

# Investing in Healthy People & Communities Through Recreation & Parks Infrastructure

A position paper prepared by ARPA



Recreation for Life

ARPA is a provincial charitable not-for-profit organization with a voluntary board of directors dedicated to the promotion of recreation and parks and their benefits to the quality of life of all Albertans.

## Our Vision...

"A province, and communities within, that embrace and proactively use recreation and parks as essential means for enhancing individual well-being and community vitality, economic sustainability and natural resource protection and conservation."

## Our mission...

ARPA strives to build healthy citizens, their communities and their environments throughout Alberta.

For more information on ARPA, our programs or services, or the benefits of recreation and parks, please visit our website at <http://www.arpaonline.ca>.

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## Summary

At a time when both Health Canada and the Province of Alberta<sup>1</sup> are urging citizens to be active more often as an antidote to epidemic obesity, type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases, the public recreation and parks infrastructure needed to support active living and build community capacity is distinctly compromised. Not only are existing pools, arenas, parks, open spaces and other indoor and outdoor facilities aging, but we have not been keeping pace with the need for additional infrastructure as our population grows and recreation trends shift.

Numerous recent studies (see side box) underline the need to grapple immediately with Alberta's ill-timed infrastructure deficit. Although those studies were completed independently and with diverse objectives, they reinforce the fact that Alberta's growing infrastructure gap is imposing marked operational constraints. What's more, the gap could have significant long-term consequences, including loss of crucial assets and continued escalation in health costs related to inactivity and isolation.

Among the impacts of inadequate capital funding and aging facilities are:

- deteriorating facilities - worn out physical plants;
- sub-optimal functioning and operation of recreation facilities;
- health and safety concerns for facility users and staff;
- reduced use and satisfaction due to a growing disconnect between facility design and current recreation participation trends, at a time when all governments recognize the health benefits of active living;
- insufficient capacity, particularly in growth communities;
- older, less energy efficient facilities compound the effects of utility rate increases;
- inability to capitalize on environmental and other innovations that would save energy and money;
- facility upgrade and programming dollars diverted to cover operating and maintenance costs, which escalate as facilities age and deteriorate;
- significant user fee increases reduce accessibility to key public services;
- reduced ability to provide enhanced quality of life and attract and accommodate growth.

Municipalities have assumed a far larger share of the funding burden for public recreation infrastructure in the past two decades, filling gaps left by reduced provincial and federal investment. But as numerous analysts have observed, Alberta's municipalities are challenged by the need to upgrade current or build new municipal infrastructure without the revenue streams that are available to other orders of government. Largely reliant on property tax, municipalities are forced to increase user fees, making recreation less affordable for the very populations most dependent on those public services. Provincial grant programs (e.g. Community Facility

<sup>1</sup> *Report on the Health of Albertans*, Alberta Health and Wellness, 2006.



### Studies referenced in this report include these:

- *Community Recreation Infrastructure in Alberta – 2006 Updated Facility Assessment Report*, a collaborative, multi-year study facility assessment study providing data on the condition of 132 pools, ice arenas and curling rinks, begun in 2001 and ongoing.
- *ARPA's Infrastructure Committee: Operations Survey*, an operational analysis of a subset of Alberta recreation facilities, by Randall Conrad and Associates, 2006.
- *City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need*, a report documenting clear need for increased capital investment, by an Infrastructure Working Team within Edmonton's Community Services Strategic Services Branch, 2004.
- *Recreation Facility Energy Cost Increases*, prepared for ARPA by Pearse Walsh & Associates, 2004.
- *The Public Financing of Recreation and Culture in Alberta: An Historical Review*, noting the decline of public funding for the recreation and culture sectors, by Nichols Applied Management, 2002.

*“...parks and recreation are not extras in any culture; they are an integral part of our economic, environmental and cultural foundation. We must continue to support these programs (urban parks, municipal recreation and tourism areas) so that future generations can take full advantage of the natural bounty of Alberta’s environment and the wisdom of our pioneers in sport, culture and recreation.”*

*– Lois Hole, former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, 2002.*

*“Quality infrastructure is critical to supporting healthy, financially sustainable communities, and strengthens the quality of life for all Albertans, and is the foundation for the Alberta Advantage.”*

*– Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, 2006 Policy Statement on Municipal Infrastructure.*



Enhancement Program and the Centennial Grants Program) have patched some recreation infrastructure gaps, but they tend to be either too small or major events/celebrations oriented and unpredictable to allow for effective strategic planning — and, for larger federal/provincial infrastructure programs, municipalities are “pressed” to “focus” on grey infrastructure (i.e. recreation facilities are regarded as being eligible within funding programs but often “positioned” to be of a lower priority). Municipalities tend, for the most part, to direct those federal/provincial dollars to grey infrastructure components such as streets, water and sewers rather than the recreation/social infrastructure. Addressing the recreation/social infrastructure gap/deficit will require adequate, directed, long-term, sustained and predictable funding.

Alberta is not alone in this concern. Research across the country indicates the recreation and parks infrastructure gap is a national issue with two main components: inadequate capital maintenance and replacement of existing infrastructure; and need for more and different infrastructure to meet new needs. Recognizing the severity of the gap, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation identified sport and recreation infrastructure as their top priority at an August 2005 conference and directed officials to develop parameters for a long-term national approach dedicated to sport and recreation infrastructure. Indeed, such a program is key to achieving the goal of the Ministers of increasing physical activity by at least 10% by 2010.

Municipalities large and small urgently need a sustained allocation of infrastructure funds to address pressing health and recreation development needs and strategically plan future expenditures. Traditional provincial infrastructure programs have been “bi-lateral”, involving financial contributions by both provincial and municipal orders of government, but it’s clear that municipal financial constraints have exacerbated the current crisis. Funding formulas for recreation infrastructure should minimize any requirement for matching municipal dollars, particularly in light of such municipal contributions as land and operating subsidies. Municipalities must be at the table in making those decisions, however. Rebuilding a network of facilities that meets recreation needs and accomplishes health goals requires concerted action by all levels of government.

Amid the stresses of a complex and stressful society, Alberta’s community recreation infrastructure plays an increasingly critical role. By offering recreation, sport and physical activity opportunities to all children, youth and their families, these facilities build vibrant and healthy people and neighbourhoods, thus helping to corral health care costs. This infrastructure also sets the stage for economic and environmental health by generating income while protecting the natural areas so essential for ecological survival. In short, the recreation infrastructure provided by and for Alberta’s communities is crucial to the improved health and quality of life envisioned for all segments of society.

## Background

Government and other leaders are urging citizens to be active more often as an antidote to epidemic obesity and related chronic disease, yet the recreation and parks infrastructure needed to support that activity is suffering from an investment gap that imposes significant operational constraints. It's a reality we cannot afford to ignore.

### The Cost of Physical Inactivity

Jack is clinically obese. Jill is overweight and battling high blood pressure. Jimmy is headed for life as a diabetic. While fictional, these three composite figures echo reality for thousands of Albertans. Epidemic weight gain in recent decades has left 68.8% of Alberta adults and 22% of children overweight or obese<sup>2</sup> and at increased risk of preventable chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, arthritis and some types of cancer. Diabetes alone is costing our province more than \$260 million a year, not including lost productivity and other socio-economic and psychological burdens,<sup>3</sup> and its incidence is expected to double by 2020.

