current participants.
- ✓ Create a buzz and get all Canadians excited about sport participation for fun, family and social engagement and for health.
- ✓ Consider the four P's of marketing (place, price product and promotion) in designing and promoting sport program offerings.

**Share the programs that are working, build a repository of knowledge and support implementation.**

- ✓ Identify programs and policy actions that are working across the country but are unpublished and share them broadly.
- ✓ Take existing reports and share their recommendations more widely.
- ✓ Create capacity for implementation of identified good practice and recommended actions.

**Offer programs based on human rights not just based on the balance sheet.**

- ✓ Consider your organization's profit-structure with the benefits realized in other areas of the community by undertaking changes that may be less profitable.

**Use role models with whom participants can identify.**

- ✓ Promote a variety of role models for a better connection with your diverse audience.
- ✓ Promote local heroes that people can relate.
- ✓ Provide training for role models and spokespeople to be sure stories encourage more participation rather than scare away potential participants.

**Create a welcoming environment**

- ✓ Ensure programmers, leaders, coaches, staff and participants set an example and encourage appropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Provide sensitivity and cultural competency training to all staff, administrators and volunteers. For example, provide training to coaches and volunteers about the socio-cultural, political, and religious background about newcomers in their centres/clubs to help understand their attitudes toward sport.

- ✓ Improve educator and coach understanding of how to coach female athletes, awareness of variations in skill level, motivation, social dynamics, maturation, and demands in their personal lives.
- ✓ Promote the use of inclusive language and respect for diversity. Encourage and support sensitive but vocal denouncing of racist, homophobic, sexist, ageist, ablebodyist, language and stereotypical assumptions within in the organization and with the public (e.g., parents, spectators, other participants).
- ✓ Develop champions that can play a key role in creating more welcoming and accepting environments for sexual minorities in sport.
- ✓ Develop policies governing the participation of trans athletes that embrace diversity and offer a positive sporting experience, free of discrimination.
- ✓ Instate a zero-tolerance policy for participants who make inappropriate comments or exhibit inappropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Ensure key psychosocial elements of acceptance, safety, trust and recognition are in place to support women's participation.
- ✓ Ensure that 'initiations' are inclusive, team building, and positive.
- ✓ Establish and enforce anti-harassment policies.
- ✓ Question assumptions and stereotypes.
- ✓ Involve men and boys in training on gender equality in sport and the empowerment of women and girls.
- ✓ Work with other organizations and departments to spread the message about inclusivity in sport.

**Recognize the impact, privilege and interpretation of power.**

- ✓ Understand that different cultures interpret the power relationship in different ways.
- ✓ Ensure that leaders are sensitive to their position as a leader or expert and enforce safe participation, demonstrate appropriate skills and encourage behaviours in ways that preserve participants' dignity, is equally applied, explains reasons for rules and techniques, and provides options for what to do rather than just telling what not to do.
- ✓ Establish and maintain positive and supportive relationships with participants.

**Involve broad support networks.**

- ✓ Involve parents, partners, extended family, Elders, community members in supporting the activity and encouraging participants.

### **Subsidize registration, equipment, transportation, clothing.**

- ✓ Recognize that some target audience members face economic barriers to participation. Ensure dignity in providing assistance, for example, include the equipment as part of the program; provide swipe cards that are generic to full registration and subsidized participants, allow for activity buddies or companions to enter facility or program free of charge, discount family plans, seniors/students, charter a bus for all participants.
- ✓ Be flexible with uniforms/workout wear; provide women only change rooms and activity times (e.g. swimming).

### **Assist with family responsibilities.**

- ✓ Offer care services or programming for other family members at the same time. Parents, older siblings and others may have care giving responsibilities for young children, dependents with disabilities or a spouse, that makes it difficult for them to participate without such support.
- ✓ Examine the possibility of having participants serving as caregivers, whereby participants rotate through the responsibility of taking care of the dependents on-site during different sessions, if care services are not available.

### **Ensure equitable access policies.**

- ✓ Provide a gender-sensitive approach to the redesign of existing facilities, planning of new infrastructure, and the rules and regulations of sporting events and institutions. For example, changing the schedule of activities held in a community sports hall to allow women and girls access at convenient times or ensuring appropriate changing facilities.
- ✓ Ensure facility allocation policies are updated so that they are not based on historical use or precedence, which disadvantage women and girls.

