



# Outdoor Play in Canada

## 2021 State of the Sector Report



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# Executive Summary

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. OPC aims to develop, foster and support the Canadian outdoor play community by providing leadership and strategic direction, serving as a central portal of credible information, amplifying efforts and successes and convening and facilitating collaborations.

The Outdoor Play Working Group (an early iteration of the OPC Leadership Group), along with diverse partners, was responsible for the development and release of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*<sup>1</sup> in 2015. This statement and the systematic reviews that informed it<sup>2,3</sup> highlighted the unequivocal benefits of outdoor play for children's growth and development – mentally, physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially. The Position Statement served as a galvanizing force, bringing together previously disconnected groups that each shared a passion for outdoor play. It led The Lawson Foundation to shift their strategic priorities towards outdoor play, committing ~\$4.5 million over five years to 18 projects that support Canadian communities in increasing children's opportunities for outdoor play.<sup>4</sup> It informed a British Columbia Supreme Court decision related to a playground injury lawsuit.<sup>5</sup> It spawned many research projects, play programs and interventions<sup>6</sup> both in Canada and internationally, and led to the official launch of OPC in 2019.

*The Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*<sup>1</sup> was a significant advancement in bringing the sector together, providing direction and a common purpose: the promotion of healthy growth and development of children in harmony with the outdoor environment. The purpose of OPC's *Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report* is to continue the trajectory initiated six years ago and to propel the sector forward.

This *State of the Sector Report* serves as a chronology of what has happened within the outdoor play sector since the publication of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play* in 2015; it also provides an account of where we are now, and a map of where we need to go from here. Its message is disseminated in various forms and formats, including a full-length research report, a public-facing strategic directions summary, an online library, a social media strategy, a succinct whiteboard video, and a more detailed slide deck and summary webinar. All components are available in English and French.

As part of the process of identifying our future direction, OPC hosted a series of online consultation meetings from October 2020 to April 2021 with 63 individuals across Canada from government, policy, education, research, and not-for-profit and for-profit organizations. Participants identified what they believed were the major priorities for the sector and what actions needed to be taken to move these priorities forward. Common priorities and actions were identified, refined and voted on. We then reached out to our wider networks for input on these priorities and actions, to ensure that this Report truly represented the sector. In total, 302 stakeholders provided input.

Through this process, we identified nine central priorities for the outdoor play sector, with several action items for each priority. Those priorities are as follows (not in order of importance; for detailed information about the rationale for and action items of each priority, please see the main body of this *State of the Sector Report*):

- **Promote the Health, Wellbeing and Developmental Benefits of Outdoor Play**
- **Promote, Protect, Preserve and Invest in Outdoor Play Environments**
- **Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Outdoor Play**
- **Ensure that Outdoor Play Initiatives are Land-Based and Represent the Diverse Cultures, Languages and Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples of North America**
- **Research and Support Data Collection on Outdoor Play**
- **Reframe Views on Safety and Outdoor Play**
- **Leverage Engagement Opportunities with the Outdoors During and After COVID-19**
- **Increase and Improve Professional Development Opportunities in Outdoor Play**
- **Expand and Enable Cross-Sectoral Connections/Collaborations**

We hope that this *State of the Sector Report* and the above priorities will serve to unify the many diverse, yet related, outdoor play-oriented groups in Canada, create a sense of community, and provide a common vision for the sector to thrive and succeed over the next five years. In doing so, we hope that the Report will help to guide our collective effort to promote, protect and preserve outdoor play in nature and the outdoors for all people living in Canada, now and for generations to come.



# Purpose

The purpose of the *Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report* is to serve as a chronology of where the outdoor play sector has been over the past six years, provide an account of where we are now, and strategize our future direction over the next five years. This *State of the Sector Report* aims to rejuvenate, amplify, power, guide and direct the movement to encourage all people living in Canada to get outside – and encourage them to play, learn, teach, grow and develop as healthy, caring and environmentally attentive stewards of each other, the Land\*, water, plants and animals.

# Process

The development, release and promotion of the *Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report* included securing funding; conducting a scoping review and environmental scan; developing an online library of outdoor play programs, projects and services; establishing a national, cross-sectoral Consultation Group and a robust consultation process; distributing, analyzing and summarizing the results from a Stakeholder Survey of outdoor play priorities and actions; writing the report; implementing a knowledge translation and dissemination strategy, including the production of a public-facing summary, a succinct whiteboard video and a more detailed slide deck and webinar; translating all items into French; posting all materials on the OPC website and social media outlets (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook); and releasing the *State of the Sector Report* at the 2021 Breath of Fresh Air Outdoor Play Summit, with intentional discussion of how the identified priorities and actions may serve as a common vision for the sector.

This project was initiated by OPC, a network that resides within Dr. Mark Tremblay's research group at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute. OPC is led by a Leadership Group consisting of the following individuals: Dr. Mark Tremblay (OPC Chair, CHEO Research Institute), Dr. Mariana Brussoni (University of British Columbia), Heather Cowie (City of Fort Saskatchewan), Dr. Raktim Mitra (Ryerson University) and Dr. Frank Welsh (Canadian Public Health Association). Daily operations are managed by Dr. Louise de Lannoy (Outdoor Play Canada), Research Manager, and Lindsay MacDonald (Outdoor Play Canada), Research Assistant.

## Funding and In-Kind Support

Funding for the *State of the Sector Report* was secured through a grant from an anonymous donor and The Lawson Foundation. Funding for the French translation of the Report and related materials was provided by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connection Grant (#611-2020-0292), with matching funds provided from the above two grants, as well as through in-kind support from the OPC Leadership Group. Translation of all materials on the OPC site and of the *State of the Sector Report* was provided by Maryse Froment-Lebeau and Christine

\* Land is capitalized throughout this Report to acknowledge its importance and that it includes peoples, cultures, languages and knowledge. [55]

Laplante with input from Sylvie Melsbach (Soutien au partenariat et aux aires de jeu Regroupement des centres de la petite enfance Montérégie; Quebec Institute for Safety in Playgrounds). The OPC Leadership Group and all other participating individuals and organizations provided in-kind support for the overall development, dissemination and promotion of the *State of the Sector Report*.

## State of the Sector Consultation Process

A 15-person Consultation Group – comprised of representatives from education, policy, government, research, philanthropy, and not-for-profit and for-profit organizations – was initially convened in October 2020. This group met twice in the fall of 2020 to provide initial feedback and input on the parameters of the Report, as well as to identify individuals and organizations who should be invited to participate in a larger multi-sectoral Consultation Group. This larger 63-person group, which included the original 15 people that convened in October 2020, met virtually four times for a total of six hours over Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc, San Jose, California) between January and April 2021 to identify, refine and vote on what they felt the main priorities and actions should be for the outdoor play sector over the next five years. The Consultation Group was also invited to contribute to an online document of projects, programs and services related to outdoor play in Canada, which was subsequently added to the OPC website as part of the *State of the Sector Report* Online Library. Note-takers and discussion facilitators guided and recorded discussions. The members of the Consultation Group (including the facilitators and note-takers) and their home organizations are presented in Table 1.

Prior to the first meeting in January 2021, Consultation Group members were each asked to identify three priorities for the outdoor play sector, which were then presented at one of four break-out groups in the meeting (the composition of the four groups was selected randomly by Zoom), with one note-taker and one facilitator assigned to each group. After the January meeting, the most common priorities (those identified by five or more different participants) were consolidated as a working list of top priorities and shared with the Consultation Group.

