

Foundations for Action



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Quality of Life

Shifting Alberta to where it needs to go is a bigger task than any one individual, organization or sector can accomplish alone.

The Quality of Life framework gives a blueprint for action to disciplines that share a passion for accomplishing the big shifts that are imperative now.



Unifying Alberta's Quality of Life Sector

From silos to synergy

Consider all the not-for-profits and community groups across Alberta striving to make this province the best possible place to live. Add the many government agents mandated to balance competing interests for the good of everyone who lives here. More than ever, all these actors need to work seamlessly together to tackle the complex issues that threaten Alberta's quality of life.

In the past, organizations tended to work in silos. Gaps and overlaps resulted, leaving citizens poorly served and crucial issues unaddressed. By working better together, we can create a far more livable future that not only provides a higher quality of life but costs less in the long run.

Seeing the need to coordinate and expand the good work already being done, the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) invited Alberta leaders from many disciplines that enhance quality of life to become involved in Vision 2015. In several working sessions, they discovered remarkably similar values and goals, including a desire for healthy people, vibrant communities and sustainable environments. Together, they charted a framework for uniting as a Quality of Life Sector to address top priority issues. This bulletin summarizes that work, which is first appeared in *Foundations for Action: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Alberta*. The full document is available at www.vision2015.arpaonline.ca.

One chapter of *Foundations for Action* zeroes in on the strategies needed to revitalize recreation and parks in Alberta.

In today's complex environment, two things are clear. First, governments and not-for-profit organizations can no longer work in silos. Second, hierarchies between levels of government and voluntary organizations are irrelevant. To achieve quality of life for all, we need to partner across boundaries as never before.

As other disciplines consider how their priorities overlap, opportunities for synergy are already becoming clear.

Think of the work of enhancing quality of life in Alberta as one big puzzle. Working alone, holding only some of the puzzle pieces, we may never see the big picture. By working together, we have a much greater chance of success. Each agency can concentrate on what it does best, knowing that others in the Quality of Life Sector are filling their own important roles. With less overlap and fewer gaps in service, in the end all Albertans will benefit.

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Quality of Life Vision
A re-creating, sustainable society that lives and promotes a culture of wellness, creativity and stewardship for the enhanced quality of life of all Albertans, their communities and their environments.

United by a vision

Imagine living in the Alberta pictured in this Quality of Life Vision: creative, active, healthy, sustainable. A province where people have all they need to live lightly on the earth and meaningfully with each other. Where all individuals, communities and environments enjoy life that is worth living. A united Quality of Life Sector can help turn that vision into reality—and create an Alberta we are proud to bequeath to generations to come.

Guiding principles

Thirteen bedrock principles serve as cornerstones for the Quality of Life Sector, giving shape to decision-making.

1. **Individual responsibility and empowerment.** Each Albertan is responsible for personal health and wellness and should be equipped to actively participate in fulfilling that responsibility.
2. **Citizens first.** Albertans are citizens first and consumers second. Our consumption of scarce resources such as water and of public goods such as

health care must reflect our responsibility to current and future citizens, here and around the world.

3. **Holistic health.** Each individual's health involves a mix of mind, body and spirit as well as health determinants such as income and gender. Because our sense of worth depends on interconnectedness, contributing to community can enhance wellbeing, particularly when combined with fitness, good nutrition and relaxation.
4. **Excellence in public goods.** Public services and facilities must be high quality, as varied as the need and accessible to all. This applies equally to education, health care, environmental resources (air, land, water), recreation and cultural assets.
5. **Respect for environmental limits.** We cannot develop sustainable systems or protect natural ecosystems until we set limits on our environmental impact.
6. **Celebrating differences.** Diverse ideas, beliefs and cultures cannot simply be tolerated, but must be valued and nurtured as a necessary part of a rich and engaged society.
7. **Quality of place.** Albertans need livable communities that incorporate and protect natural capital, invite active lifestyles and enhance quality of life.
8. **Centrality of quality of life services.** Quality of life services are at the heart of wellbeing. Properly supported, they enable individual health; prevent social exclusion; and enhance community health, education and safety.
9. **Equity and inclusion.** Albertans should never be kept from fulfilling their potential due to lack of access to high quality public services and education, appropriate employment, decent housing and healthy local environments.