### **Provide appropriate, adapted programming and facilities tailored to community needs.**

- ✓ Provide women only programs or facility use times that benefit both religious and body image concerns.
- ✓ Allow people to participate in sports and use dressing rooms consistent with gender identify. When requested, trans players should be provided access to a gender-neutral space (i.e., family restroom)
- ✓ Provide change room times or sections for older adults.
- ✓ Plan event schedules to respect religious observances.
- ✓ Provide sport experiences that are more collective, inclusive and supportive to appeal to women.

- ✓ Adjust fee structure so a person can attend with a support person.
- ✓ Ensure facilities are welcoming and accessible.
- ✓ Train staff with disability knowledge and adaptations.
- ✓ Offer programs in different languages.

**Establish procedures to encourage retention.**

- ✓ Consider following up with drop outs and ensure they are feeling welcome to return. Ask about barriers and address them as appropriate.
- ✓ Create a system that ensures follow up by a buddy if someone misses one class/session to keep them engaged.
- ✓ Provide ongoing information about opportunities to participate so that participants know what options they have for continuing at the end of a session.

**Ensure opportunities are fun, interesting, social.**

- ✓ Engage participants with opportunities they will enjoy and that keep their interest.
- ✓ Consider structuring the sport around or in concert with a social opportunity. Tie sporting activities to cultural events or components, pot-lucks, leadership training, literacy or second language training etc.
- ✓ Encourage participation with a buddy.

## Other Activities to Promote Sport Participation

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Along with addressing barriers, examining ways to increase mastery and creating a sense of engagement, meaning and belongingness, there are other actions that policy makers and other stakeholders may want to consider in promoting sport participation among underrepresented groups.

### Disseminate and Gather Feedback

The Work Group should consider wide dissemination and consultation on this report, to build upon the initial list of ideas for action. Grass roots consultation will be important to both validate the findings, solicit additional ideas and, most importantly, gather input from members of the underrepresented groups who are the subject of this literature review.

Dissemination vehicles, channels and messages should be tailored to the target audience (i.e., policy makers, sport, recreation and physical activity promoters, members of underrepresented groups, non-traditional community partners).

Among Canadian communities with populations of more than 1,000 residents, 79% consider information regarding ways to inspire Canadians to be more active would be useful, 60% would like to have information on successful promotion campaigns in other jurisdictions and 54% would like to have information on evidence-based recommendations on how to address barriers.<sup>146</sup> While these statistics refer to



physical activity more generally, the appetite for this information for sport is likely similar.

### Identify and Share Previously Published and Unpublished Successful Practices

In addition to the practices identified as part of this literature review, there are many policy decisions being made and programs being implemented that are not published and have therefore not been identified. A Canadian environmental scan of programs and policies at the federal, provincial/territorial and municipal levels would help to identify policies, programs, and activities being undertaken and gather an assessment of their success and lessons learned. The findings from this work could then be assembled into a repository or database (e.g., via the Leisure Information Network) to share with others across the country. Similarly, identifying and sharing successfully implemented policies and practices from around the world would enhance this knowledge base. Regular updating of this review and any environmental scans, along with opportunities for practitioners to share

their successes would keep such a resource current and relevant.

There are many excellent existing Canadian publications that address ways to support physical activity and sport in underrepresented groups (e.g., CAAWS' Leading the Way: Working with LGBT Athletes and Coaches). These reports contain much more detail than provided here. These resources also need ongoing broad dissemination and promotion as their recommendations are still valuable and valid.

There is an opportunity to strengthen connections between the Canadian Sport Policy, Active Canada 20/20 and The Framework for Recreation in Canada. The three policy/strategy documents describe several similar actions and recommendations that, with support for coordination, could have a great impact and greater impact in joint implementation.



There have been a number of opportunities for action by inter-sectoral, cross-professional partnerships in this report. This should be a priority both locally and among and between all jurisdictions. In addition to the joint implementation of the three policy

documents noted above, there are opportunities for such groups to work on many initiatives and build one upon another. Bringing leaders (researchers, policy makers, practitioners, members of these groups, and others) together in long term steering/advisory committees or Communities of Practice would provide opportunities to learn from each other, to co-create tools, resources and action plans and to support their dissemination and implementation.

Supporting program and policy developers in sharing and promoting their successes and key learnings would further increase the efficacy in promoting sport participation. Promotion can include posting prominently on websites (including cross promotion with partners) and discussions via social media. Webinars, which are archived online for later reference, are also useful. Support could

additionally take the form of toolkits or templates for sharing successful practices in a consistently written manner or providing script guidelines for video presentations of these practices. However, to truly gain momentum, and generate discussion, ongoing knowledge brokering from some of the key players is needed. Knowledge Brokers/Capacity Builders can ensure active stakeholder

involvement with the material and the co-creation of tools and resources that will assist knowledge dissemination and capacity building.