Inactivity is compounding those statistics. Despite all we know about the links between inactivity, obesity and ill health, less than a third of Albertans are physically active, according to Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Surveys. Although that percentage rose four points over two years, to 29.8% in 2003 (with 24.2% moderately active), the gain remains stubbornly slow. More than 43% of Albertans remain inactive.<sup>4</sup>

The resulting costs are huge—and growing. Recent estimates place the national economic burden of physical inactivity at \$5.3 billion (\$1.6 billion in direct costs and \$3.7 billion in indirect costs); of obesity at \$4.3 billion (\$1.6 billion of direct costs and \$2.7 billion of indirect costs). Those combined totals represent 2.6% and 2.2%, respectively, of Canada's total health care costs, researchers note: "The results underscore the importance of public health efforts aimed at combating the current epidemics of physical inactivity and obesity in Canada."<sup>5</sup>

*"People who spent their leisure time in sedentary pursuits were more likely than those who were physically active to be obese."*

– 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada

*"Physical inactivity and obesity have now reached epidemic proportions in Canada and account for a significant portion of health care spending."*

– T. Katzmarzyk and I. Janssen, *Economic Costs Associated With Physical Inactivity and Obesity in Canada*, *Journal of Applied Physiology*

*"In Canada, more than three-quarters of all deaths occur in one of four groups of non-communicable diseases: cardiovascular, cancer, diabetes and respiratory. The risk factors leading to these diseases (including physical inactivity and unhealthy eating) are growing, particularly within vulnerable groups."*

– CPRA & Provincial/Territorial Partners *Communiqué*, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> In the past quarter century, obesity rates have more than doubled in some age groups, based on direct measurements of height and weight. *Canadian Community Health Survey: Nutrition*, Statistics Canada, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Alberta Diabetes Strategy 2003-2013*, Alberta Health and Wellness.

<sup>4</sup> *Canadian Community Health Survey (2000/01, 2003)*, Statistics Canada. These results differ somewhat from a 2005 Centre for Active Living survey, which found 60% of Albertans active enough to experience health benefits. Differences likely reflect questionnaire design and definitions used for physical activity and health benefits.

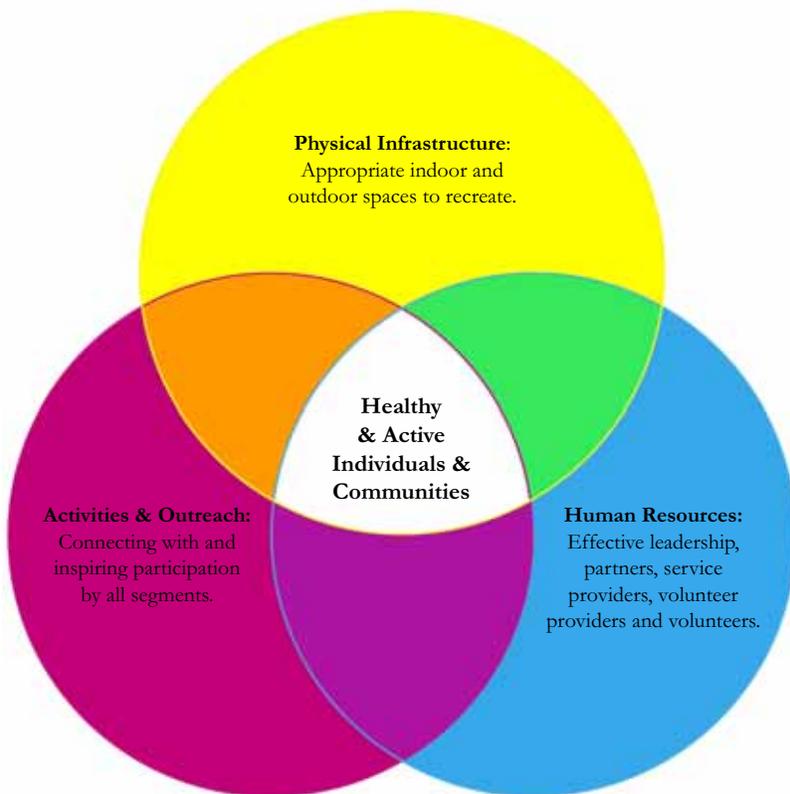
<sup>5</sup> P. T. Katzmarzyk and I. Janssen, "The Economic Costs Associated With Physical Inactivity and Obesity in Canada: An Update," *Canadian Journal of Applied Physiology* 29, 1 (2004): pp. 90.115.



Recreation, sport and physical activity offer significant positive health benefits, coupled with skills development, social cohesion and economic gains.<sup>6</sup> Most Albertans know that; why don't more participate? Studies show that physical, social, economic and cultural environments strongly shape our potential to make the changes necessary for health. A 2005 survey by the Alberta Centre for Active Living found that environmental factors affecting Albertans' leisure-time physical activity include perceptions of convenience and access to affordable places for physical activity.<sup>7</sup> Those findings and many others highlight the need for a wellness strategy that seeks not only individual behaviour change but environmental change. In the words of Capital Health's 2005 annual report, "We have to help build environments that promote health."<sup>8</sup>

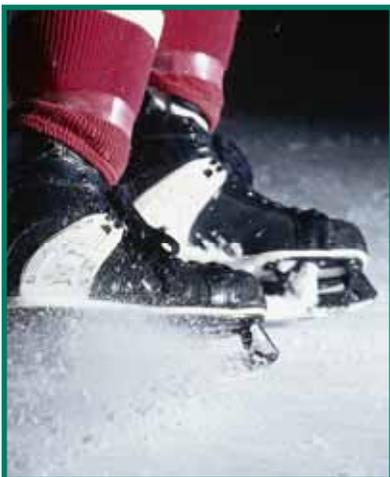
## Essential Elements of Healthy, Active Individuals and Communities

Figure 1: Healthy and Active Individuals and Communities<sup>9</sup>



*"Of the more than two million Canadians who will die from chronic diseases during the next 10 years, about half will suffer needless deaths because they've smoked too much, exercised too little and ate unhealthily. In the next decade, deaths from chronic diseases will increase by 15% in Canada; deaths from diabetes will soar by 44%."*

- World Health Organization, 2005



Healthy, active people who are positively interacting with other members of the community enhance both individual lives and the social fabric of

<sup>6</sup> *Strengthening Canada: The Socio-Economic Benefits of Sport Participation in Canada*, Conference Board of Canada.

<sup>7</sup> *Alberta Survey of Physical Activity*, Alberta Centre for Active Living, 2005. [www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/surveys.html](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/surveys.html).

<sup>8</sup> Capital Health, 2005 Annual Report

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from "Investing in Healthy Communities through Recreation Infrastructure", BC Recreation and Parks Association, 2005.

the community. Vibrant people and thriving communities make Alberta an attractive place to work, live, invest in and visit while enhancing our economic viability through increased productivity and reduced costs for health care, support services and justice. What does it take to create healthy and active individuals and communities? Three components are essential:<sup>10</sup>

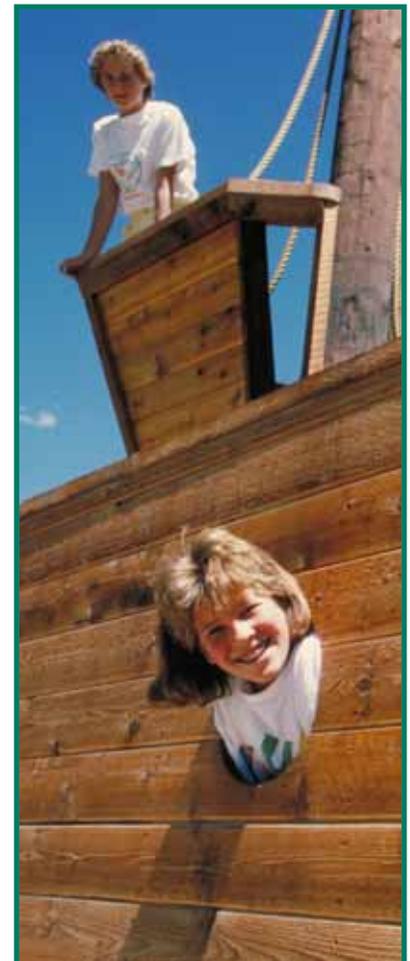
1. **Activities and outreach.** People need accessible activities located close to where they live and work – activities that inspire people to be active while engaging anyone facing such barriers as language; gender; income; lack of confidence; mental, physical, visual or emotional disability. Data clearly show that people who recreate are physically healthier than those who do not; that active living is key to balanced human development, which in turn reduces the need for costly crisis intervention. Yet inactivity and unhealthy eating are on the rise among our most vulnerable citizens, markedly increasing their risk of disease and premature death. It is crucial to design, market and deliver activities that engage and involve vulnerable Albertans.
2. **Human resources.** Each community needs key people skilled at designing, providing and leading recreation activities. Those individuals include municipal staff, other service providers, the private sector and volunteers. Each group is governed by distinct values and philosophies that influence who they target, what experiences they provide and what percentage of facility expenses they seek to recover. While each has an important role to play, Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport and Recreation have recognized that the primary delivery system needs to be at the municipal level. In the words of the *National Recreation Statement*, “Municipal governments are closest to the people; they are likely to respond more flexibly, more quickly and more effectively to the needs of the community in matters of recreation. For this reason the municipality is the primary public supplier of direct recreation services.”<sup>11</sup>
3. **Physical infrastructure.** People and communities need well designed, safe, functional, inviting facilities, parks and trails. There is a direct correlation between physical activity levels and access to a well-kept system of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities that meets local, community and regional needs. Both infrastructure condition and a match with current and future participation trends are crucial to maximum use. As socio-demographic profiles shift and recreation preferences evolve, designs must serve different needs. The trend toward drop-in rather than scheduled activities, for example, demands leisure ice as well as hockey ice, trails as well as playing fields. To help knit neighbourhoods together, the infrastructure must offer attractive spaces for socializing and other services as well as exercise.