At the second meeting, in February 2021, Consultation Group members were organized into four break-out groups according to sector affiliation: Community and Community Outreach (17), Education (18), Policy and Government (13), and Research (15). At this meeting, participants were asked to review the top priorities, identify those most relevant to their sector, and provide suggestions and edits to, as well as action items for, those priorities. At the third meeting, in March 2021, participants were again organized into break-out groups according to sector and were asked to review changes to the priorities and actions since the previous meeting and to vote on which of the suggested priorities and actions should be included in the final list. However, some Consultation Group members were not in attendance at that March 2021 meeting, and therefore did not have the opportunity to review and vote on the priorities and actions. Therefore, ahead of the final meeting in April 2021, an online survey was distributed to all Consultation Group members, asking respondents for their anonymous input on their level of agreement with each priority; respondents were also given an opportunity to provide feedback on each of the priorities.

The results of that survey then guided the April 2021 meeting, in which the Consultation Group met as one full group, reviewed the results and feedback, and provided final input on the priorities and actions. Priorities were included as the final working list of priorities for this Report if >75% agreement (defined *a priori*) had been achieved in the survey. We did not achieve consensus on the wording of one priority related to liability and safety in outdoor play; therefore, two options were provided in the Stakeholder Survey, distributed in May 2021 (see detailed discussion of the Stakeholder Survey below), and respondents were asked to either select their preferred wording

or offer up another suggestion. We again did not achieve consensus on the wording of this priority through the Stakeholder Survey and so returned to the Consultation Group in June 2021 with four suggestions (two had been originally suggested in the Stakeholder Survey, and two were suggested by survey respondents). The final wording for this priority was determined following this final poll with the Consultation Group.

## Stakeholder Survey

Following the final Consultation Group meeting in April 2021, an online Stakeholder Survey was developed, in both English and French, to solicit review and comment from the larger outdoor play network on the nine outdoor play priorities and associated actions. (Appendix A contains the complete English and French versions of this survey.) French translations were verified by Consultation Group member Dr. Richard Larouche (University of Lethbridge). The CHEO Research Ethics Board reviewed and approved the administration of the survey and the use of a passive consent process.

The survey was disseminated through the larger outdoor play network including the various networks of the Consultation Group and followed a snowball sampling methodology (recognizing the inherent risk of bias) to maximize reach and input. It was live from May 14–27, 2021. Survey participants were asked for basic demographic information, but their survey responses were anonymous. Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement with each priority and action item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” There was one exception to this question format: Since the Consultation Group had not yet reached consensus on the wording of the priority related to liability and safety in outdoor play, we asked respondents to indicate their preference for either of two suggested priority titles, or to offer up another suggestion. Additionally, participants could provide open-ended comments on any of the priorities and actions. We asked respondents if they wished to publicly disclose their support for the final *State of the Sector Report*, pending their review of the final draft. To facilitate this, interested respondents were asked to provide an email address where the final draft of the *State of the Sector Report* could be sent. Respondents then had the opportunity to review the *State of the Sector Report* and, if they desired, give their permission to publicly display their support/endorsement. The names of supporters are listed on the OPC website.

After the survey closed, responses were tabulated and analyzed, and written comments were consolidated into themes. Any additional actions that had been suggested by survey participants were either integrated into existing actions if there was overlap or added as new actions if they had been suggested by more than one respondent (e.g., five respondents recommended an action be added on outdoor play and ecological preservation, and so this was combined into one new action). The OPC Leadership Group reviewed the summarized survey results as well as the changes to the action items and provided input on the final nine priorities and actions for inclusion in the *State of the Sector Report*. The revised priorities and actions were circulated to the Consultation Group for final comment before being translated into French.

## Environmental Scans and Scoping Review

An environmental scan was conducted from October 2020 to March 2021 to identify Canadian outdoor play-related programs, services and activities that have emerged since the publication of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. Items were identified through social media postings (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) and the OPC Leadership Group network, as well as through direct input from members of the Consultation Group.

Efforts were made to identify any items that referenced the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. All relevant items were uploaded to the OPC website.

A second environmental scan was conducted from March to May 2021 to identify reports in the scientific and grey literature of Canadian programs, services and activities aimed at supporting children's and youth's outdoor play during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was distributed to the program, service and activity providers that were identified in this scan, as well as to the OPC network, to identify the successes and challenges they had seen in supporting children and youth in getting outdoors and into play during the COVID-19 pandemic. The list of items found in this environmental scan is available in Appendix B. For more detail on the findings of this scan, see 'Outdoor Play Sector Response to COVID-19', below.

A scoping review of existing scholarly literature was conducted from March to May 2021 to quantify the volume of Canadian research conducted on outdoor play, including adult outdoor recreation and leisure, since the publication of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play* in 2015, and identify themes within this existing literature. The list of publications included in the scoping review is available in Appendix C. For more detail on the findings of this review, see 'Scoping Review of Outdoor Play in Canada: 2015-2021', below.

## Full Report

A final draft of the *State of the Sector Report* was circulated for review to the Consultation Group, survey respondents who expressed interest in providing public endorsement, and 12 key international outdoor play colleagues (Table 2), as well as to The Lawson Foundation and the anonymous donor who provided funding for the *State of the Sector Report*.

## Knowledge Translation and Dissemination

A comprehensive knowledge translation and dissemination plan was developed to maximize the impact and reach of the *State of the Sector Report*. This communications plan was led by OPC in association with Fuse Consulting (Calgary, Alberta) and Dr. Sarah Moore (Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia). A public launch date of October 6, 2021, was established, preceded by a national press release and social media toolkit (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) distributed to those involved in the development of the *State of the Sector Report* with key messages to customize and use to spread awareness of the national release in a coordinated fashion. Public-facing documents were released in October both on the OPC website and through social media outlets, including social media graphics, building up to the official release of the full *State of the Sector Report* and affiliated whiteboard video, public-facing summary, in-depth webinar and slide deck, at the 2021 Breath of Fresh Air Outdoor Play Summit on October 6-7, 2021.

## Evaluation

Evaluation measures of the *State of the Sector Report* (e.g., satisfaction, utilization, impact, media uptake) will include surveys of the Consultation Group and OPC members, as well as website analytics, media coverage summaries and impact assessment analyses in the six months following the release of the Report.



Table 1. Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report Consultation Group

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation/Home Organization</b>	<b>Sector</b>
Cindy Andrew	Healthy Schools Consultant	Education, Healthy Communities
Mike Arthur	Government of Nova Scotia (retired)	Policy and Planning
Micki Bry	Peel-Halton Nature Collaborative EarlyON	Community Support/Engagement, Education
Hilary Caldwell	Dalhousie University	Public Health, Research
Lynn Campanella	Playocracy Incorporated	Community Engagement, Education–Early Years and Elementary, Industry
Dawn Carr	Canadian Parks Council	Environment (Parks and Protected Areas), Government, Policy
David Chorney	University of Alberta	Post-secondary and Teacher Education, Research
Cameron Collyer	Evergreen	Not-for-Profit
Bekah Craik	West Hants Regional Municipality	Government
Beverlie Dietze	Okanagan College	Education
Enid Elliot	Camosun College	Education
Petra Eperjesi	Child and Nature Alliance of Canada	Education, Not-for-Profit
Margaret Fraser	Le lion et la souris (The Lion and The Mouse)	Advocacy, Community-based Practice, Not-for-Profit
Amanda Froehlich Chow	University of Saskatchewan	Public Health, Research
Katherine Frohlich	Université de Montréal Centre de Recherche en Santé Publique	Research
Josh Fullan	Maximum City	Education, Engagement, Research
Katrina Galas	In Common Consulting	Industry
Paula Gallo	Recreate Place (Consulting)	Child-Friendly Participatory Approaches for Communities, Education
Casey Gray	Public Health Agency of Canada	Research
Jillian Griffin	Communities, Culture and Heritage; Province of Nova Scotia	Government
Tanya Halsall	The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research University of Ottawa	Research
Susan Herrington	University of British Columbia	Research
Laura Hilliard	Earthscape Play	Industry
Kim Hiscott	Andrew Fleck Children's Services	Direct Service Delivery, Not-for-Profit

