

# MONITORING & TRACKING THE FIELD



CFLRI'S BULLETIN SERIES MONITORING SPORT AND RECREATION IN CANADA

## Impact of COVID-19 on Physical Activity and Sport Opportunities in Communities

In the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's 2020-2021 *Opportunities for Physical Activity in Canadian Communities* survey, municipal administrators operating in communities with at least 1,000 residents were asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community programming and facilities. Specifically, these municipal administrators were asked about the impact of the pandemic on the:

- revenue sources or financial sustainability for sport and recreation *programming*;
- number of staff or human resources to sustain sport and recreation *programming*;
- overall ability to provide quality *programming* for sport and recreation;
- revenue sources or financial sustainability for sport and recreational *facilities*;
- number of staff or human resources to sustain sport and recreational *facilities*; and,
- overall ability to open, maintain or sustain sport and recreation *facilities*.

In addition, these municipal administrators were also asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community's ability to provide alternative options for promoting physical activity and sport (such as virtual opportunities), and its ability to address equitable access to facility use among the population (for example, access regardless of age, affordability, abilities, culture, geographical region).

In general, the majority of Canadian communities have been impacted by the pandemic to *at least* some extent (that is, to *some* or a *great* extent) when providing sport and recreation opportunities to their residents. Table 1 described the extent to which municipal administrators reported these impacts on either programming or facilities.

**Table 1:** Impact of COVID-19 on sport and recreation programming and facilities in communities with at least 1,000 residents

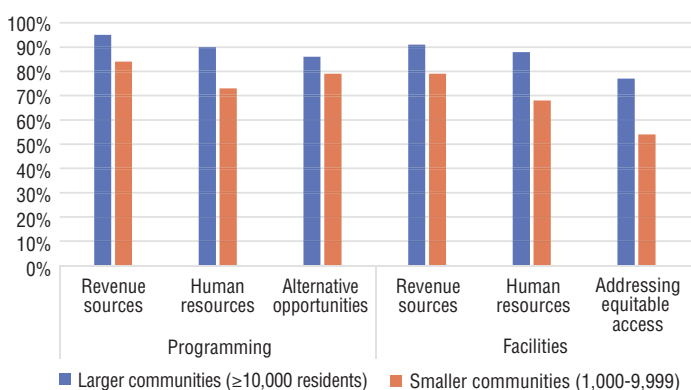
		A great extent	Some extent	Little or not at all	Not applicable/ Don't know
Sport and recreation programming	Revenues	46%	41%	8%	-
	Human resources	31%	48%	17%	-
	Overall ability to provide quality programming	60%	32%	-	-
	Alternative ways of promotion (e.g., virtual)	32%	49%	12%	7%
Sport and recreation facilities	Revenues	49%	34%	12%	-
	Human resources	26%	48%	22%	-
	Overall ability to open or maintain facilities	62%	31%	-	-
	Ability to address equitable access to facilities	24%	36%	27%	12%

- not released due to sample size in cell  
Source: CFLRI, 2020-2021 *Opportunities for Physical Activity in Canadian Communities* survey

## Community size

Compared to smaller communities (1,000 to 9,999 residents), a greater<sup>1</sup> percentage of municipal administrators in larger communities ( $\geq 10,000$  residents) report that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their community to *at least* some extent for most factors. These are illustrated in Figure 1. The overall ability to provide quality programming and to open and sustain facilities, however, were the two factors that were considered equally an issue (to *at least* some extent) among smaller and larger municipalities (i.e., no significant differences).

**Figure 1:** Impact of COVID-19 on sport and recreation programming and facilities in communities with at least 1,000 residents by community size



Source: CFLRI, 2020-2021 Opportunities for Physical Activity in Canadian Communities survey

## Region

Table 2 illustrates the pandemic's impact on sport and recreation programming and facilities by region; specifically, the data in this table describes differences between regions that impact the various factors to at least some extent (i.e., to *some* or a *great* extent).

**Table 2:** Impact of COVID-19 on sport and recreational programming and facilities in communities with at least 1,000 residents by region

		Regional differences in percentages from national average among municipalities (with at least 1,000 residents) reporting impact to at least some extent				
		Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	West	North
Sport and recreation programming	Revenues		↓	↑		-
	Human resources			↑		-
	Overall ability to provide quality programming			↑		-
	Alternative ways of promotion (e.g., virtual)					-
Sport and recreation facilities	Revenues		↓	↑	↑	-
	Human resources			↑		-
	Overall ability to open or maintain facilities					-
	Ability to address equitable access to facilities	↑	↓	↑		-

↑ percentage is higher than national average by at least 5%; ↓ percentage is lower than national average by at least 5%; - not released due to sample size in cell  
Source: CFLRI, 2020-2021 Opportunities for Physical Activity in Canadian Communities survey

<sup>1</sup> With a difference in percentages of at least 5% between categories



**The overall ability to provide quality programming and to open and sustain facilities, were the two factors that were considered equally an issue among smaller and larger municipalities.**