*“As the needs of our society are becoming greater and more complex, leisure and recreation pursuits are playing a more critical role in helping to deliver health, wellbeing and quality of life for all segments of society.”*

— City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need, 2004.

*“Physical activity levels are higher among Canadians who are in more frequent contact with their friends and family.”*

— P. A. Spanier and K. R. Allison, *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 2001.



<sup>10</sup> Adapted from BCRPA.

<sup>11</sup> *National Recreation Statement*, Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, 1987. Also, *Canadian Sport Policy*, Federal/Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity, 2002.

*“Many of the leading illnesses and injuries in our region can be prevented. While it is tempting to think that if we just get the message out, people will automatically make healthy choices, we know that the environment – physical, social, economic, and cultural – strongly shapes the potential for us to make healthy choices. We have to help build environments that promote health.”*

- *How Healthy are We?* Capital Health, 2006

*“Without the investment [in community recreation and parks infrastructure] to date, it is staggering to think what the cost to the health care system, the social fabric of the community, and individuals’ quality of life would be.”*

- *Investing in Healthy Communities through Recreation Infrastructure*, BC Recreation and Parks Association, 2005.



## **Importance of Quality Community Recreation and Parks Infrastructure**

There’s a direct link between physical activity levels and appropriate places and spaces to recreate. The latest Alberta Survey of Physical Activity underscores that link: respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they had “easy access to places where I can get physical activity” were 1.94 times more likely to be sufficiently active than those who disagreed or strongly disagreed.<sup>12</sup>

Other studies also find a correlation between availability and affordability of recreational facilities, parks, sports fields and playgrounds and increased physical activity.<sup>13</sup> The U.S. Task Force on Community Preventive Services, for example, reported strong evidence for the value of community-based strategies to increase physical activity, such as improving access by building trails and reducing facility fees.<sup>14</sup>

Alberta’s Sport Plan, “*A New Century for Sport in Alberta (2001)*”, identified a province-wide network of sport facilities as a priority consideration. From input received through public review of the sport plan report (over 11,000 public responses), there was overwhelming support (94%) for the priority need to upgrade and expand sport facilities in communities throughout the province.

Equally important, quality recreation infrastructure enhances Alberta’s “social capital,” the essential sense of participation, belonging and mutual trust that grows by playing, working and walking together. High levels of social capital have been linked to increased physical activity, lower mortality rates, reduced crime and increased perceptions of positive health. About 65% of Albertans report a “very strong or somewhat strong” sense of belonging in their community; that figure drops in our largest urban areas: to 62.6% for the Capital Region and 61.2% for Calgary.<sup>15</sup>

Amid the stresses of a complex society, Alberta’s community recreation infrastructure enables the active and interactive living necessary for the health and quality of life envisioned for all segments of Alberta society. The gathering places of urban centres, the heart of rural communities, the recreation facilities and parks operated by and for our communities knit us together, build capacity and foster health.

## **The Challenge**

Despite the foundational role sport and recreation infrastructure play in developing and sustaining healthy people and communities, virtually every community in Alberta is challenged by recreation infrastructure that

<sup>12</sup> *Alberta Survey of Physical Activity*, Alberta Centre for Active Living, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> *Improving the Health of Canadians: Promoting Healthy Weights*, Canadian Population Health Initiative, Canadian Institute for Health Information, [http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/healthyweights06\\_e.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/healthyweights06_e.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> “Recommendations to Increase Physical Activity in Communities,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22, 4 Supplement, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> *How Healthy are We?* 2005 Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Capital Health.

is aging, deteriorating and in need of immediate attention. Fiscal constraints and competing priorities severely hamper municipalities' ability to respond.

## **The State of Alberta's Community Recreation Infrastructure**

Much of Alberta's community recreation infrastructure dates back to the 1970s, when Alberta led the way in spurring the building and renovation of key assets such as ice arenas, swimming pools and curling clubs. Provincial investments of more than \$1 billion (in today's dollars) attracted more than \$3 billion in matching dollars from municipal, non-profit, corporate and other recreation providers. Indeed, as Canada West Foundation analyst Casey Vander Ploeg notes in *No Time To Be Timid*, capital grants from other levels of government served as "the financial bedrock for most large municipal capital projects."<sup>16</sup>

That bedrock crumbled during the deficit cutting of the late '80s and early '90s, when capital transfers for local recreation infrastructure were significantly reduced or, in the case of Alberta Urban Parks, ended. Careful analysis of historic funding patterns by Nichols Applied Management shows that both federal and provincial investment continued to lag municipal expenditures as we moved into the new millennium.

- Provincial funding of recreation and culture declined in absolute dollars between 1989 and 2000 while real funding levels, adjusted for inflation and population growth, declined by more than 40%. Provincial funding has also been markedly variable.
- Federal investment, extrapolated from Canada-wide figures, show very slight growth in absolute dollars between 1992 and 2001, offset by a dip in the mid-'90s. Adjusted for inflation and population growth, this support declined by 17%.
- Recreation did benefit somewhat from two federal-provincial-municipal infrastructure programs, but most of those dollars went into such infrastructure as roads and sewers.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, the resulting fiscal shock came at a time when municipalities were growing rapidly and needed more, not less, infrastructure investment. In effect, we have traded a fiscal deficit for an infrastructure gap that continues to widen as the population grows and needs evolve.

<sup>16</sup> *No Time to be timid: Addressing Infrastructure Deficits in the Western Big Six*, Casey Vander Ploeg, Senior Policy Analyst, Western Cities Project Report #30, February 2004

<sup>17</sup> *The Public Financing of Recreation and Culture in Alberta*, Nichols Applied Management, 2002.



### **What is recreation and parks infrastructure?**

Examples of the diverse infrastructure needed for recreation and parks.

#### **Indoors:**

- Ice arenas
- Swimming pools
- Curling clubs
- Community centres/halls
- Leisure multiplexes
- Seniors centres

#### **Outdoors:**

- Sports fields
- Parks
- Trails
- Open spaces



Numerous recent studies<sup>18</sup> underline the need to grapple immediately with Alberta’s ill-timed infrastructure deficit, or risk irreparable disintegration of crucial assets at the very point when their importance is hitting home. Although completed independently and with diverse objectives, those reports reinforce a key insight: all across Alberta, a huge and growing recreation and parks capital investment gap is imposing significant operational constraints.