Charles Hopkins	York University United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	Education, Research
Ian Janssen	Queen's University	Research
Ness Kenalty	The Walton's Trust	Early Childhood Education, Philanthropy
Katalin Koller	Three Nations Education Group Inc.	Education, First Nations Community Development, Research
James Lamouche	Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre	Innovation and Research
Richard Larouche	University of Lethbridge	Education, Research
Ellen Long	Physical and Health Education Canada	Education, Not-for-Profit
Laura Beth MacPherson	Nova Scotia Department of Justice (formerly Sport and Recreation Division)	Government, Policy
Sylvie Melsbach	Soutien au partenariat et aux aires de jeu Regroupement des centres de la petite enfance Montérégie (RCPEM) Quebec Institute for Safety in Playgrounds (IQSAJ)	Education, Not-for-Profit
Sarah Moore	Dalhousie University	Education, Research
Linda Naccarato	Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL)	Education
Lily Patzer	Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia	First Nations Education
Michelle Perry	Healthy Transportation Coalition	Healthy Transportation, Municipal Advocacy
William Pickett	Brock University	Research
Nancy Pynch-Worthylake	Canadian School Boards Association	Education
Shelagh Pyper	Fuse Consulting Ltd.	Public Education, Schools, Science Communication
Andrea Redmond	Communities, Culture and Heritage; Province of Nova Scotia	Government
Hailey Renaud	Sea Smart School Society	Education, Not-for-Profit
Rob Ridley	Peel District School Board	Education
Stephen D. Ritchie	Laurentian University Canadian Outdoor Summit	Education, Research
Stephanie Rivera	Ecosource/The Peel-Halton Nature Collaborative	Education, Not-for-Profit
Alison Ronson	Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)	Environment
Lynn Short	Humber College	Education, Research

Alex Smith	International Play Association – Canada PlayGroundology	Education, Not-for-Profit, Research
Valerie Smith	Parachute Canada	Not-for-Profit
Stephanie Spilchak	Elk Island Catholic Schools	Education
Paul St. Arnaud	International Play Association – Canada ProjectsWork Formerly with Municipal Government	Child Friendly Cities, Not-for-Profit, Parks, Recreation & Culture (Municipalities), Play Advocacy, Urban & Rural Parks and Recreation Planning
Daniel Stevens	Dalhousie University	Research
Sue Stevenson	Canadian School Boards Association	Comprehensive School Health, Education
Kelly Stone	Families Canada	Family Support, Not-for-Profit
Michelle Stone	Dalhousie University	Education, Research
Son Truong	Dalhousie University Western Sydney University	Research, Teacher Education and Early Childhood Education
Trish Tucker	University of Western Ontario	Education, Research
Leigh Vanderloo	ParticipACTION	Health, Not-for-Profit, Research, Social Marketing
Jill White	Waterplay Solutions Corporation	Industry
Heather Wilson	Child and Nature Alliance of Canada	Education, Not-for-Profit
Trevor Zahara	Peak Play Consulting Corporation	Play Environment Design Consultancy, Playground Safety, Risky Play Advocate
Megan Zeni	British Columbia Public School System Room to Play University of British Columbia	Education, Research
Louise Zimanyi	Humber College	Education, Research
<b>Facilitators</b>		
Mariana Brussoni*	University of British Columbia British Columbia Children’s Hospital Research Institute Outdoor Play Canada	Research
Heather Cowie*	City of Fort Saskatchewan Outdoor Play Canada	Community Development, Government
Louise de Lannoy	Outdoor Play Canada CHEO Research Institute	Not-for-Profit, Research
Raktim Mitra*	Ryerson University Outdoor Play Canada	Research, Urban and Regional Planning

Mark Tremblay*	CHEO Research Institute Outdoor Play Canada	Health, Not-for-Profit, Research
Frank Welsh*	Canadian Public Health Association Outdoor Play Canada	Not-for-Profit, Policy Development
<b>Note-Takers</b>		
Breann Corcoran	University of British Columbia	Health, Research
Emily Gemmell	University of British Columbia	Health, Research
Ali Kabir	CHEO Research Institute University of Ottawa	Health, Research
Negin Riazi	Brock University	Health, Research
Nicholas Seguin	CHEO Research Institute University of Ottawa	Health, Research

\*All asterisked names are members of the OPC Leadership Group.

Table 2. Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report International Reviewers

Name	Affiliation/Home Organization	Country
Salomé Aubert	Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance France	France, Canada
Peter Bentsen	Bispebjerg and Frederiksberg Hospital	Denmark
Maria Isabel Amando de Barros	Instituto Alana	Brazil
Tim Gill	Rethinking Childhood	United Kingdom
Susanna Ho	Singapore University of Social Sciences	Singapore
Taru Manyanga	University of Northern British Columbia	Zimbabwe, Canada
Shawnda Morrison	University of Primorska	Slovenia
Laerke Mygind Grønfeldt	Deakin University	Australia, Denmark
Ylva Jannok Nutti	Sámi University of Applied Sciences	Norway
Alessandra Pioreschi	University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa
Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter	Queen Maud University College	Norway
Po-Yu (Eric) Wang	National Taiwan University of Sport	Taiwan

# Where We Have Been – A Timeline of Outdoor Play in Canada

On December 13, 1991, Canada ratified Article 31 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>7</sup> officially recognizing ‘the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child’ and acknowledging Canada’s responsibility to provide children with ‘appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity.’ Two decades later, the *Active Healthy Kids Canada 2011 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* added ‘nature and the outdoors’ as a physical activity indicator,<sup>8</sup> highlighting the emerging evidence and the need for Canada-specific data on the importance of outdoor physical activity for children and youth’s health and wellbeing. A year later, active play was the focus of the 2012 Report Card,<sup>9</sup> recognizing it as an important contributor to overall physical activity levels of children and youth. That same report expressed concern over a decline in active play, which it attributed in part to reports of children and youth spending less time playing outdoors after school. This concern over declining opportunities for outdoor play was echoed at a global level when the UN published a six-part document (General Comment No. 17<sup>10</sup>) in 2013 as an addendum to Article 31 on the Rights of the Child<sup>7</sup> and the need for governments to respect this right.

In response to the above observations and growing concerns, an outdoor play movement began to take shape in Canada. In 2013, an Active Play Action Group was formed at a national roundtable meeting in New Brunswick.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, risky play was discussed at the Canadian Injury Prevention & Safety Promotion Conference in Montreal and a follow-up manuscript was published,<sup>12</sup> calling on the injury prevention field to recognize risky play as distinct from hazardous play, and essential to healthy child development. In 2014, the Canadian Parks Council released their report *Connecting Canadians with Nature*,<sup>13</sup> in which they recognized outdoor play as important not just for children’s health and wellbeing, but also for promoting a connection to nature and fostering the next generation of environmental stewards. This was later supported by the *Framework for Recreation in Canada: Pathways to Wellbeing*,<sup>14</sup> which in turn gained endorsement from Provincial and Territorial Ministers.<sup>15</sup>

At around the same time, in the spring of 2014, two systematic reviews<sup>2,3</sup> were initiated to gather evidence on the importance of active outdoor play for children’s health. Several months later, the Outdoor Play Working Group was formed to create the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*,<sup>1</sup> which was officially released in June 2015, and was featured as the main story in the 2015 *ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*<sup>16</sup> (formerly the *Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*).

