

Outdoor Play Canada



Outdoor Play Canada – What it is

Our Mission: Outdoor Play Canada (OPC) is a network of advocates, practitioners, researchers, and organizations working together to **promote, protect, and preserve access to play in nature and the outdoors for all people living in Canada**.

Our vision: *Outdoor play is a valued part of daily life for all people living in Canada*

OPC provides leadership to galvanize the outdoor play movement across Canada to promote the health and wellness of Canadians and the environments in which we live.

Outdoor Play Canada – A Brief History

In 2015, we asked:

- Have we, as a society, lost the appropriate balance between keeping children healthy and active and protecting them from serious harm?
- If we make too many rules about what they can and can't do, will we hinder their natural ability to develop and learn?
- If we make injury prevention the ultimate goal of outdoor play spaces, will they be any fun?
- Are children safer sitting on the couch instead of playing actively outside?

The Benefits of Outdoor Play

Children

move more,

sit less,

and play longer.



Kids learn to balance
risky play
and their own
safety.



Active lifestyle associated
with improved
blood pressure,
cardiorespiration,
and
musculoskeletal
fitness.

Increased
resilience,
self-regulation,
and skills for dealing with
stress.



Position



“Access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings – at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.”

- *Informed by 2 systematic reviews*
- *Interpreted by Canadian experts from 14 organizations and reviewed by >1,600 stakeholders.*
- *Research-grade report: www.mdpi.com/journal/ijerph.*
- *Public facing document: https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/portfolio_page/the-2015-position-statement-on-active-outdoor-play/*
- *To date, there are **393 supporters** of the Position Statement, including endorsement by the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health*

A child in a purple shirt and shorts is walking barefoot on a path made of old tires. The path is outdoors, and the background is a soft-focus green field. The text "Impact of the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play" is overlaid in white.

Impact of the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play

Legal Precedent

District of Saanich ruled not negligent in a case of a child getting hurt during a game of grounders, citing the Position Statement as social fact evidence

Municipal Policy

Peterborough & Region Public Health Policy Position: Outdoor gathering spaces must support healthy free play.

School Culture Shift

A principal in the Renfrew County Catholic Board of Education prioritized outdoor play and student engagement in her school

Mental Health Resource: ementalhealth.ca

“Nature and Why It’s Essential For Kids’ Brains: Information for Parents and Caregivers”: An overview of the importance of outdoor play, nature, and unstructured time

Charitable Sector Strategic Direction Shift

The Lawson Foundation invested \$2.7 million in 18 projects between 2013-2018 that support Canadian communities to increase children’s opportunities for outdoor play.

The Position Statement was a significant advancement in bringing the outdoor play sector together, providing direction and a common purpose.

However, in 2018 it was recognized that there was no central, authoritative voice to address issues that come up across Canada related to outdoor play.

Thus, in 2019, Outdoor Play Canada was launched.

Outdoor Play Canada:

Where We Are Now

OPC was launched on September 27, 2019 at the Breath of Fresh Air Outdoor Play Summit in Ottawa. In early 2020 we developed the following Strategic Priorities for our network:

- 1) Establish and operate OPC
- 2) Provide leadership and strategic direction for the Outdoor Play sector
- 3) Serve as a central portal of credible information on the Outdoor Play sector in Canada
- 4) Amplify efforts and successes related to Outdoor Play
- 5) Convene and facilitate collaborations among members of the Outdoor Play movement

Our Strategic Priorities (2020-2023)



1. Establish and Operate OPC

A first step in establishing OPC was to create our leadership group, consisting of the following individuals:



Mark Tremblay, PhD
Director, Healthy Active Living and Obesity
Research Group
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
Research Institute



Mariana Brussoni, PhD
Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics
and the School of Population and Public Health
The University of British Columbia



Frank Welsh, PhD
Director of Policy, Canadian Public Health
Association



Raktim Mitra, PhD
Associate Director and Associate Professor,
School of Urban and Regional Planning
Ryerson University



Heather Cowie
General Manager, Community and Protective
Services
City of Fort Saskatchewan

In an effort to provide leadership and strategic direction to the sector, we are working on the following two main efforts:

PLaTO-Net: Play, Learn and Teach Outdoors Network

- An international initiative by OPC
- A global network of thought-leaders interested in advancing research and practice related to outdoor play, and learning and teaching through outdoor play.
- PLaTO-Net members are working on projects to share evidence and resources, harmonize terminology, and collaborate on research and advocacy efforts.
- >300 members from >45 countries
- If interested, please join us!