Among those reports is a professional assessment of 132 Alberta pools, arenas and curling rinks by Alberta structural engineers and architects on behalf of ARPA and partners. A first study of its kind in Canada, this Alberta Gaming-funded assessment revealed these sobering facts:

- Of the 466 pools, arenas and curling rinks across Alberta, 75% are 25 years old or older and many are entering the last half of their functional life expectancy.
- With an average age of 37 years, the buildings are deteriorating more rapidly than necessary due to inadequate capital maintenance and upgrade.
- Numerous and significant code violations, safety hazards, slab deterioration, mechanical problems, building envelope deficiencies are raising health and safety issues for users.
- Designed when energy was cheaper and requiring more maintenance as they age, these facilities are increasingly expensive to operate as energy and construction costs rise, diverting dollars needed for capital maintenance and redevelopment.
- The capital upgrades required by Alberta’s existing pools, arenas and curling rinks could cost in the range of \$327 million.
- Broken down into specific facilities, the anticipated capital cost of addressing the most urgent needs is as follows:

**Figure 2: Province-wide Projections to Upgrade Conditions Rated 1, 2 & 3**

Facility Type	Projected Number in Province	Average Cost	Extrapolated Province-Wide Cost
Arena	151	\$868,941	\$131,210,139
Curling	155	\$432,917	\$67,102,164
Sportsplex	75	\$1,031,838	\$77,387,867
Swimming Pool	85	\$605,260	\$51,447,078
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>		<b>\$327,147,249</b>

Source: ARPA Facility Inventory, Costs Adjusted for Inflation to 2006 dollars by CPI Statistics provided by Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation, Government of Alberta.

<sup>18</sup> This analysis is based particularly on *Community Recreation Infrastructure in Alberta*, Randall Conrad and Associates (2001-2006); *ARPA Infrastructure Committee Operations Survey*, Randall Conrad and Associates (2006); *City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need* (2004); *Recreation Facility Energy Cost Increases*, Pearse Walsh & Associates (2004); *The Public Financing of Recreation and Culture in Alberta*, Nichols Applied Management (2002).

- Only one assessed recreation facility rated above 50% on the Facility Condition Index (repair cost as a percentage of replacement cost). Fifty per cent is the point at which replacement becomes more appropriate than repair. The average FCI stands at just over 15%. While aging, these facilities still retain value, and thus deserve appropriate upkeep.
- Replacing these assets would cost as much as \$2.8 billion. That figure does not include such crucial community assets as parks, trails, cultural and arts venues, community halls and libraries. Including that infrastructure has the potential to more than double the total capital funding requirement. Nor does it include the new facilities warranted by population growth and changing recreation participation trends. These aspects also require further investigation, which will undoubtedly uncover still more investment required to regenerate and develop Alberta recreation infrastructure.

It's instructive to note that the required upgrades to Alberta's pools, arenas and curling rinks are estimated at \$327 million. That is just 12% of the \$2.8 billion likely needed to replace those assets. What's more, the engineers and architects conducting these assessments discovered strong community commitment and emotional ties to the facilities. An operations survey of 19 facilities in 10 Alberta communities corroborated that commitment and found widespread use.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, Alberta's 466 arenas, curling rinks, swimming pools, and multiplexes are part of a valuable and cherished asset base. Collectively, these facilities represent the single largest citizen participation mechanism in Alberta. Yet minimal capital maintenance threatens to undermine decades of investment by the province and communities alike.

That lack of capital maintenance reflects not only short-term budget pressure but habitual failure to plan and finance such lifecycle needs as capital maintenance, rehabilitation, upgrade and replacement. Ad hoc, unpredictable investment is the rule instead, dominated by cycles of build and replace. "Some suggest that infrastructure has for too long been considered merely in anti-cyclical terms – as a mechanism to stimulate the economy by increasing aggregate demand. The structural aspect – where investment in the long-term is needed to maintain public infrastructure and boost the nation's productive capital – has largely been overlooked," Canada West Foundation's Vander Ploeg notes. "By deferring infrastructure maintenance and renewal, governments are contradicting a fundamental principal of sustainability, namely that each generation should pay for its share of use and enjoyment of intergenerational assets."

Nor is Alberta alone in having a significant infrastructure deficit. Following Alberta's lead, other provinces have launched community

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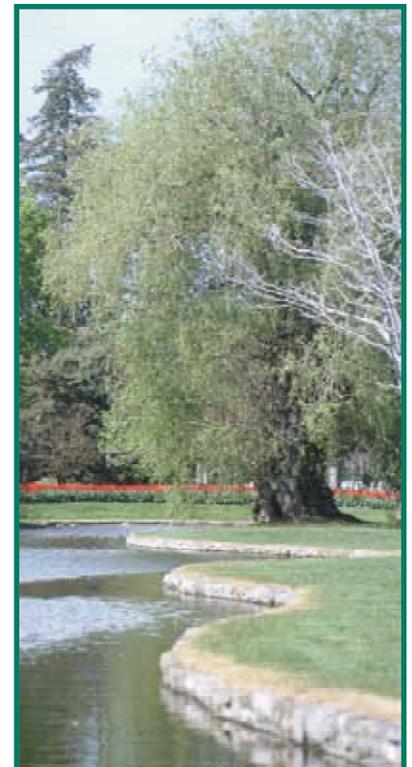
<sup>19</sup> A typical facility attracts 15,000 paid users in smaller communities and as many as 150,000 in urban centres, not including spectators. Age ranges vary, with arena users more likely to be youth while pool users are quite evenly split between youth and adults. Schools also make use of this infrastructure, with 77% of municipalities compensated through formal joint use agreements. Operators are enticing additional use by offering such programs as junior lifeguard training, themed swim nights, women's hockey and parent-tot skate. *ARPA Infrastructure Committee Operations Survey*, Mike Roma, Randall Conrad and Associates, 2006.

*"While the fiscal deficit has been closed, an infrastructure deficit has opened, and the effect of previous budgetary restraint measures continues to be felt."*

– Casey Vander Ploeg, Canada West Foundation

*"... quality of life is more than a growing economy and good social programs. It's also about people being able to realize their dreams, feeling safe in their homes and on their streets, knowing their natural environment is protected, and being enriched by cultural, sport and recreational opportunities in their neighbourhood. The Alberta Government is committed to making investments that contribute to all these forces that comprise the overall quality of life for all Albertans."*

– *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, Alberta Government, 2004



*“Infrastructure that functions appropriately to meet community-identified needs is critical. Proper site location, adaptable building designs appropriate for their intended uses are equally as important as the physical condition rating when assessing infrastructure needs.”*

*– City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need, 2004.*



recreation facility assessments, revealing similar straits. A recent study in Ontario, for example, estimates that the order-of-magnitude capital repair and replacement cost for existing municipally owned ice arenas, community centres, indoor pools and outdoor pools is \$4.95 billion in 2005 dollars. Nova Scotia estimates updating all 10-year priority items would cost about \$90 million. Such research indicates the recreation and parks infrastructure gap is a national issue with two main components:

- inadequate capital maintenance and retrofitting of existing infrastructure;
- the need for more and different infrastructure to meet growing new needs.

A City of Edmonton infrastructure inventory and analysis<sup>20</sup> illustrates how the infrastructure deficit impacts individual communities. Expanding needs are outpacing Edmonton’s ability to maintain current investments, let alone adjust to population growth, delivery changes and desire for health and wellness services close to home. The municipality’s long-range financial plan funds only 27% of the identified capital need for community services infrastructure, including just 10% of growth needs, leaving a \$483 million unfunded gap between now and 2014. Facilities and assets used for recreation and parks have a replacement value of \$2 billion (\$1.46 billion in parks systems assets; \$522 million in recreation facility assets) or about 11% of all City of Edmonton infrastructure. The plan funds rehabilitation and replacement at about 0.5% of the total replacement value a year, significantly below the recommended range of 2 to 4 per cent. “This leads to an increase in asset degradation to a point where rehabilitation will not be sufficient,” the report warns. “Total reconstruction may be required and in some cases reduced services, closure or lower development standards may also need to be applied.”

Although Edmonton’s community service infrastructure is in good to fair condition overall and generally able to meet demand within design capacity, many key elements and sub-elements “fail to meet program and service needs due to critical deficiencies and/or poor condition and require significant modernizing or replacement.” Numerous buildings and washrooms are below par, parks and trails aren’t receiving proper care, public golf courses can’t keep up with demand, cemeteries lack client service buildings, major facilities such as Valley Zoo and Muttart Conservatory require significant refurbishment, pools and arenas are old and out of step with emerging recreation needs... the list goes on. Already, programming constraints and operating costs created by outdated and inadequate facilities are compromising revenues and limiting citizen satisfaction and use.