*The Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play* served as a major galvanizing force in the emerging outdoor play sector in Canada. Shortly after its publication, it was used to inform a British Columbia Supreme Court decision against a playground injury lawsuit.<sup>5</sup> It also led The Lawson Foundation to shift their strategic priorities towards outdoor play, committing ~\$4.5 million over five years to 18 projects that support Canadian communities in increasing children’s opportunities for outdoor play.<sup>4</sup> The Lawson Foundation hosted the Outdoor Play and Early

Learning Policy Research Symposium<sup>17</sup> in October 2018 to discuss strategies for advancing outdoor play across policy, practice and research, acknowledging the cross-sectoral nature of outdoor play and the need to bring different voices together. The Position Statement also helped inform a new report on *Obesity in Canada* (led by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology<sup>18</sup>), which was endorsed by the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health in their own statement on outdoor play,<sup>19</sup> and spawned many research projects and outdoor play programs and interventions, both in Canada and internationally.<sup>6</sup>

To maintain this impactful trajectory, the Outdoor Play Working Group continued to meet after the release of the Position Statement, working to identify stakeholder gaps and dissemination strategies, and collaborating with other organizations to keep outdoor play front of mind. They contributed to the development of the *Parks for All Action Plan*,<sup>20</sup> a collaboration between the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and the Canadian Parks Council (CPC), in which the Working Group ensured that outdoor play was highlighted as integral to fostering children's connection with nature, and was embedded into the strategic action items of this work.

With funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Working Group began to develop an Outdoor Play Strategic Impact Plan, which eventually led to the formation of OPC, an expanding network of multi-sectoral leaders working together to grow the outdoor play movement in Canada. The Working Group and the larger outdoor play network began contributing to outdoor play-oriented conferences, including the first-ever Canadian Parks Conference,<sup>21</sup> the Child and Nature Network International Conference,<sup>22</sup> the Children's Health and the Environment Workshop<sup>23</sup> and the International Play Association Triennial World Conference,<sup>24</sup> all of which were hosted in Canada in 2017. The outdoor play network also began contributing to new initiatives, both in Canada and internationally, to bring people of all ages into nature.<sup>15,25-28</sup>

Despite this growing enthusiasm and engagement, the participants at an outdoor play roundtable meeting in Vancouver in 2018 recognized that Canada lacked a central, authoritative voice to address emerging issues related to outdoor play. Thus, in 2019, at the first Breath of Fresh Air Outdoor Play Summit,<sup>29</sup> OPC was officially launched.<sup>30</sup> At that same meeting, the first biennial OPC awards were established and awarded,<sup>31</sup> recognizing exceptional commitment and leadership in the promotion of outdoor play in Canada.

## Where We Are Now

OPC was officially launched in 2019 at the first Breath of Fresh Air Outdoor Play Summit,<sup>29</sup> to serve as a central authoritative voice on outdoor play in Canada. At that summit we clarified our vision – outdoor play is a valued part of daily life for all people living in Canada – and mission:

*Outdoor Play Canada 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. Outdoor Play Canada 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.*

In 2020, The Lawson Foundation announced Phase Two of their Outdoor Play Strategy, and their plan to fund eight projects focused on building capacity to implement and support outdoor play in early childhood.<sup>32</sup> OPC was a successful applicant, along with projects focused on post-secondary and continuing education on Land-based and outdoor-focused early childhood education, parent- and child-focused interventions to promote time spent in quality outdoor play, as well as a pilot program surrounding the licensing of Forest and Nature Schools.<sup>32</sup> As part of the process of developing our application for Phase Two of the Foundation's Outdoor Play Strategy, we underwent a rigorous strategic priorities process, and identified the following priorities for OPC: 1) provide leadership and strategic direction for the outdoor play sector; 2) serve as a central portal of credible information on the outdoor play sector in Canada; 3) amplify efforts and successes related to outdoor play; and 4) convene and facilitate collaborations among members of the outdoor play movement.

Through this process, we identified several initiatives that OPC was well-positioned to lead and would help us meet our defined priorities. These initiatives included the development of the Play Learn and Teach Outdoors Network (PLaTO-Net),<sup>33</sup> a source of leadership and direction within the outdoor play research and practice fields; the creation of the OPC website ([www.outdoorplaycanada.ca](http://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca)), a central portal of information and connection; and the *Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report*, a vital contribution to all of the above priorities and a guiding body of work that will allow OPC and the larger outdoor play sector in Canada to thrive and succeed over the next five years.

## Online Library of Outdoor Play Projects, Programs, Services and Initiatives in Canada: 2015–present

With funding secured for OPC, we began developing the *Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report*. Early on in our brainstorming, we recognized the need to create a library of outdoor play projects, programs, services and initiatives in Canada. This would serve to amplify the efforts of the outdoor play sector in Canada and would help establish a centralized portal of information. We began collecting and documenting Canadian outdoor play-related programs, projects, services, research and activities that have emerged in Canada since the publication of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. We identified items informally through our social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) and through the networks of the OPC Leadership Group. As part of the State of the Sector Consultation Process, we invited our Consultation Group to send us information about outdoor play initiatives (see 'Process,' above). All their suggested items were added to our online living library on the OPC website.

Collectively, we identified 364 items related to outdoor play in Canada. These items are included within our *State of the Sector Report* Online Library. All items were categorized according to the nine main priorities for the outdoor play sector (many of the items applied to multiple priorities and were categorized as such). The number of items included within each category is shown in Table 3. In addition, we identified 26 items that specifically referenced the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*.

Table 3. Categories within the OPC Online Library and the Number of Items Included Within Each Category (as of June 30, 2021)

Online Library Categories (Central priorities as identified by the <i>State of the Sector Report</i> )	Number of Items Included Within Each Category
Promote the Health, Wellbeing and Developmental Benefits of Outdoor Play	191
Promote, Protect, Preserve and Invest in Outdoor Play Environments	108
Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Outdoor Play	61
Ensure that Outdoor Play Initiatives are Land-Based and Represent the Diverse Cultures, Languages and Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples of North America	16
Research and Support Data Collection on Outdoor Play	68
Reframe Views on Safety and Outdoor Play	35
Leverage Engagement Opportunities with the Outdoors During and After COVID-19	107
Increase and Improve Professional Development Opportunities in Outdoor Play	161
Expand and Enable Cross-Sectoral Connections/Collaborations	44

By far the most populated priority in our online library is the one promoting the health, wellbeing and developmental benefits of outdoor play; the smallest section is the one ensuring that outdoor play initiatives are Land-based and represent the diverse cultures, languages and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples of North America. This indicates both the sector-wide recognition of the benefits of outdoor play, and highlights where more effort is required. This online library is intended to be a living resource, and we plan to continually add items as we learn about them. We acknowledge that there are items we may not have included and invite the outdoor play sector to share their efforts with us, so that we may update this library and continue our effort to serve as a central portal of information on outdoor play in Canada, avoid duplication of efforts, and help groups with similar interests to connect.

## Outdoor Play Sector Response to COVID-19

When we started planning this Report in earnest in August 2020, Canada was six months into the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey on change in the movement behaviours of children and youth in Canada during the pandemic, conducted by the CHEO Research Institute in collaboration with ParticipACTION and several universities across Canada, showed that in the early months of the pandemic, time spent outdoors and in outdoor play had decreased among children and youth across all regions in Canada, and that these decreases corresponded with public health restrictions placed on access to outdoor spaces.<sup>34</sup> Follow-up studies from the same group showed that this trend continued, despite a general loosening of restrictions on access to outdoor spaces across the country.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, heavy restrictions and long-term closure of indoor spaces such as restaurants and gyms meant that Canadians of all ages were turning to the outdoors as a source of stress relief, a safe place to gather (in small groups) and to get active, and more generally as ‘something to do.’<sup>36</sup> It was clear that the pandemic was having a lasting impact on outdoor play.