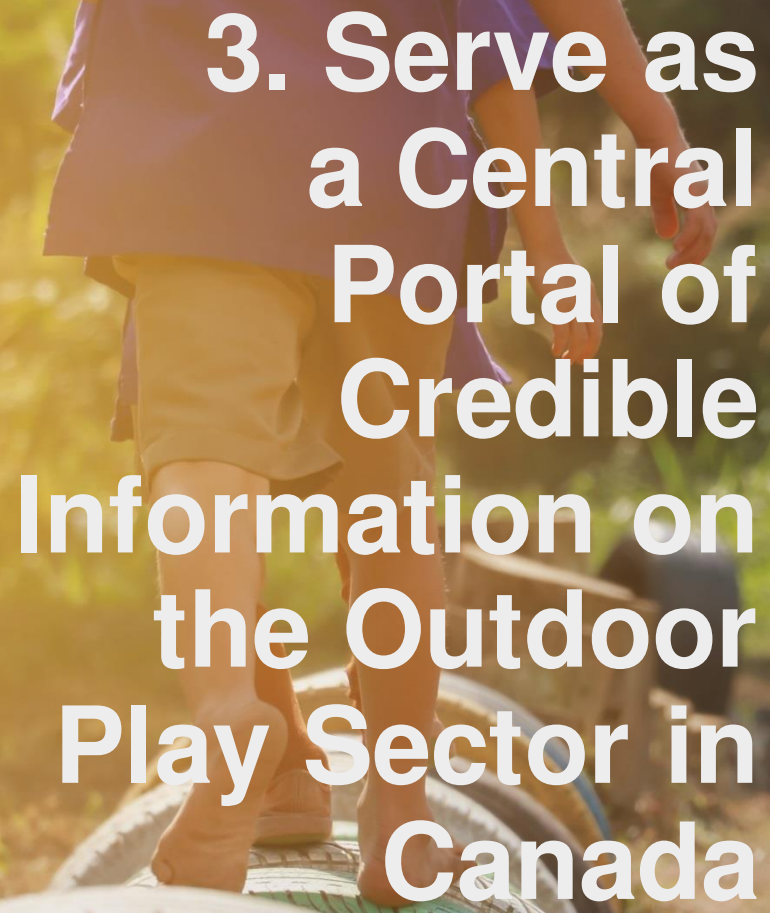
<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/plato-net/>

Five-Year State of the Sector Report

- An evaluation of where we have been since the publication of the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play five years ago, where we are now, and where we need to go from here in Canada to ensure that outdoor play is a valued part of daily life.



**2. Provide
Leadership &
Strategic
Direction for
the Outdoor
Play Sector**

A photograph of children's legs and feet as they walk on a series of stacked tires, which is part of an outdoor play structure. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

3. Serve as a Central Portal of Credible Information on the Outdoor Play Sector in Canada

In an effort to achieve this strategic priority, we regularly create blog posts relevant to the Outdoor Play sector, such as the following:

Statement on Outdoor Play during COVID-19: “Should I go outside in the COVID-19 era?”