Meanwhile, accelerated population growth and recreation shifts (e.g., greater desire for multipurpose facilities, outdoor recreation and spontaneous drop-in activities) are creating pressure for new construction. Ironically, accelerated growth is also inflating capital construction and rehabilitation costs, further complicating attempts to amass the dollars needed for major facility replacement, reconstruction and development. Partnerships provide one potential solution, but the

<sup>20</sup> City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need, Infrastructure Working Team, Strategic Services Branch, September 2004.

magnitude of investment needed to supplement limited public dollars can result in projects that serve private more than public needs.

Recreational opportunities are key to a caring community. Knowing what we do about the links between physical activity and health, we share a collective responsibility to provide safe, inviting, affordable opportunities to all, with particular outreach to those most vulnerable. But as other levels of government continue to offload services such as affordable housing, recreation infrastructure competes with a growing list of municipal priorities for limited property tax dollars. Thus the chronic deficiency in capital budgets continues.

## **Alberta's Urban and Rural Parks**

Recreation infrastructure includes not only facilities such as pools and arenas, but parks, open spaces, trails and natural areas. Such outdoor spaces offer some of the best preventive medicine, enabling Albertans to connect with nature and de-stress as they engage in the physical activity and social interactivity so important to health. As cities expand and resource extraction carves up the land, there's growing recognition of the need to preserve and interconnect green spaces for use by both humans and wildlife.

Alberta has many community parks, thanks in part to past investment through a farsighted Urban Parks program, one of the most successful active living and outdoor recreation, urban ecology, development and environmental conservation initiatives ever undertaken by the Government of Alberta. This program ended in the mid-'90s, leaving a significant gap even as research began amassing solid evidence of direct links between urban design and health issues such as obesity. With burgeoning population and a marked shift to outdoor recreation activities, Alberta's urban centres are struggling to shift design paradigms to meet the need for walkable communities with ample parks and open spaces.<sup>21</sup> Urban Parks continues to offer a valuable model that clearly meshes with the provincial government's *20 Year Strategic Plan* and its philosophy of focusing on people, prosperity and preservation.

The need for investment in rural parks and green spaces is also becoming acute as cities sprawl and rural areas lose population. Such guiding documents as *Alberta's Rural Development Strategy* note that expanded and regenerated provincial parks, campgrounds and recreation areas can serve recreation and tourism, help revitalize rural community life, promote wellness and retain biodiversity.

Similarly, Alberta's rapid growth heightens the need for attention to the rural urban fringe, the space between city and country. This evolving body of land offers golden but fleeting opportunities to create green spaces ranging from working farms to linked paths to historic sites to neighbourhood squares. Besides significantly enhancing quality of life, such spaces create powerful first impressions for visitors and potential investors entering a city, benefiting the economy and society as a whole.

*"We are nature-starved. We need nature close by in our neighbourhoods and in our city centres."*

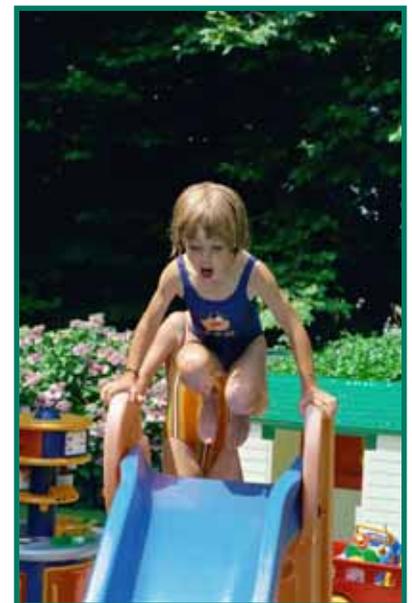
*– Fanis Grammenos, Dialogues, Spring 2005*

*"Encourage the revitalization of parks and campgrounds across Alberta."*

*– Recommendation from the MLA Steering Committee on Rural Development, 2004*

*"In re-enacting this program, we would... seize hold of the opportunity to create a true legacy, one that will enhance urban life for generations to come and contribute significantly to keeping Albertans healthy."*

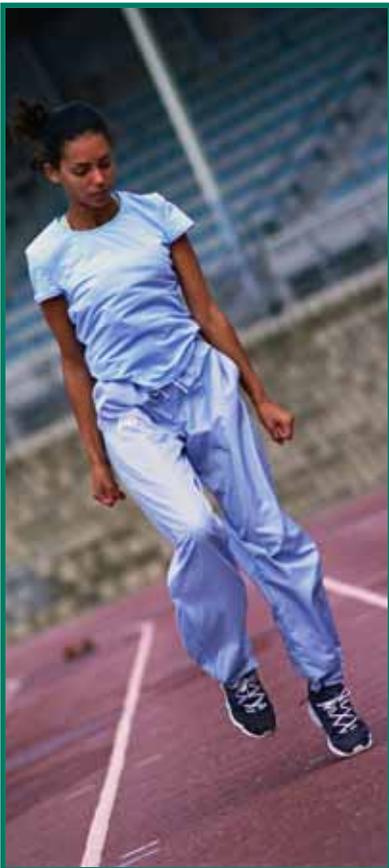
*– "Investing in Alberta's Future: A Proposal for a Re-established Urban Parks Program", ARPA, 2004.*



<sup>21</sup> "Municipal Green Space Allocation: Practice and Protocol in Alberta Communities", Randall Conrad and Associates; 2005.

*“Many cities simply do not have the capability, tools, or resources to build an inventory of the infrastructure they own, never mind undertaking a detailed description or history of that infrastructure’s condition and the amounts needed to maintain or replace it. This has led to suboptimal repair and rehabilitation strategies – a toxic mix considering the limited funding available in current budgets.”*

*– Casey Vander Ploeg, No Time to Be Timid, Canada West Foundation, 2004.*



As ARPA has recommended in the past, Alberta is overdue for a renewed Urban Parks program, coupled with a complementary program for Countryside Parks & Recreation Areas<sup>22</sup>. Those initiatives would enable Alberta to reclaim its acclaim as a leader in park development by building an integrated parks and open space system that conserves and enhances what exists while expanding the range of recreation and lifestyle pursuits available for Albertans and visitors alike.

## **Fiscal Circumstances of Alberta Municipalities**

For Alberta municipalities, the struggle to provide quality public recreation services is compounded not only by growing populations, expanding boundaries, escalating costs and rising citizen expectations, but by sharply diminished transfer income and limited options for alternative funding.

The 350-plus municipalities in our increasingly urban province spend roughly 2.5 times as much as the Government of Alberta on recreation and culture – sharply up from 0.3 times more in the ‘80s. Local sources now fund as much as 95% of total spending while provincial contributions have declined in both absolute and relative terms to less than 5% of costs.

Municipalities devote about one-tenth of their combined operating and capital budgets, or about \$500 million a year, to recreation and culture. Operating outlays have grown consistently since the late 1980s, yet overall municipal spending on the sector has lagged increases in costs and population by about 14% over the past 12 years – in part because capital expenditures have remained flat.<sup>23</sup>

To fill the income transfer gap, municipalities have increased user fees and sales a full 90% between 1988 and 1999 – and more since then. As a result, affordability is becoming a significant recreation issue at a time when the importance of active and interactive living is more certain than ever. In recent Alberta Recreation Surveys, economic constraints – particularly the cost of admission fees, equipment and supplies – replaced time constraints as leading barriers to citizen participation.

But municipalities have few other funding options. Their primary revenue source, property tax, is linked to just one aspect of life – and unlike other forms of tax (income, sales, excise), it does not grow in step with the economy. Grants can serve a fundamental role by addressing tax base inequities and compensating for serving non-residents, but those have diminished in size and become ad hoc and uncertain. Edmonton and Calgary have received rebates based on provincial fuel tax since 1999, but that can be (and has been) unilaterally reduced, with multi-million dollar impacts. Despite downloading responsibilities to local levels, Canada’s provinces remain unwilling to significantly increase municipalities’ authority to expand revenue sources or engage in innovative financing.

<sup>22</sup> “Investing in Alberta’s Future: A Proposal for a Re-established Urban Parks Program” and a “Countryside Parks and Recreation Areas Program”, ARPA, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> *The Public Financing of Recreation and Culture in Alberta: An Historical Review*, Nichols Applied Management, 2002.

