



## Diversifying Our Approach

Along with healthy eating and tobacco cessation, physical activity is a known preventative measure on the health promotion spectrum.

Because most physical activity opportunities are offered by local government and not-for-profit recreation service providers, public recreation is about more than leisure programs; public recreation is a key to improving health and wellness in our communities.

Indeed, many public and not-for-profit recreation providers recognize the benefits of recreation and physical activity, and state a commitment to improving community health and wellness.

However, inequity and poverty can limit the choices available to community members. These limiting factors are known as determinants of health or root causes of health. Studies show that low income and social status are linked with higher rates of almost all types of chronic disease.<sup>1</sup>

Physical activity will not end poverty, but it can help mitigate some of the worst effects of inequity. Local governments and organizations dedicated to improving health and wellness, particularly for lower income community members, can take action in several ways:

- Policy commitment
- Engagement of low-income community members
- Partnerships with non-traditional partners
- Provision of a wide range of opportunities for participation in physical activity

**Social Inclusion:** Inequities are a result of exclusion from community life. A social inclusion framework provides a guide to removing barriers to physical activity. Socially inclusive recreation and physical activity means that:

- Participation doesn't rely on one's ability to pay
- People have a choice in how and what they participate in
- All citizens are supported to participate in decision-making
- Public places and community resources are accessible
- Policies and practices value human rights, dignity and respect
- Systemic barriers do not hinder participation
- People feel a sense of belonging
- Equitable opportunities to participate are provided and valued
- Diverse needs are explored and intentionally addressed<sup>2</sup>

For more on social inclusion, download **Information Sheet 6: From Access to Inclusion**.



A joint initiative of  
BC Recreation and Parks  
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An initiative of these  
BC Healthy Living Alliance  
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## MORE THAN PROGRAMS

With the knowledge that recreation and physical activity can play a key role in preventing chronic disease and that community members do not all have equal chances to make healthy choices, inequities need to be addressed through a number of different approaches.

### 1. Policy

Local governments and organizations can adopt policies that recognize the determinants of health approach and the role that socially inclusive recreation and physical activity can play in the promotion of community health.

Some examples of health determinants that can be affected through public policy related to physical activity include, but are not limited to:

Health Determinant	Policy Area
Income and social status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guiding values of respect and dignity</li> <li>● Promoting an organizational culture of social inclusion</li> <li>● Affordable and free opportunities are available</li> </ul>
Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participation is possible without a demeaning application process</li> <li>● Opportunities are available within walking distance</li> <li>● Introductory opportunities are available to those unfamiliar with recreation and physical activity settings</li> </ul>
Education and literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information about opportunities is available in simple language</li> </ul>

### 2. Engagement

Developing a stronger connection with low-income community members and intentionally involving them in discussions, planning and evaluation of policies and initiatives can help:

- Create better policies, programs and services
- Build trust and a sense of belonging
- Build participation and citizenship

Engagement takes time but the process is rewarding as systemic barriers to participation can only be addressed by engaging in conversations and mutual learning with low-income community members. Start by:

- Looking beyond the walls of your facility and go to community members.
- Building trusting relationships by conversing and sharing information.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> Hayward, K. and Colman, R. 2003. The Tides of Change: Addressing Inequity and Chronic Disease in Atlantic Canada Discussion Paper. Health Canada: Population and Public Health Branch (Atlantic Region). [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/Publications/Tides\\_of\\_change/turning\\_tide-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/Publications/Tides_of_change/turning_tide-eng.php)
- <sup>2</sup> Health Canada, Atlantic Region, 2002. An Inclusion Lens: Workbook for Looking at Social and Economic Exclusion and Inclusion. (p.5 Figure 2)
- <sup>3</sup> Donnelly, P. and Coakley, J. 2002. The Role of Recreation in Promoting Social Inclusion. Laidlaw Foundation. [www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/page1436.cfm](http://www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/page1436.cfm)

### 3. Partnerships

Expanding existing partnerships and working with non-traditional partners is an important step to addressing inequities. Coordination across sectors results in:

- Comprehensive information about community services available to the public.
- Ability to reach community members who generally do not participate in mainstream physical activity or recreation opportunities.
- Opportunities to share resources or co-apply for funding.
- Demonstrating a broad-base of support to decision-makers.

### 4. Range of Opportunities

Programs and services are the tangibles that enable community members to improve their health, so a range of opportunities needs to be available. However, what works in one community may not be effective in another community. The only way to determine what is needed is to engage low-income community members. Some opportunities include:

- Leisure counseling
- Fee assistance
- Low cost options
- Free opportunities
- Skill building introductions
- Supportive built environments
- Involvement in activity planning

The benefits of recreation programs are maximized when they provide participants with:

- A safe environment (feeling physically and emotionally safe)
- Opportunities to develop and display competence (sense of personal value)
- Social networks (social connections)
- Moral and economic support (direct support and guidance)
- Autonomy and control during experiences (sense of control and decision-making)
- Hope for the future (envision possibilities for oneself) <sup>3</sup>

Many local government and not-for-profit recreation providers have taken a first step by offering financial assistance programs to reduce fees. However, it is evident that there are more barriers to participation, and therefore more barriers to health, than program affordability.

By adopting a social inclusion framework, recreation providers can develop a more comprehensive approach to reducing inequities and ensuring everyone in the community can experience the health and social benefits of physical activity.

