



TRENDING: Election 2025 | Fewer candidates | Leader ridings | Tory campaign | CPC base | Sheila Copps | Mark Bourrie | Matt Gurney

Recreation and parks: infrastructure Canada can't afford to ignore

In uncertain economic times, a bold federal push to build and renew recreation infrastructure would fuel economic growth—just like Centennial-era investments did.



Facilities in Kemptville and Arnprior. Across the country, aging pools, rinks, and community centres—most built during Canada's centennial era—are falling apart, writes Martin Sampson. Photograph courtesy of Canadian Parks and Recreation Association

OPINION | BY MARTIN SAMPSON | April 21, 2025

You can find the op-ed in the Hill Times [here](#). As Canada prepares to elect its 45th

Parliament, the question before us is clear: what kind of country do we want to build?

At the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA), our answer is simple—we want a vibrant, resilient, and healthy Canada where every community thrives. That vision starts with federal leadership on an often-overlooked foundation: recreation and parks.

Too often dismissed as “nice to have,” recreation and parks are, in fact, critical infrastructure. Across the country, aging pools, rinks, and community centres—most built during Canada’s centennial era—are falling apart. These facilities are not just places to play. They are catalysts for workforce productivity, economic development, community safety, climate resilience, and national unity.



Renewing Recreation and Parks Infrastructure Is Nation-Building

In uncertain economic times, a bold federal push to build and renew recreation infrastructure would fuel economic growth—just like Centennial-era investments did. Facilities like arenas, pools, and parks are as vital as roads and bridges. They create jobs, attract talent, and improve quality of life. They also unify communities across regions and generations. This is true nation-building.

The federal government has an opportunity to lead. CPRA has laid out a clear path forward:

1. A Federal Plan for Recreation and Parks Infrastructure

Invest in modernizing crumbling facilities and building new ones—particularly in small, rural, and under-served communities. This isn't just about concrete and steel—it's about building the places where Canadians gather, connect, and thrive.

2. Recreation as a Smart Economic Choice Every dollar invested in recreation returns

dividends in reduced healthcare costs, lower crime, improved public safety, and stronger local economies. Programs that support active lifestyles also help Canadians age in place, reducing reliance on long-term care. Recreation pays for itself—and then some.

3. A Commitment to Stronger, Healthier Communities

Recreation supports mental health, physical wellbeing, and social connection. It builds protective factors for youth and prepares communities to respond to emergencies—from climate events to public health crises.

Support Youth, Reduce Crime

Recreation is a cost-effective way to support youth. Community-based programs offer more than activity—they provide mentorship, employment, and purpose. Programs like summer youth employment initiatives are proven to reduce crime and arrest rates. At a time when it costs over \$200,000 annually to incarcerate a single youth, prevention is not just compassionate—it's fiscally responsible.

Recreation Is Emergency Infrastructure When wildfires, heatwaves, or floods strike, community centres are on the frontlines— offering shelter, supplies, and safety. This role is increasingly urgent. Recreation facilities must be recognized as essential emergency infrastructure in Canada’s climate resilience strategy.

This Election Is About Priorities

CPRA is calling on all federal parties to commit to a long-term strategy for recreation and parks—backed by dedicated funding and cross-party support.

This sector already delivers on federal priorities—from healthier Canadians to integrating immigrants, safer streets, more inclusive communities, and a more competitive economy. The dollars are in the system. What we need now is leadership to direct them to where they make the most impact.

Let’s not miss this opportunity. Let’s invest in the infrastructure that shapes our daily lives and our collective future.

Because recreation and parks aren’t extras—they are vital. And they are ready to deliver.