A 2004 review of energy costs in six Alberta recreation facilities by Pearse Walsh & Associates illustrates the resulting financial squeeze felt by the typical municipal recreation provider. Commissioned by ARPA in response to concerns about rising rates, that study found energy costs up 119% over five years – the single largest factor pushing overall operating costs up 71% and total facility costs up 52%. Those increases are impacting overall facility operations and pulling funds away from necessary facility capital maintenance. What's more, the fiscal scramble makes it harder for municipalities to tap opportunities to reduce energy costs. The following points illustrate:<sup>24</sup>

- Electricity is a particularly large expense, typically representing more than 80% of energy use in an ice arena and 60% in a combined recreation facility or aquatic centre. Prices have stabilized after rising when electricity generation and retailing were opened to competition in 2001 then declining as supply increased, but few municipalities access the best deals. Causes include a lack of retail competition, the confusion of shifting from bundled monopoly service and inability to fund the meters that must be installed to take advantage of variable pricing.
- Gas prices have increased significantly since 1998, from under \$2/Gjoule in 1998 to about \$6.50 at study date – and continue to rise, with some government relief. Although gas has been deregulated since 1996, few recreation facilities have opted to exercise choice, instead remaining with their existing utility under a regulated rate option.
- Some larger communities took advantage of AUMA aggregate purchase programs for both electricity and gas, but smaller communities, regional districts and villages generally did not have these options. Besides providing price stability and certainty, aggregate purchase saved some money (up to 5%) and allowed sharing of contracted volumes among those involved.
- Few facilities are reducing costs through energy management and innovation, even though potential savings are significant. Excellent technology exists, for example to store the heat resulting from changing water into ice for use at other hours of the day to heat dressing rooms, amenity areas or a pool. But with average annual shortfalls between revenue and total operating costs, facility operators are draining the reserve funds (as well as grants) that might fund such technologies.

The operations survey conducted by Randall Conrad and Associates found an even larger earnings gap: operating expenses among the 19 facilities studied outweighed revenues by an amount ranging from 15% for arenas to 51% for indoor aquatic centres. Extrapolating to the entire province, this indicates Alberta municipalities invest more than \$32 million a year in arenas, pools and curling rinks alone – a figure that includes neither the cost of borrowing to construct the facilities nor investments in a range of other leisure facilities, from multi-sport centres

*“The time for rehabilitation and replacement of significant infrastructure systems has arrived, but governments are finding the fiscal cupboards bare.”*

*– Casey Vander Ploeg, Framing a Fiscal Fix-Up, 2002.*

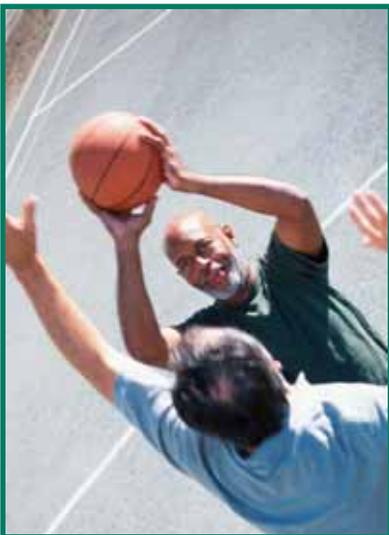


<sup>24</sup> Recreation Facility Energy Cost Increases, Pearse Walsh & Associates, 2004.



*“The creativity which calls for sharing resources and creating win-win scenarios is one that will be called for increasingly as all municipalities grapple with the challenges of growth.”*

*- Mayor Stephen Mandel, City of Edmonton, “Municipalities as Engines of Change” in Dialogues, Canada West Foundation, Spring 2005.*



to community halls.<sup>25</sup> It is perhaps instructive to note that, to date, the ME *first!*— a Municipal Energy efficiency assistance program (providing no-interest loans) has experienced marginal take-up by Alberta municipalities – perhaps due to existing municipal debt load circumstances; or, due to the fact that in many cases energy efficiencies would be impractical in aging recreation facilities.

These operational circumstances along with growing concerns and escalating costs related to risk/liability insurance and the increasing difficulty to recruit and train staff for various facility positions have community recreation facility operators becoming more and more concerned.

Both the operations survey and the review of energy costs found a dearth of long-range life cycle and energy management planning among facility operators. More than half of the respondents whose operations were surveyed said they do not have a life cycle capital plan, even though half reported near-term plans for major renovations and upgrades. For many, capital expenditures seem ad hoc, triggered by urgent need. Facilities rarely seem to have provisions in place for major capital needs, such as compressor replacement or new roofing, let alone plans for a major upgrade or replacement. Given the advancing age of Alberta’s recreation infrastructure stock, that’s cause for significant concern.

### **Seeking a Better Way: Funding Options**

Public recreation facilities, parks, sports venues and one-of-a-kind attractions serve not only residents, but visitors from the region and far beyond. In today’s global economy, those facilities (and many others) also help create the dynamic “come-to” atmosphere needed for a province to thrive. Given the mismatch between cities’ expanded roles and restricted revenues, there’s growing recognition of the need for a new look at how municipalities are funded.

Many analysts are calling for a retooling of legislation to assure a stronger municipal revenue base and allow freedom to innovate. Canada West Foundation’s policy analyst Denis Wong, for example, suggests “enabling municipal legislation that includes natural person powers for municipal authorities, spheres of jurisdiction instead of a ‘laundry list’ of responsibilities, greater municipal control over responsibilities, wider range of revenue generating options and dispute resolution mechanism.”<sup>26</sup>

Tripartite agreements already offer a mechanism for the federal, provincial and municipal governments to combine resources and expertise in addressing recreation infrastructure needs. In the past, however, those agreements have tended to be too short, ad hoc and under-funded to provide stable capital financing. What’s more, infrastructure programs that pit recreation against other grey infrastructure priorities often tilt toward roads, sewers, hospitals, schools

<sup>25</sup> ARPA’s Infrastructure Committee: Operations Survey, Randall Conrad and Associates, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Cities at the Crossroads: Addressing Intergovernmental Structures for Western Canada’s Cities, Denis Wong, Policy Analyst, Canada West Foundation, August 2002.

and other items deemed more urgent. Yet poor or inadequate public infrastructure threatens health and safety, the environment and the economy, notes Canada West Foundation's Casey Vander Ploeg. "In other words, the tax dollars needed to finance the very priorities of Canadians (e.g., health care and education) do depend to some extent on a good public infrastructure system that supports the functioning of the broader economy."<sup>27</sup>

Ensuring adequate attention to recreation and parks facilities through tripartite/bi-lateral agreements would require longer, properly financed, renewable agreements that involve each party at every stage. Ideally, those agreements would factor significant municipal inputs such as land and lifecycle costs into the funding formula.

## The Opportunity

Amid mounting evidence that community sport, recreation and parks infrastructure is crumbling at a time when it's most needed to build healthy people and vibrant communities, momentum for reinvestment is building in Alberta – and across Canada.

Meeting in August 2005, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation identified recreation infrastructure as their most important priority for collective action and directed that parameters for a *National Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Program* be ready for review by the end of 2006. This same Ministers Conference endorsed the Canadian Sport Policy, which has set a target of increasing physical activity in the Ministers' respective jurisdictions by 10% by 2010. Collectively agreeing that municipal governments would be extremely challenged to provide any matching capital, the federal and provincial governments committed to developing a bilateral strategy of sport and recreation facility investments, with municipal departments providing ongoing operational and maintenance funds.

In the recent federal election, the winning Conservative Party committed to spend at least 1% of total federal health funding on physical activity.

In November 2005, the FCM Big City Mayor's Caucus endorsed the Ministers' recommendation and proposed to draft a pan-Canadian Civic Sport/Recreation Policy. Meanwhile, other provinces have joined Alberta in quantifying the extent of the recreation and parks infrastructure gap, and governments are beginning to use that data for decision making.