10. **Long-term perspective.** Quality of life enhancements cannot be restricted to election cycles or times when budgets are flush. Investments need to occur now, focus on prevention and continue for the long term.
11. **Children/youth highest priority.** While it is important to foster all Albertans' health and wellness, investing in our children and youth promises the most lasting dividends.
12. **Lifelong learning.** Opportunities to learn and grow must be available to all, for true quality of life requires continuous learning.
13. **Active daily living.** Being active and engaged is an essential cornerstone of health and quality of life.

Overarching values

The following six fundamental values are remarkably consistent across virtually all disciplines that contribute to quality of life.

1. A civic society with a strong sense of citizenship
2. Community governance
3. Diversity valued and respected
4. Creativity nurtured
5. Inclusion of all citizens in community life and services
6. Sustainable natural and built environments

What difference does a united Quality of Life Sector make?

Already the existence of a framework is focusing the Quality of Living Sector's energy. Working together rather than in silos or at cross purposes, we're pushing forward on issues we now know the disciplines hold in common. Leadership and involvement are naturally shifting from issue to issue so that expertise matches the need. Together, we are helping Alberta make the significant changes that are essential to our future.

Expected outcomes

With the Quality of Life Sector working better together, we can expect life to improve in significant ways for individuals, communities and the environment.

Individual outcomes

1. **Personal capacity.** Everyone has the desire, ability and skill to be active and engaged.
2. **Personal development.** Education and lifelong learning have universal support.
3. **Engaged citizens.** Individuals actively shape community life.
4. **Healthy adults.** Albertans are healthier, happier and more active.
5. **Healthy children and youth.** Inactivity and obesity are no longer epidemic, and Alberta's children are among Canada's healthiest.
6. **Balanced lifestyles.** A healthy mix of physical, mental and spiritual activities is the norm.
7. **Shift from consumerism.** People pursue quality of life rather than things.
8. **Range of opportunities.** Everyone has diverse ways to soak up leisure and culture.
9. **Inclusive, inviting environments.** Activities are affordable and take place in safe, welcoming places.
10. **Collaboration.** Health, education, recreation and culture routinely team up.
11. **Cultural appreciation.** All citizens see the value of arts, culture and heritage.
12. **Creative expression.** People feel empowered to pursue their creative and cultural interests.
13. **Cultural learning for children.** Schools and communities involve children in cultural activities.

Environmental outcomes

1. **Citizen stewards.** All Albertans recognize environmental limits and reduce their footprint.
2. **Public leadership.** Governments and corporations model and demand conservation and preservation.
3. **Smart design.** Communities are deliberately planned to conserve energy and preserve natural areas.
4. **Preservation and linkages.** A network of parks, natural areas, ecological reserves and corridors protects Alberta's natural heritage.
5. **Recreation and protection in balance.** Alberta's parks and protected areas seek to offer recreation that does not compromise ecological integrity.
6. **Environments as public goods.** Albertans hold each other accountable for and reward good stewardship.
7. **Shift to renewable resources.** Legislation shifts the norm to renewable energy and clean water and air.
8. **Integrated sustainable investments.** Ecosystem planning balances economic and environmental realities.
9. **Good choices easy and affordable.** Environmentally friendly choices are rewarded through public policy.