Simultaneously, real efforts were being made at both grassroots and organizational levels<sup>37-40</sup> to make outdoor play available in communities, given the myriad health benefits of being outdoors<sup>1</sup> as well as the lower risk of viral transmission outdoors compared with indoors.<sup>41</sup> Some programs began exploring how to bring their traditionally indoor activities outside, as these efforts allowed them to continue their operations while adhering to public health restrictions.<sup>42</sup> To better understand the nature and extent of these adaptations, we conducted an environmental scan of Canadian outdoor programs, projects, services and activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>42</sup> We identified 79 initiatives from across the country and distributed a survey seeking input from outdoor play providers on their experiences adapting during the pandemic, challenges they faced, and best practices they had realized. Briefly, we found that most initiatives were national in scope, were aimed for the most part at supporting parents in getting children and youth outdoors, and were largely recreation- and health-oriented, and that the most common form of adaptation was in moving or compiling material online. What we heard from outdoor play providers was that there were major challenges in adapting to COVID-19 restrictions and the new and ever-changing safety protocols, but also that outdoor programming was naturally suited to minimizing health risk and adhering to those protocols. More importantly, the greatest learning echoed by outdoor play providers was that children and youth thrive when outdoors, which is an important message as we look to support children and youth in recovery from the current pandemic, and as we develop preparedness plans in the face of future health challenges. The full list of outdoor play programs, projects and activities found in this environmental scan is available in Appendix B.

## Scoping Review of Outdoor Play in Canada: 2015-2021

To continue our efforts to identify resources and amplify the outdoor play sector in Canada, we also endeavoured to assess the state of scholarly outdoor play publications that had been written by Canadian authors since the publication of our Position Statement in 2015. When that Position Statement<sup>1</sup> was published, it was informed by two systematic reviews<sup>2,3</sup> that collectively identified 49 publications related to outdoor play, not exclusive to Canadian authors. This was a large increase since the 2011 *Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*,<sup>8</sup> which cited just one publication related to nature, the outdoors and health (written by a group from the United Kingdom).<sup>43</sup>

The Position Statement served as a galvanizing force, leading to the publication of numerous studies both in Canada and internationally, and we aimed to quantify exactly how robust this research area had become. Accordingly, we conducted a scoping review of outdoor play-related research published by Canadian authors between the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2021. To be included, studies could be of any age group but had to be written in English or French. We identified a total of 418 publications related to outdoor play in Canada; this is a staggering increase in publications since the release of the Position Statement in 2015.

While a review of these publications is beyond the scope of this Report, we are in the process of identifying common themes across identified publications and will publish our findings as a research-grade report in the months following the release of the *State of the Sector Report*. Specific efforts will be made to highlight publications that cite the Position Statement, to measure its impact on the outdoor play research sector in Canada. The full list of publications included in this scoping review is available in Appendix C.

# Where We Need to Go From Here

A central goal of this Report was to develop a common vision that would allow the outdoor play sector to thrive and succeed over the next five years, and to develop priorities for action. The following are the priorities, and actions to implement those priorities, identified for the outdoor play sector in Canada, as determined with input from more than 300 stakeholders (Consultation Group, Leadership Group and survey respondents). When implementing these actions, stakeholders may benefit from accessing the Online Library of Outdoor Play Projects, Programs, Services and Initiatives in Canada for background research and/or support. Note that these priorities are not listed in rank order, given the diversity of interests and sectors these priorities encompass.

## Priorities and Actions for the Outdoor Play Sector in Canada



### Promote the Health, Wellbeing and Developmental Benefits of Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is important for the physical, mental, emotional and social development of children, and the health and wellbeing of people of all ages. Outdoor play may also help children deal with climate change-related anxiety.<sup>44</sup> This priority is intended to recognize all of these benefits, with specific actions suggested for how this information may be promoted across sectors. Inclusion of this priority is in direct agreement with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #3: Good Health and Well-Being,<sup>45</sup> as well as the Bangkok Declaration on Physical Activity for Global Health and Sustainable Development,<sup>46</sup> the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030,<sup>47</sup> and the International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH)'s Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity,<sup>48</sup> which collectively emphasize the benefits of active play for health and development and the need for play-oriented policies in order to achieve the UN's SDGs.

### Actions

- Promote an understanding of the value and benefit of play for all ages and normalize outdoor play as a default behaviour for all Canadians.
- Prioritize outdoor play as an ongoing support for Canadians during, and in the eventual recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Disseminate, mobilize and communicate the benefits of outdoor play to multiple audiences including parents, care-providers, insurers, schools, healthcare professionals, built environment professionals, recreation staff, municipalities and communities across Canada.
- Engage in cross-sectoral connections and collaborations to promote the benefits of outdoor play.
- Identify champions at community, municipal, regional and national levels, and identify funding to support these champions.
- Support, promote and build on existing campaigns that focus on the benefits of outdoor play such as Take Me Outside Day;<sup>49</sup> the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) ReImagine RREC – Renew, Retool, Engage, Contribute Report;<sup>50</sup> ISPAH’s Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity;<sup>48</sup> and the World Health Organization (WHO)’s Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030.<sup>47</sup>
- Recognize inequities in the quality of experiences when discussing the benefits of outdoor play; for example, outdoor play in concrete spaces, near highways, is not the same as in parks with trees.

## Promote, Protect, Preserve and Invest in Outdoor Play Environments

This priority is intended to be inclusive of all outdoor spaces in which outdoor play may occur: both built environments (e.g., playgrounds, streets) and natural spaces that already exist and do not need to be built. The many factors associated with outdoor spaces (geographical, cultural, social, political, ecological), as well as differences between urban and rural, or built cities and natural environments, are important considerations for this priority and its associated actions. This priority also highlights synchronicities between outdoor play and sustainability efforts, where outdoor play environments may serve to support development of sustainable cities and communities. Accordingly, this priority is in line with the UN’s SDG #11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG #13: Climate Action, and SDG #15: Life on Land;<sup>45</sup> ISPAH’s Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity,<sup>48</sup> which calls for investment in active transport and active urban design; as well as a recent joint statement by the WHO, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the *Lancet*,<sup>51</sup> which highlights the importance of child-friendly city design, where neighborhoods are protected from traffic and have green spaces to promote play and outdoor physical activity across all ages.



## Actions

- Promote play declarations (e.g., the Calgary Play Charter<sup>52</sup>) to raise awareness of the need for policies and strategies that provide more access to, and social support for, quality play in local neighbourhoods.
- Establish policies that ensure access to natural/play areas close to where people live, and that conserve safe, active transportation routes that have come about during COVID-19. Resilient cities have built environments that make it easy to access outdoor play. Make a connection between active transportation and outdoor play within national, provincial and local active transportation strategies currently being developed.
- Promote spatial justice – the fair and equitable distribution of, and access to, safe and ethical<sup>53,54</sup> outdoor space for all ages. This is particularly important in urban areas with high levels of densification, and when considering ways to support a respectful coming together of Indigenous and Western worldviews.
- Share resources and work together with regulatory and land-use planning bodies to promote and advocate for policies and licensing regulations that support quality outdoor play spaces.
- Conduct research on the effects of traffic speed, safety and risk reduction on outdoor play, and disseminate these findings to policy makers and municipal planners.
- Adopt a broader view on play environments (e.g., street play, forest play, yard play, and play spaces for all ages and abilities) to fuel research that will differentiate outdoor play patterns to create unique measurement tools and resources. Disseminate research findings to policy makers and municipal planners.
- Focus on Land-based<sup>55</sup> outdoor play.
- Focus on healthy communities and outdoor play; this has been recognized as a research funding priority within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.<sup>56</sup>
- Promote the connection of the outdoor environment with food security, home and community gardens, and protection of native plant species.
- Promote the inclusion of a diversity of plants (e.g., trees, shrubs, grasses, wildflowers) in environmental and ecological enhancement planning to enhance the health and wellness outcomes of any outdoor play space.
- Advocate for and support outdoor play actions that limit and reduce the impact of climate change and pollution on the air, water and Land.
- Promote efforts to minimize adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems and wildlife when people are playing on the Land. Outdoor play must include an appreciation for ecosystem function, wildlife preservation and environmental sustainability.
- Accept a shared responsibility for connection and access to the Land.<sup>54</sup>
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions. Identify funding to support these champions.
- Include all voices in decision-making (e.g., children, youth, families, communities, leaders, advocates), while respecting principles of equity, diversity and inclusion.

## Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Outdoor Play

This priority is grounded in and builds upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognizes ‘the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.’<sup>7</sup> This is both a stand-alone priority and one that is embedded throughout all other priorities. It also aligns with the UN’s SDG #5: Gender Equality, and SDG #10: Reduced Inequalities,<sup>45</sup> as outlined in the WHO’s Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030.<sup>47</sup>

This priority is also in alignment with CPRA’s ReImagine RREC Report,<sup>50</sup> in which equity, inclusion and access are highlighted as pillars for action for the parks, recreation and community sport sector.



### Actions

- Apply an EDI lens and a continuous improvement approach to every priority.
- Ensure that diverse groups are at outdoor play leadership tables, including Indigenous people, and children and youth. Include all layers of accessibility when considering this priority, including physical, visual, sensory and intellectual disabilities, and accessibility among marginalized communities.
- Assess, evaluate, preserve and improve access to sufficient, safe and high-quality outdoor play spaces, and advocate for equitable access for all. Community-building activities that aim to rehabilitate public outdoor spaces in low-income neighborhoods may be one strategy.<sup>57</sup>
- Consider the role of the built environment in promoting EDI.
- Adopt the broadest definition of EDI, incorporating the highest level of inclusion possible in terms of gender, culture, and geographical, social, physical and spiritual factors. Have further discussions to identify other subgroups that may fall under this priority and that may feel excluded or marginalized.
- Develop inclusive Play Declarations across multiple levels of government in Canada. Ensure that governments promote and acknowledge that outdoor play is a right in all communities. Use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>7</sup> as a tool to hold our governments accountable, similar to what was done in Sweden, which adopted Right to Play into law in 2020.<sup>58</sup>
- Consider newcomer experiences and perspectives on play to inform this priority.
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions.
- Identify funding to support access to outdoor play environments in all weather (e.g., transportation, cold, rainy-weather gear), for all ages.

## Ensure that Outdoor Play Initiatives are Land-Based and Represent the Diverse Cultures, Languages and Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples of North America



From time immemorial, Indigenous people have lived, worked and played in connection with the Land we now call Canada. Land is capitalized throughout this Report to acknowledge its importance and that it includes peoples, cultures, languages and knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Supporting, learning about and engaging in Indigenous-led Land-based outdoor play provides an opportunity to build trusting and respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, move towards reconciliation, and raise the next generation of environmental stewards. This is both a stand-alone priority and one that is embedded throughout all the priorities listed in this Report. The phrasing of this priority was agreed upon by members of the *State of the Sector Report* Consultation Group who identify as Indigenous, and was based on language used in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report Calls to Action.<sup>59</sup>

### Actions

- Reflect on how internal practices and policies may make outdoor play organizations spaces that Indigenous Peoples want to engage with.
- Prioritize building relationships and trust with local Indigenous Peoples. Give this process time in order to nurture relationships, and ensure this is done openly, thoughtfully and without presumptions.
- Focus on creating ethical and safe spaces<sup>53,54</sup> to support Indigenous and Western worldviews coming together respectfully and in a balanced way. Find ways to support these respectful partnerships.
- Engage with Indigenous communities to understand Indigenous systems and research, and what that can look like in relation to Land-based outdoor play.
- Involve Indigenous knowledge holders in guiding Land-based outdoor play.
- Strengthen the connection between outdoor play, the K-12 curriculum and First Peoples' Principles.<sup>60</sup>
- Promote learning about Indigenous history within settler outdoor play communities, and support baseline training on cultural safety. Promote an understanding of why it is important to engage with Indigenous Peoples when talking about outdoor play on the Land.

## Research and Support Data Collection on Outdoor Play

This priority focuses on gaps in knowledge related to outdoor play, and the research and data collection efforts that are needed to address those gaps. It was recognized that research and knowledge on outdoor play needs to be made accessible to governments, policy makers, educators, community organizations and the private sector; to address this, we have woven knowledge translation and mobilization efforts into the action items here, and into other priorities where relevant. This is in alignment with the mandate of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which focuses on ‘the creation of new knowledge and its translation into improved health for Canadians,’<sup>61</sup> as well as action item 4.2 of the WHO’s Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030, which focuses on enhancing population-level physical activity data collection systems.<sup>47</sup>



### Actions

- Create valid and reliable outdoor play measurement tools and resources, and promote the use of these tools to achieve greater consistency and reproducibility across research groups. Use these tools to study the characteristics of outdoor play across different outdoor spaces and population groups.
- Promote surveillance data on outdoor play that adopts an EDI lens.
- Improve the robustness of outdoor play research, with attention to detection and selection bias, transparent reporting (e.g., TIDieR Checklist for intervention descriptions, STROBE for reporting on observational studies) and pre-registration of studies.<sup>62,63</sup> Review the literature on best practices for facilitating and promoting outdoor play.
- Include early childhood education (including infant and toddler care), and K-12 school-based populations in research efforts. Allow school boards, municipalities and other interested agencies to have ongoing access to this information.
- Translate research into practice. Focus on knowledge translation, dissemination, mobilization, communication and advocacy of findings.
- Consider ways to package data and develop messages and materials for multiple audiences (e.g., parents, care-providers, insurers, schools, municipalities, healthcare professionals, built environment professionals, recreation staff).
- Develop strategies to acquire resources and funding for outdoor play research.
- Support and promote research on the role of outdoor play (in all its forms) in preserving mental, social and physical health during, and in the recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Connect researchers working on different aspects of outdoor play.
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions.

## Reframe Views on Safety and Outdoor Play

While liability and safety in outdoor play is already a prevalent topic, a priority moving forward is the reframing of the way in which liability and safety are applied to outdoor play opportunities. In other words, the way in which we provide outdoor play needs to be recalibrated so that there is a better balance between protecting against injury and promoting beneficial play opportunities. This is in alignment with the Canadian Public Health Association's Position Statement on Children's Unstructured Play, in which they recommend 'the use of risk-benefit assessment processes to mitigate play-associated liability concerns' in childcare, school and municipal settings.<sup>64</sup>