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<sup>27</sup> *Framing a Fiscal Fix-Up: Options for Strengthening the Finances of Western Canada's Big Cities*, Casey Vander Ploeg, Senior Policy Analyst, Canada West Foundation, January 2002.

*"The recreation community is delighted that the infrastructure issue has been identified as a top priority of the F-P/T Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation and their direction that an Infrastructure Program be initiated. The recreation, sector, through the Canadian Parks & Recreation Association and its provincial/territorial partners, is fully prepared and able to be an active participant in developing, implementing and monitoring the program."*

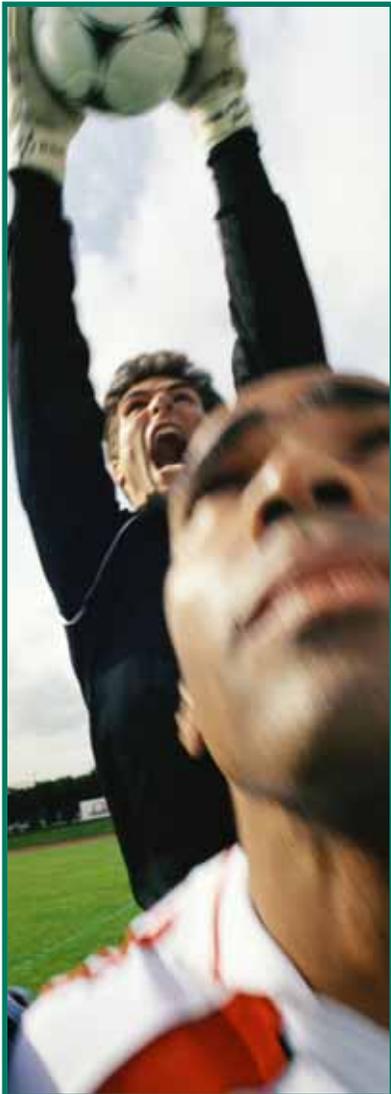
- CPRA & Provincial/Territorial Partners  
Communiqué, April 2006.

*"Improved infrastructure will advance sport and physical activity in communities across the country while addressing critical health challenges and strengthening Canadian communities."*

- Conference of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers  
Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity  
and Recreation, August 2005

*"The Alberta Government is committed to enhancing the province's cultural diversity and recreational resources by developing a long-term strategy to assist communities to focus investment according to community priorities."*

- Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise, Alberta Government, 2004



Through those actions and in many direction-setting documents,<sup>28</sup> provincial and federal governments and other stakeholders have committed to recreation and culture as a means to individual health, community building, quality of life and economic development. Building and rebuilding the network of facilities needed to meet those commitments will take concerted action by all levels of government and affiliated groups.

As in most public health issues, responsibility should not rest with a single entity, but rather be shared by government, agencies and organizations that have the capacity and commitment to positively influence individual and community health. ARPA recommends the establishment of an *Alberta Recreation and Parks Infrastructure Program* designed and founded on the following principles and parameters.

## Toward a Provincial Recreation and Parks Infrastructure Program

As envisioned, the Provincial Recreation and Parks Infrastructure Program encourages strong partnerships with the shared goal of enhancing the quality of community life and improving the health status of Albertans by providing recreation and parks opportunities for all. Drawing from population health learning, the program invests in both natural and built environments as part of a comprehensive mix of interventions and strategies aimed at removing social and economic barriers to health and quality of life. A focus on lifecycle planning and maintenance ensures that the resulting infrastructure is appropriately stewarded for decades to come.

### Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles would support those outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

1. Distribute projects fairly and equitably throughout the province working with stakeholders to define “equity.”
2. Incorporate input from the recreation and parks sector both at the design stage and as the program evolves, adjusting and refining elements, criteria and parameters in consultation with the sector.
3. Span several years in order to facilitate effective planning and to mitigate the current circumstances of construction cost inflation.



<sup>28</sup> A few examples of that commitment: Federal/provincial/territorial ministers recently unveiled new guidelines for physical activity to counter the sedentary lifestyles that are creating an epidemic of obesity and chronic disease; the Government of Alberta's 20-year strategic plan, *Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise* (2004) commits the provincial government to invest in cultural, sport and recreational opportunities to enhance overall quality of life; its *Measuring Up* document sets goals that rely heavily on appropriate and accessible recreation and culture; The *Report of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health* and the *Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy* (2005) reinforces the importance of wellness and lifestyle strategies to containing health care costs.

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from BCRPA; *Ontario Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Study (Interim Report)*, 2006; and, *Recreation and Parks Community Endorses a National Recreation and Sport Infrastructure Program*, CPRA/National Partners, 2006.

4. Include three complementary components: capital maintenance, adaptation/rejuvenations and development.
5. Balance places and spaces – for example, buildings as well as parks, open spaces and trails; community recreation and parks facilities and elite sport facilities.
6. Respond to both current and anticipated community and regional needs and demands.
7. Establish intended outcomes and require reports that measure results against outcome indicators.
8. Expect facility developers/operators to demonstrate capacity to collaborate, particularly to foster public/private sector partnerships, municipal recreation–public school integration, municipal recreation–health and wellness collaboration, and volunteerism.
9. Make lifecycle maintenance the norm by establishing requirements, incentives and training.
10. Given the important role played by municipalities and local governments in providing recreation and parks opportunities to all segments of society, be particularly sensitive to these constraints and realities:
  - a. municipalities face competing capital priorities for limited capital funding.
  - b. recreation infrastructure and lifecycle planning typically take low priority in the face of other pressing needs.
  - c. most communities require assistance with both developing new and rehabilitating existing indoor and outdoor recreation and sport facilities.
  - d. local governments ultimately absorb the cost of land and facility operations, which should be considered as part of their contribution to the program.
11. Be inclusive, encompassing every environment that accommodates leisure, recreation, play, physical activity and sport endeavours: facilities for traditional organized sports and physical activities (e.g., arenas, community centres, pools) as well as increasingly popular outdoor environments (trails, bike paths, parks, sport fields, open spaces, etc.) and non-physical recreation venues such as youth centres and multi-purpose facilities with opportunities for older adults.
12. Encourage and facilitate new integrated community planning approaches, creative design features and the most up-to-date construction techniques to enhance participation levels, augment accessibility and reduce environmental footprints (e.g. LEED's or Natural Step as program examples).
13. Complement existing federal, provincial/territorial and local recreation, physical activity and sport development initiatives. Where possible, connect with related initiatives such as active transportation and environmental sustainability.



*“Improving the livability of places will be critical for the future.”*

*– “From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building A Stronger Future For All Canadians”, Final Report of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities; Government of Canada. June 2006.*

*“High-quality public buildings and open spaces, where local residents can meet, be active and socialize, give communities a sense of pride and belonging and, are a key element in achieving sustainable development.”*

*– Foundations for Action: Enhancing Quality of Life in Alberta; ARPA, 2006.*

## Program Parameters

The following table outlines more detailed recommendations for key program components.<sup>30</sup>

