



PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

2021 Pre-Budget Submission

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www.prontario.org

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Parks and Recreation Ontario

Background

Over the last year, Ontarians have dealt with the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has had a marked impact on self-reported levels of anxiety and depression. Since then, it has become clear how important parks and recreation programs are to overall well-being.

At the same time, as communities locked down to keep the virus at bay, municipalities and sport organizations pivoted away from traditional indoor recreation programs towards the use of green spaces, parks, and trails. Community recreation and sport organizations were forced to close or significantly reduce their capacity to abide by public health mandates. **Most of PRO's members indicated that this poses serious financial consequences that could see the sector struggle to return to pre-pandemic service levels, particularly in small, rural communities.**

Why does this matter?



Self-reported levels of anxiety and depression have increased by 20% and 12% respectively last year.



56% say that being outside and exercising has a positive impact on mental health.



Physical activity has been proven to lower the risk of chronic disease and improve psychological well-being.

In this context, Ontario's 2021-22 budget must act as a launching pad for a strategy to support the well-being of Ontarians and their communities by strengthening the parks and recreation sector.

Recommendation

Create a parks and recreation recovery fund that supports the sector as it works to return to pre-pandemic service levels. PRO recommends that the province allocate \$30 million over a period of 3 years to give communities the resources necessary to build sustainability and resilience in the face of unprecedented change.

PRO commends the government on its ongoing investments in the Canada Infrastructure Program's Community, Culture, and Recreation Stream. Equally as important, are investments to address the challenges of innovating to make the sector safer and more resilient. PRO's members have indicated that there are specific funding challenges related to the following three issues.

1. Engaging Ontarians more effectively in green spaces, trails, and parks.
 - Connecting with communities outdoors can combat social isolation and help deliver programs that were traditionally offered indoors.
 - This involves staffing and nominal equipment costs.
2. Making outdoor spaces accessible year-round.
 - As more Ontarians use outdoor spaces, the sector must make a fundamental shift in how these spaces are operated and managed.
 - This involves increased maintenance, cleaning, and upgrades to infrastructure to make it more accessible.
3. Making recreation pandemic-proof.
 - The sector needs resources to re-imagine and deliver recreation programs more creatively to ensure they are resistant to future disruptions.

Such an investment ensures that all Ontarians, regardless of where they live, will have consistent access to high quality parks and recreation programs that contribute to their overall well-being.

[About Parks and Recreation Ontario](#)

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is a non-profit organization representing over 6500 parks and recreation professionals. PRO advances the health, social and environmental benefits of quality recreation and parks.