## **Implementation**

Many of the issues and recommendations of many reports have been in existence for quite some time but there are no mechanisms in place to actively fund and support them. It is time to start examining ways to take action in assisting the sector to implement these evidence-based recommendations. A long-term commitment is needed to fund, support and build sustainable system capacity in partnership with cross sector, interdisciplinary, stakeholders, including all levels of government, sport organizations, non-governmental organizations and members of underrepresented groups.

## **Further Research**

In addition to the environmental scan further research could be undertaken to investigate the role of coaching and of other administrative roles in welcoming and promoting an environment of inclusion along with the differences in motivation and skill level in coaching at the community or beginner level as compared with at the elite level (as these were excluded from this project). For example, coaches at the beginner level are often volunteer parents and teachers who may not be trained in physical literacy and skill development. Research could also examine the role of coaches in developing adult beginners who wish to join a community team.

## **Evaluation and Monitoring**

Efforts to implement actions to increase sport participation among members of

underrepresented groups should be monitored and evaluated. As mentioned above, participation is about far more than numbers of participants from various backgrounds. Participant engagement, belongingness, meaning, and mastery; numbers of new registrants and retention of existing registrants; organization attitudes and change; level of engagement with other community partner; changes to policy documents and other key indicators should be examined over time. Program design and evaluation strategies could take on elements of Collective Impact, RE-AIM and other proven strategies.

Feedback on this report and resulting ideas for a repository of policy and program actions and activities should be ongoing. Finally, there is a need for baseline and ongoing national data collection regarding physical activity, recreation and sport participation for members of some groups. For example, the 2001 PALS survey was the most recent data collected on persons with disabilities and some of the data were not sufficiently clear to yield meaningful results.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the Physical Activity and Sport Monitor does not currently have sufficient sample size to gather information about the participation levels of members of certain groups. The General Social Survey, only collects sport participation data irregularly and may not include correlates and factors related to participation that would assist policy makers and programmers in their decision making and planning processes.

## Conclusion

Canada provides some of the best sport and recreation opportunities in the world. One way to make it even stronger is to ensure that it provides opportunities for more members of underrepresented groups to participate, as they have experienced marginalization in various parts of their lives, including sport. Indeed, the love of sport and a passion for playing it have the potential to unite participants from diverse backgrounds.

This review presents an overview of current literature and ideas to improve access and inclusion for members of underrepresented groups. While these groups are diverse, there are many similarities in terms of the barriers and challenges to their participation in sport. Most importantly, the very nature of their marginalization from main stream sport participation creates a vicious cycle of exclusion, as low levels of physical literacy and cultural capital place their abilities below those of their peers and result in further exclusion. Many come to the conclusion that sport is 'not their thing.'



Providing opportunities to gain basic skills to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, whether it is their desire to become accomplished athletes or just to feel comfortable playing with their peers, is paramount to ensuring their consideration of sport as an option for them. To encourage participation at all levels, there is a need for sport leaders and organizations to support the delivery of fun, socially inclusive sport programs that support a healthy active lifestyle for all Canadian residents. It is important to understand, acknowledge and honour reasons for sport participation and not to enforce athletic development standards on those who are not looking for that type or experience. Accommodating all levels of skill and competition and supporting choice of participation level provides the variety of experiences sought by different individuals.

As well as supporting individual choice, it is imperative that policy makers and practitioners work with members of each target group they are hoping to serve, to gain an understanding of the group's culture, challenges and preferred solutions, and then tailoring those solutions to the local context. Some of the cross-cutting actions that address increasing participation for members of any group include:

- Offering physical literacy and skills development opportunities to people all ages and abilities.

- Celebrating diversity and ensuring that sports participation experiences are positive, social, fun, inclusive, non-judgemental and free of harassment and inappropriate language.
- Honouring and supporting the choices regarding type and level of involvement and competition and scheduling.
- Increasing access to sports by opening many types of buildings and facilities, ensuring physical and operational access and addressing equipment, economic, and transportation barriers.
- Offering programming to members of underrepresented groups based on human rights rather than revenue generation.
- Working with community groups and intersectoral partners to integrate sport activities into a broad range of programming within and beyond sport and recreation mandates.

- Providing development and mentorship opportunities to those who desire them.

There is ample academic and gray literature describing the barriers to participation and solutions. There are also likely many great programs underway and policy activity across Canada that has not been published. Now is the time to find ways to share the solutions broadly and support their implementation.



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