In response to initial confusion around the safety of going outdoors during COVID-19, we outlined the following reasons why spending time outdoors can help cope with, contain, and combat COVID-19:

- Transmission is less likely outdoors
 - Outdoor physical activity makes our immune system more robust
 - Connecting to community makes isolation less isolating
 - Outdoor play is important for children’s ability to process what is happening right now
-
- To date there are 156 supporters of this page

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/should-i-go-outside-in-the-covid-19-era/>

3. Serve as a Central Portal of Credible Information on the Outdoor Play Sector in Canada

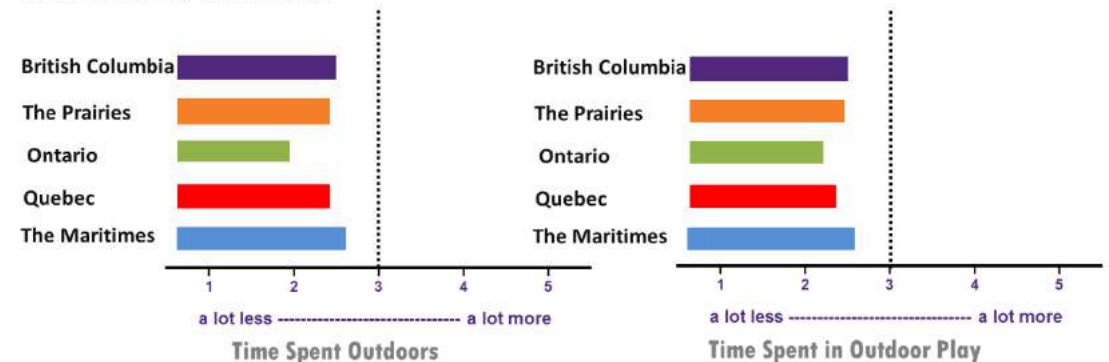
In addition, we conducted a national survey, in collaboration with ParticipACTION and researchers across Canada, examining the change in movement behaviours of children and youth as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. This led to 4 peer-reviewed publications and a press release highlighting the following:

In April, one month after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, **less than 3% of Canadian 5-17-year-olds were meeting the minimum recommendations in the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines** for physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep – in contrast to 15% before the health crisis.

All regions of Canada exhibited a decrease in time spent outdoors and in outdoor play.

Regional Differences in Time Spent Outdoors and in Outdoor Play

Adapted from de Lannoy et al; Under Review



<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/2020/07/08/national-survey-of-children-and-youth-shows-covid-19-restrictions-linked-with-adverse-behaviours/>

To work towards this Strategic Priority item, we regularly update and add the following to our website and Twitter feed:

- Blog posts
 - Research summaries written by us or invited researchers in the field
 - Position statements
 - Opinion pieces
 - News articles
 - Webinar and podcast summaries
- Resource Items
 - Tools to support outdoor play
 - Infographics
 - Workbooks
 - Play Charters
 - Links to resources by others
- Event Calendar
 - Celebration Days
 - Online webinars, events
- Bi-monthly Newsletter (launched July 2020)
 - Highlight updates, campaigns, efforts from our members
- >40,000 website visits since outdoorplaycanada.ca was launched*
 - >50% of OPC members frequently visit outdoorplaycanada.ca for news and resources

*Updated on December 7, 2020

4. Amplify Efforts and Successes Related to Outdoor Play



A child in a purple shirt and tan shorts is walking barefoot on a path made of old tires. The path is outdoors, and the background is a soft-focus green landscape. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

5. Convene and facilitate collaborations among members of the Outdoor Play Movement

To achieve this strategic priority item, we are working to build a sense of community recognized by OPC members and the broader sector.

- Since the start of the year, we have built new connections between OPC and other organizations within the following sectors:
 - Not for profit
 - Education
 - Research
 - Industry
 - Government
- We welcome and encourage anyone within or affiliated with the Outdoor Play sector to reach out to us with ideas and resources for research, blog posts, articles, webinar opportunities, to support our collective effort in making *outdoor play a valued part of daily life for all people.*



Join us!

Join the movement, become a member!

>95% of members report being satisfied with their membership!

Benefits include:

- Professional identity, cohesion, and engagement
 - Membership certificate
 - Networking opportunities
- Professional development opportunities
 - Reduced registration fees for conferences, training
- Stay informed
 - Communication of important events, training
 - Notice of the latest research and ideas in outdoor play
- Recognition opportunities
 - Privilege of nominating candidates for OPC awards
 - Invitation for one representative to attend OPC annual general meeting for organizational members

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/#join-us>