## Discussion

Canadian municipalities and communities play a vital role in encouraging residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles. The mental, physical and emotional benefits of regular physical activity, recreation, and sport participation have been well-documented<sup>1</sup>, and national guidelines<sup>2</sup> have long been established outlining the amount of daily physical activity required to reap health benefits. However, in spite of this, many Canadians remain insufficiently active<sup>3</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested municipal governments' abilities to provide physical activity, recreation, and sport opportunities, which in turn may have affected Canadians' ability to remain active during this time. This study found that the COVID-19 pandemic considerably impacted municipal administrators' ability to provide opportunities for sport and recreation (e.g., loss of revenue and human resources). For some, finding innovative and new ways to offer programs and services (e.g., virtual programming) may have proven helpful in sustaining programs and services, but with revenue shortages due to COVID, finding alternative ways to service residents has proven challenging. Financial hardships are not a new phenomenon as financial barriers for physical activity and sport facilities were cited by municipal administrators before the pandemic. Data from the previous cycle of the survey of *Opportunities for Physical Activity in Canadian Communities (2015)* found that the majority of municipal administrators experienced difficulties in obtaining funding for repair, maintenance and/or development of community facilities<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, previous research has shown that a large number of municipalities partner and collaborate with other organizations (e.g., with sport organizations or schools)

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when developing programs and services and have agreements for shared use of facilities and resources (e.g., human resources, equipment), however, restrictions also affected access to these organizations during the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Public health measures producing closures, restricting access, or shifting to virtual programming have resulted in reduced profits and human resources for municipalities, which can, in turn, make it increasingly difficult for communities to continue to offer quality programming. The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing and evolving situation and, as explained in the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's *Re-Imagine RREC-Renew, Retool, Engage, Contribute* report, it is unclear how behaviours will change when restrictions are loosened further and how this will continue to impact municipalities' abilities to provide opportunities for physical activity and sport. It is for this reason that ongoing monitoring and research to understand and track changes into the post-pandemic period is essential<sup>6</sup>.



# FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS



## Financial investment for facilities

Communities require increased financial commitments from all levels of governments to facilitate the redesign, development and retrofitting of physical activity, recreation, and sport facilities. This will be key for recovery efforts to help address public concerns about safety and to ensure that these facilities are adaptable and resilient in the event of future pandemics. Examples of infrastructure requirements may include investing in anti-bacterial building materials that can be easily sanitized; updated ventilation and HVAC systems for improved air flow and filtration; development of private change rooms and showers to allow for physical distancing; and development or retrofitting of outdoor facilities to be used year-round<sup>6</sup>. In addition to addressing infrastructure needs, communities will require additional financial resources for protective equipment and sanitization products to ensure that programs are delivered in a safe and clean environment.



## Providing support for human resources

Many organizations have been faced with staffing shortages due to the pandemic. Staff and volunteers are integral to delivery of these programs and services. Communities require investment in recruitment and training of staff and volunteers. As restrictions lift and demands increase, these shortages may result in decreased opportunities, if not addressed. Training of new staff will be critical as new roles and responsibilities may be expected, such as new sanitary procedures, vaccine policies and use of virtual programming software/equipment<sup>6</sup>.



## Consider new programming

Communities need immediate support from organizations and governments to assist in the development of new and innovative ways to offer quality programming to encourage participation<sup>6</sup>. Communities could consider developing new program options such as outdoor workouts or training and virtual programming.



## Focus on equitable opportunities

There is evidence in the literature to support a disproportional effect of the pandemic on specific populations (e.g., women and girls, older adults, youth, newcomers, members of BIPOC communities, Indigenous Canadians, low-income and persons with disabilities). Physical activity levels among children and youth have declined considerably while sedentary behaviours have increased resulting in an increase of children and youth not meeting daily physical activity requirements<sup>3</sup>. Decreases in physical activity were also more prevalent in women compared to men and women were also more likely to report higher levels of mental health issues<sup>7</sup>. Municipal programs and service will need to target these segments of the population to ensure that access to new and existing programs, services and facilities are equitable and inclusive to encourage maximal participation.

## References

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization; 2018. Global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030: more active people for a healthier world. Geneva: Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines: An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Sleep. Available from: <http://csepguidelines.ca/>

<sup>3</sup> Watt, J., Colley, RC. 2021. Youth-but not adults-report less physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada. Available from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00032-eng.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. 2018. Financial barriers for physical activity or sport facilities. Bulletin 13. 2015 Survey of Physical Activity Opportunities in Canadian Communities. Available from: <https://cfri.ca/bulletin-13-financial-barriers-physical-activity-or-sport-facilities>

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. Networking with partners for the provision of physical activity opportunities. Bulletin 1. 2015 Survey of Physical Activity Opportunities in Canadian Communities. Available from: <https://cfri.ca/bulletin-01-networking-partners-provision-physical-activity-opportunities>

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. 2021. Re-Imagine RREC-Renew, Retool, Engage, Contribute. Reimagining Parks, Recreation and Community Sport: Highlights Report. Available from: [https://cpa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ReImagine\\_RREC\\_highlightsEN-2.pdf](https://cpa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ReImagine_RREC_highlightsEN-2.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Neinhuis CP., Lesser IA. 2020. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Physical Activity Behaviour and Mental Well-Being. Int J Environ. Res. Public Health. Vol. 17(23). Accessed from: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/23/9036>



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Production of this bulletin has been made possible through a financial contribution from Sport Canada and the Federal – Provincial/Territorial Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation Council. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of these agencies.