Component	ARPA recommendation	Rationale
<b>Project objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster “more people, being more active, more often.”</li> <li>• Target all segments of the community, particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the vulnerable, the inactive and those who face barriers to participation.</li> <li>• Contribute to physical, social, cultural, personal and economic development of the community.</li> <li>• Provide indoor and outdoor recreation venues for a well-planned system of activities and services that meet a variety of interests (sport, play and outdoor recreation) and levels of competency.</li> <li>• Be safe and accessible, designed to remove physical, visual and other barriers.</li> <li>• Be multi-purpose and flexible.</li> <li>• Provide space for drop-in and ancillary uses (e.g., leisure ice, fitness areas, walking/running tracks) alongside scheduled programs and rentals.</li> <li>• Provide social gathering and meeting spaces.</li> <li>• Provide adequate ancillary spaces (e.g., adequately sized family change rooms, storage, food services).</li> <li>• Foster regional, community and intersectoral partnerships (e.g. recreation and health).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering and/or involving all voices in the community when designing indoor and outdoor facilities better ensures the inactive and uninvolved are served as well as continuing to support those who are active.</li> <li>• Through engagement, participants feel greater ownership and the space is more relevant to a broader range of people.</li> <li>• Activities need to inspire a variety of interests and support a range of abilities.</li> <li>• Activities must be accessible so that the service is perceived as reliable and is habit-forming.</li> <li>• Multi-purpose and flexible spaces ensure the facility can accommodate a variety of activities now and into the future.</li> <li>• In particular, Alberta needs facilities designed to serve the broader “quality of life sector.” Toward that end, it’s important to consider multi-service centres, which can more effectively meet a broad range of quality of life needs than the traditional stand-alone facility.</li> <li>• Recreation trends in urban settings include a marked shift to clustered “leisure mall” or “multiplex” facilities and to spontaneous rather than scheduled use.</li> <li>• Ancillary spaces are key to functionality and attractiveness, yet often receive short shrift.</li> <li>• Partnerships maximize project benefits, increase reach into the community and leverage resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Eligible projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport and recreation facilities and spaces, with the priority being user-based versus spectator based.</li> <li>• Parks, fields, open spaces and trails.</li> <li>• Facilities that serve the broader “quality of life” sector by meeting a broad range of quality of life needs.</li> <li>• Other recreational infrastructure that meets program objectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation makes for healthier citizens.</li> <li>• Recreation trends include greater desire for informal, outdoor experiences.</li> <li>• Outdoor spaces and trails typically show high use to cost ratio.</li> <li>• Being active while connecting with nature promotes mental as well as physical health.</li> <li>• Connected trails can serve as a non-vehicular transportation option.</li> <li>• Designing places and spaces that respond to future needs and are sustainable will take careful planning, significant capital support and appropriate incentives to do it right.</li> </ul>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

Component	ARPA recommendation	Rationale
<b>Funding formula</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior levels of government (federal and provincial) contribute a larger share of the funding for building capital projects.</li> <li>For their part, municipal governments contribute land, and the costs of facility operation, regular and lifecycle maintenance, along with programming and activity costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The benefits of an equitable, efficient and responsive provincial funding program accrue to all regions of the province.</li> <li>A shared funding model reflects the significant investment that municipal governments already contribute to sport and recreation including parks and trails infrastructure.</li> <li>Requiring municipalities to contribute equally to capital costs severely impacts the timing, quality and quantity of facilities being built.</li> <li>Municipalities are limited in their ability to generate new sources of funding and, continue to receive less transfer payments from senior levels of government.</li> </ul>
<b>Infrastructure tracking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create and fund a provincial system for comprehensive and regular tracking of recreation and parks infrastructure.</li> <li>Involve sector stakeholders to design and monitor the system.</li> <li>Coordinate data collection to ensure optimum comparison between facility types and jurisdictions.</li> <li>Enable communities to input data directly into a central database.</li> <li>Require database entry by program participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equip decision makers with a consistent source of information for comparative analysis and action.</li> <li>Ensure that the system is tracking the right information and retaining accuracy as that information is compiled.</li> <li>Earlier research has tended to focus on specific facility types or sports and to use varying parameters.</li> <li>Streamline the gathering of facility data, for efficiency and breadth.</li> <li>Data collected by ARPA is already being used in the province.</li> </ul>
<b>Lifecycle planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require and provide incentives for lifecycle planning and maintenance.</li> <li>Build community capacity to implement lifecycle maintenance.</li> <li>Require clear demonstration that each proposed project is economically and environmentally sustainable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lifecycle maintenance planning is essential to ensure this infrastructure does not slip into disrepair.</li> <li>Creating local knowledge on how to assess, plan and address maintenance issues ensures greater responsibility and responsiveness.</li> <li>In the long term, public budgets can afford only sustainable projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Facility energy management and training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure access to a comprehensive recreation facility energy audit and training program.</li> <li>Provide incentives for participating in the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumer education regarding energy deregulation and energy management is imperative.</li> <li>The work and resulting database would encourage sharing of energy management best practices and cost saving techniques.</li> </ul>
<b>Requisite project support</b>	<p>Information that supports each project must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project and budget approvals.</li> <li>An evidence-based plan that takes into account current and future regional and community needs, barriers, demands and trends.</li> <li>A well-designed community engagement process.</li> <li>In the case of municipal projects, Municipal Council endorsement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects must respond to current and future community needs and current demand (i.e. actual usage).</li> <li>Projects must specifically address the accessibility barriers experienced by the inactive, the uninvolved and those who are disadvantaged.</li> <li>The process of engagement provides a foundation for reaching those who have not historically been served.</li> </ul>

*“For all Provincial programs designed to fund or address ‘municipal’ infrastructure, it should be defined as ‘fixed capital assets in Canada for public use or benefit,’ and the Government of Alberta should eliminate any requirement for matching municipal funds.”*

*– AUMA Policy Statement on Municipal Infrastructure, adopted by the AUMA Board of Directors, January, 2006*



## Conclusion: Moving Ahead

There is no doubt that Alberta’s community recreation and parks infrastructure adds to quality of life and health, providing places for Albertans to congregate, relax and take part in the physical activities needed to improve health, build community, reduce chronic disease and avoid overloading our healthcare system. Yet as the reports referenced here clearly show, Alberta’s community recreation and parks infrastructure is aging and in disrepair. That reality is significantly impacting facility operators’ ability to provide the full range of recreation opportunities at the very time when we need them most.

The analysis done to date speaks volumes about the action required to secure and enhance a legacy created through significant past investment. Addressing the need among our curling rinks, arenas and pools alone will take an estimated \$327 million for remedial upgrades; more than \$2.8 billion in replacement cost. Assessing and upgrading all community recreation facilities and the many other community venues that require attention if they are to continue enhancing Alberta’s quality of life will undoubtedly multiply that figure. Further, this analysis speaks only to existing community recreation and parks infrastructure. It does not address the need for new facilities that may be warranted due to provincial and urban population growth, nor does it address the functionality of existing facilities. These aspects also require further investigation, which will undoubtedly uncover still more investment required to maintain Alberta’s community recreation and parks infrastructure.

The status quo is not an option. Protecting the investment embodied in our community recreation and parks facilities requires immediate, multi-faceted, coordinated effort by all parties. As recent events amply illustrate, that effort must take into account the significant investment already being made by municipalities as well as the limited sources of public funds at the local level. To ensure that today’s investments benefit future Albertans, this effort must be grounded in sustainable planning and operations. Only then will we respond responsibly to the growing body of evidence directly linking recreation and active living to lifelong health and wellness.

In times of economic prosperity, reinvestment is crucial to ensuring that our quality of life is sustained for years to come. Again, we must act together to avoid further deterioration and revitalize our community recreation and parks infrastructure. ARPA and its partners want to be part of that solution.

Collectively, the recreation and parks and sport sector represents the single largest citizen participation enterprise in the province. The millions of individuals connected to the sector will be the direct beneficiaries of a program that results in the development, renewal and rehabilitation of recreation, parks and sport infrastructure throughout the province.

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## Appendix B: List of Relevant Studies

Studies included in this appendix include:

- *Community Recreation Infrastructure in Alberta – 2006 Updated Facility Assessment Report*, a collaborative, multi-year study facility assessment study providing data on the condition of 104 pools, ice arenas and curling rinks, begun in 2001 and ongoing.
- *ARPA's Infrastructure Committee: Operations Survey*, an operational analysis of a subset of Alberta recreation facilities, Randall Conrad and Associates, 2006.
- *City of Edmonton Community Services Infrastructure Inventory & Investment Need*, a report documenting clear need for increased capital investment, by an Infrastructure Working Team within Edmonton's Community Services Strategic Services Branch, 2004.
- *Recreation Facility Energy Cost Increases*, prepared for ARPA by Pearse Walsh & Associates, 2004.
- *The Public Financing of Recreation and Culture in Alberta: An Historical Review*, noting the decline of public funding for this sector, by Nichols Applied Management, 2002.
- *Municipal Green Space Allocation: Practice and Protocol in Alberta Communities*; a report that assessed the degree to which provincial and local legislation and practice regarding municipal open space allocation was in keeping with recreation trends, healthy lifestyles, environmental protection and economic sustainability in Alberta Communities; prepared by Randall Conrad and Associates, 2005.