Community outcomes

1. **Basic needs met.** No one goes without food, shelter, safety and belonging.
2. **Citizen Engagement.** Communities involve citizens in making important decisions.
3. **Caring communities.** People help each other out.
4. **Voluntary involvement.** Alberta has many volunteers who receive excellent support.
5. **Integrated service delivery.** Public services are effective and linked.
6. **Inclusive and accessible services.** All citizens can access the full range of public services.
7. **Diversity celebrated.** In policy and practice, differences are valued.
8. **Design for active living.** By design, neighbourhoods bring people together, encourage active lifestyles and avoid urban sprawl.
9. **Recreational and cultural places.** Community spaces celebrate and encourage life-enhancing pursuits.
10. **Heritage protection.** Coordinated policies protect key historical assets.
11. **Interaction with history.** Many opportunities exist to interact with, learn about, celebrate and transmit our heritage.
12. **Recreation and culture policy.** Governments commit to recreation, arts and culture as integral to social, economic and community wellbeing.
13. **Engaged organizations.** Museums, libraries, galleries, recreation providers and other quality of life agents serve not only members but the broader society.
14. **Centre of cultural excellence.** Alberta gains international acclaim for cultural leadership.



Strategic priorities for the next decade

With so many issues demanding attention, where can the Quality of Life Sector best focus its united energy? Below are 14 crucial priorities. Some are already moving forward as disciplines find new ways to work better together.

1. **Balancing work with healthy lifestyle choices.** Alberta's work ethic marginalizes leisure activities. Policies, practices and strategies are urgently needed to trigger a profound rebalancing of work and life.
2. **Moving upstream: investing in wellness.** Prevention costs less and has fewer side effects than disease response, yet most public dollars go to acute care. Wellness must be fully integrated into health care.
3. **Redefining meaningful activities.** Expanding community capacity is important work, yet we often devalue those who do it, including volunteers, parents and other caregivers. Our definition of productive activity must expand.
4. **Designing for healthy communities.** Improving the places we live, work, interact, worship and play can foster health, knit neighbours together and reduce environmental impact. We need to take advantage of that potential.
5. **Building a culture of stewardship.** Our future depends on recognizing environmental limits and protecting essential life support systems. That will take a concerted shift in how we live.
6. **Spurring an artistic renaissance.** An appreciation of heritage and the arts is a mark of a maturing society. The Quality of Life Sector is ideally positioned to promote their centrality to a livable future.
7. **Creating safer, stronger communities.** Only after securing safety and security can we attain higher order aspects of individual and community health.
8. **Harmonizing with nature.** As Alberta grows more urban, we risk losing connection and commitment to the earth that sustains us. The public, voluntary and private sectors must take a more active role in heritage protection and environmental education.
9. **Partnering on foundational research.** Collectively, the Quality of Life Sector can attract funding for important studies that no discipline could accomplish alone.
10. **Building an alliance for action.** Individual Quality of Life fields have limited capacity for advocacy and development. Systems planning and integrated efforts are

needed to move Alberta beyond ingrained attitudes and behaviours.

11. **Measuring what's important.** We cannot manage what we don't measure, and whatever is measured almost always improves. New indices are needed that pay attention to quality of life and encourage all fields to focus on outcomes rather than service outputs.
12. **Ensuring accessibility.** We cannot tolerate any Albertan being left behind. All disciplines share responsibility for equalizing opportunities, even for the hardest to reach.
13. **Narrowing health inequalities.** With an aging population, increasing inequity and epidemic obesity, chronic disease will skyrocket without collaborative responses based on valid population health models.
14. **Valuing cultural diversity.** Given that complex challenges beg for creative solutions, a variety of perspectives is more essential than ever. We must tap the gift of our diversity.

Having agreed on these priorities, the Quality of Life Sector is pushing forward on issues we now know the disciplines hold in common. Leadership and involvement are naturally shifting from issue to issue so that expertise matches the need. Together, we are helping Alberta make the significant changes that are essential to our future.

Find out more

This bulletin is part of a series based on *Foundations for Action*, a collaborative action plan for Alberta wellness and quality of life. The plan draws from the insights of individuals and agencies from many disciplines that share the vision of a future Alberta with healthy people, sustainable environments and strong vital communities. For a full copy of *Foundations for Action*, go to the Vision 2015 website at www.vision2015.arpaonline.ca.