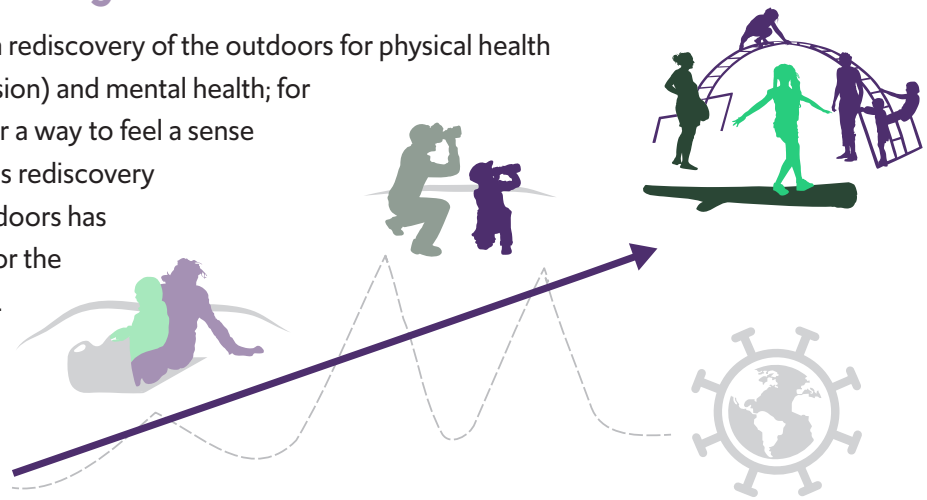
### Actions

- Collaborate more with insurance agencies, the Canadian Standards Association, licensing officers, municipal leaders and outdoor play space designers, and provide education on the value of outdoor play opportunities for children as well as the cost of not having play opportunities (i.e., provide cost/benefit analyses).
- Challenge unjustifiably restrictive policies, industry standards, guidelines and practices.
- Take an assets-based approach; base decisions surrounding outdoor play on assets rather than on liabilities.<sup>54</sup>
- Promote/develop knowledge mobilization around success items/stories that may set a precedent; demonstrate/highlight successful past practices of managing risk. For example, the National Outdoor Leadership School<sup>65</sup> has a rich history regarding risk management.
- Increase advocacy and awareness on the benefits of risky play. Ensure that it is common knowledge that risk is healthy and children need risk.
- Develop strategies oriented towards individual behaviour settings; for example, families may require different reframing strategies than early childhood educators and schools.
- Increase skills and knowledge in risk management. Ensure that the benefit-risk assessment process is user-friendly.
- Help ensure 'benefit' does not get lost in a risk-centric assessment orientation.
- Develop and implement strategies to address the effect of climate change on access to outdoor play; for example, air quality and hot weather may affect the assessment of benefits and risks of outdoor play over time, as well as how, where and when outdoor play may best be provided.
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions. Identify funding to support these champions.



## Leverage Engagement Opportunities with the Outdoors During and After COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rediscovery of the outdoors for physical health (including lower risk of viral transmission) and mental health; for enjoyment, fun and relaxation; and for a way to feel a sense of normalcy in this strange time.<sup>36</sup> This rediscovery and renewed appreciation of the outdoors has great potential to be an accelerator for the outdoor play priorities provided here. Therefore, while this is a stand-alone priority, considerations related to COVID-19 are found in the action lists of other priorities.



### Actions

- Make outdoor play a core health promotion recovery strategy for Canadians.
- Leverage the current opportunity of the pandemic to push the importance of outdoor play and recognize the advantages it can bring (such as funding opportunities). Preserve neighbourhood changes that have encouraged and facilitated spontaneous outdoor play (e.g., open streets, use of empty green space).
- Drive engagement across all age groups by connecting/collaborating with local organizations.
- Consider how the pandemic lens can inform the outdoor play strategy moving forward.
- Promote more neighbourhood planning that will support communities in the event of future health crises.
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions.



### Increase and Improve Professional Development Opportunities in Outdoor Play

There is a recognized need to increase and improve professional development opportunities in outdoor play. This includes educators (e.g., early childhood educators, elementary and secondary school educators) but also across all sectors involved in outdoor play (parents, coaches, health professionals, built environment professionals, students). Professional development opportunities are needed to help shift mindsets and provide the tools to advocate for and promote outdoor play. This priority is intended

to encapsulate the broad need for training across sectors and is in line with the UN's SDG #4: Quality Education,<sup>45</sup> which outlines the need to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as ISPAH's Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity,<sup>48</sup> which directly references play as part of the need to invest in whole-of-school programs.

## Actions

- Invest in long-term programming for practitioners that moves beyond one-time webinar/learning to a long-term learning process. This could include immersive (i.e., outdoor) full-term courses and certifications in outdoor play pedagogy, child-friendly planning and design (all of which should be accessible across a range of outdoor literacy levels), and ongoing peer mentorship opportunities.
- Make resources available, in both English and French, for educators to help them advocate for and talk about outdoor play/risk.
- Promote ethical space in Land-based outdoor play professional development initiatives, to help learners develop an understanding of the connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing.<sup>54</sup>
- Work with colleges and universities to ensure training on outdoor play is available in early childhood education programs. Several colleges across Canada have begun introducing nature- and environmental sustainability-based pedagogy into their early learning programs,<sup>66</sup> and more should follow suit.
- Make outdoor play professional development opportunities available to parents, volunteer coaches, municipal leaders, health professionals, built environment professionals, and students.
- Build outdoor play into the K-12 curriculum, including how to apply and extend learning outside.
- Develop a parent awareness campaign and youth engagement campaign to promote outdoor play education within communities.
- Promote coordination/collaboration among organizations, school boards, municipalities, planning and design practices, and childcare centres to achieve actual change.
- Work with staff on-site at schools, early childhood education centres, community organizations, municipalities, and planning and design practices to elevate authentic voices. For example, look to practitioners who have a background in outdoor play pedagogy or child-friendly planning and design, and who are already doing the work, as sources of information on how to bring play/teaching outdoors.
- Work with college and university educators to support them in going to early childhood education centres to work with children outdoors.
- Include children's and youth's voices in designing outdoor play spaces and pedagogy as well as child-friendly neighbourhoods, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals for Children,<sup>67</sup> which emphasize the importance of including children's voices when developing plans to meet these goals.
- Create child-friendly measurement tools (both qualitative and quantitative) and resources to document how children and youth learn, play and move around outdoors.

- Provide a means for stakeholders to support further research, which may then in turn influence education, planning and design (i.e., promote knowledge translation of measurement tools). Ensure that children's and youth's voices are included in this process.
- Develop mentorship positions at the school district level to coordinate information coming from the province and pass it on to teachers.
- Identify champions (including at the community level) and catalysts to promote this priority and achieve these actions. Identify funding to support these champions.

## Expand and Enable Cross-Sectoral Connections/Collaborations

Outdoor play initiatives, programs and projects are found across many sectors. In order to move the above outdoor play priorities forward, we need to promote connections and collaborations across sectors so that we work together, learn from each other and amplify each other's work. As highlighted in the WHO's Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030,<sup>47</sup> promoting opportunities for play may help achieve at least 13 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals,<sup>45</sup> emphasizing the cross-sectoral nature and benefit of play. In fact, the importance of cross-sectoral connections is addressed directly in the 17th and final UN SDG: Partnerships for the Goals,<sup>45</sup> reinforcing the importance of sharing knowledge, expertise and resources to help create a healthier future for all.



## Actions

- Promote connections/collaborations across sectors, levels of government, communities and countries.
- Coordinate gatherings and working groups to bring key influencers and stakeholders together to advance programmatic and built environment work.
- Develop cross-sectoral connections and identify other stakeholders that will help fuel the creation of measurement tools, and help identify resources as well as barriers and enablers of distribution and development.
- Engage champions at different levels – on the ground and in higher-up leadership positions – and identify and invite those not already at the table. Identify funding to support these champions.
- Provide peer mentorship across all sectors, so that practitioners see other people engaged in outdoor play who 'look like me,' and can receive ongoing support.

- Promote, highlight and recognize individuals who do great work in outdoor play! Celebrate them, promote their social media links, make it EASY to learn how to be an outdoor play advocate! Let others who are already doing it, help to motivate others!

# Next Steps

## Next Steps: Outdoor Play Champions

An important next step in moving these priorities and actions forward will be to identify champions. However, several respondents to our Stakeholder Survey commented that it was not enough to have a single champion for each priority; that *'this work cannot rest on the shoulders of a few.'* It is for this reason we emphasize the importance of engaging champions and catalysts across multiple levels so that we may collectively shift these priorities forward. Existing champion programs such as the 'inTO the Ravine Champions'<sup>68</sup> program by the Park People, and the soon-to-be-released International Play Association (IPA) Canada Play Champions program, are two ways in which our priority actions may be quickly realized.

Another consideration when promoting champion programs is the need to do so with EDI front of mind. The pandemic and related restrictions have shed a light on existing inequities across Canada. For example, a recent national survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that equity-seeking groups were more likely to experience barriers to park use.<sup>69</sup> There is a need to support the development of leadership skills among equity-seeking groups and co-develop a path forward with EDI leaders so that, collectively, this priority becomes part of who we – OPC and the broader outdoor play sector – are.

Moreover, among our Consultation Group members who identify as Indigenous, there was concern about whether a champions program was an appropriate action when considering Land-based outdoor play that represents the diverse cultures of Indigenous Peoples. Several survey respondents added that in lieu of focusing on champions, emphasis needs to be placed on building relationships and fostering ethical spaces where Western and Indigenous worldviews can be brought together respectfully and in a balanced way. Given that elements of this priority are woven throughout all other priorities, successful relationship building with Indigenous communities and creating ethical spaces will be instrumental to the success of all priorities.

## Next Steps: Promoting Reciprocity with the Land

An unexpected silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic was that more Canadians took to the outdoors than ever before. A survey conducted by the Parks People showed that 94% of Canadian cities reported an increased use of parks during the pandemic, and 82% of people using the parks expected their current use to continue or increase.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, a survey conducted by Sonnet Insurance and ParticipACTION<sup>36</sup> showed that getting outdoors was the top way in which Canadians were coping through the pandemic, and being active outdoors was among the top three things Canadians placed more importance on as a result of the pandemic. This is encouraging, as it is in direct alignment with our vision that *'outdoor play is a valued part of daily life for all people living in Canada.'*

However, there is also growing concern that this re-engagement may lead to (and is already resulting in) overuse of, and damage to, natural spaces. As one respondent mentioned, and as echoed by several others: *'We need to start talking about [health and wellbeing] in terms of reciprocity. How is being aware of and benefiting from nature also benefiting nature itself?'* As we continue to promote play outdoors and in nature for all those living in Canada, we have a responsibility to also promote reciprocity with the Land. Promoting outdoor and on-the-Land learning, at any age, will be a crucial step towards building this sense of reciprocity, as has been echoed by many.<sup>54,70,71</sup> Recently, the Nova Scotia provincial government and the federal government announced a decision to set aside \$7 million to allow all public elementary schools in Nova Scotia to create new outdoor learning spaces or enhance existing ones.<sup>72</sup> It is our hope that efforts such as this will continue in the long term and spur the next generation of environmental stewards.

## Next Steps: Outdoor Play Funding in Canada

Another important next step is to secure funding to ensure the sustainability of the priorities listed here and to support champions in this work. The importance of funding was discussed several times in our Consultation Group meetings and was echoed by respondents in the Stakeholder Survey. In tandem with this *State of the Sector Report*, The Lawson Foundation and OPC collaborated to conduct an environmental scan of existing and potential funding opportunities for outdoor play in Canada.<sup>73</sup> Our goal was to identify key funders and stakeholders, and to bridge gaps between outdoor play and other funding issues such as education, recreation, environmentalism, health and wellbeing. Ultimately, the purpose was to connect stakeholders and funders, identify opportunities for impact, and promote investment in outdoor play in Canada.

Briefly, some of the main findings of the environmental scan include that community engagement and EDI are areas of funding opportunity and that more data and better storytelling about the value of outdoor play may help attract new funders, while providing current funders a deeper understanding of the impact they are making. Moreover, to promote collaboration and connection between funders and grant seekers (so that this relationship is not one-directional), outdoor play networks in Canada are needed. Outdoor Play Canada is one such network, but we are small and are not as well known as we need to be. There may be opportunities for us to learn from international networks such as the Blue Sky Funders Forum<sup>74</sup> in the US. These observations have important implications for how these priorities, and the sector more broadly, may be supported long term.

# Concluding Remarks

This Report highlights the substantive momentum gained within the outdoor play sector in Canada over the past six years. We identified 364 outdoor play resource items produced in Canada and 418 academic outdoor play articles published by Canadian authors since the publication of the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*,<sup>1</sup> including 79 items specifically produced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, in consultation with 302 outdoor play stakeholders across Canada, we identified nine major priorities for the outdoor play sector moving forward. It is our aim that by highlighting this momentum, OPC will continue its mission to bring the diversity of Canadian outdoor play stakeholders together, create a sense of community, and provide a common vision for the sector to thrive and succeed over the next five years, so that ultimately there are more people engaging in outdoor play in Canada.

# Acknowledgements

Outdoor Play Canada projects and activities encompass all traditional territories of the Indigenous Nations of Turtle Island, within the Land we now call Canada.

Thank you to those within our Consultation Group (Table 1) who helped us identify the nine major priorities, the 302 individuals who completed our Stakeholder Survey (as well as the 25 individuals who wished to complete our survey but were ineligible because they were either younger than 12 years [three respondents] or did not live in Canada [22 respondents]), the 12 international colleagues who provided feedback on and endorsed the final draft (Table 2), and the 100 Stakeholder Survey respondents who agreed to review the final draft.

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# Disclaimer

*Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report* is a concise, public-facing review of evidence and proposals for future priorities and actions. While it suggests direction for the sector, it is not a prescription for outdoor play. It was designed to provide direction to be used by and for outdoor play-oriented programs, services, projects, strategies, campaigns, policies and practices. The legacy of this initiative is preserved in the *State of the Sector Report* itself (housed on the OPC website), as well as in the academic journals in which the environmental scan and scoping review will be published.

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report Stakeholder Survey

[Outdoor Play in Canada: 2021 State of the Sector Report Stakeholder Survey \(English\)](#)

[Sondage à propos du Rapport sur l'état du secteur du jeu à l'extérieur au Canada \(French\)](#)

Appendix B: Canadian Outdoor Play Programs,  
Projects and Activities During the COVID-19  
Pandemic, Organized Alphabetically by  
Organization, as Identified in an  
Environmental Scan

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>City and Province</b>	<b>Type of Initiative</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>COVID-19-related actions/adaptations</b>
Playbook 2030: A guide to building Canada's most livable region (Active City Collective, 2020)	Active City Collective	Calgary, Alberta	Report: 10-year Master Plan for the active economy	Environment, Health, Recreation	Leaders in active recreation in Calgary	The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the active economy is addressed as one of the major trends that will influence the future of recreation.
Virtual Roundtable Series (Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, 2020)	Advancing Early Childhood Education Outdoors Now	Vancouver, British Columbia	Meeting: Webinar series	Education	Early childhood educators and researchers	This 3-part roundtable series explored licensing of outdoor early childhood education and included a discussion on the unexpected momentum for outdoor learning and play gained during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Neighborhood Adventure (Alberta Orienteering Association, 2020)	Alberta Orienteering	Alberta	Program: Resource for children and youth	Environment, Community, Health, Recreation	Children and youth	A self-guided neighbourhood adventure program to get children and youth active while practising social and physical distancing.
Coronavirus: should you let your children play with other children? (Levinson-King, 2020)	British Broadcasting Corporation	Canada	Media: Newspaper article	Community, Health	Parents and children	This Canadian-written article discussed the importance of social distancing and of following local health authority guidelines while playing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Summer of Free Play? (Fieber, 2020)	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	Canada	Media: Opinion piece	Community, Recreation	Parents	This article discussed the importance of outdoor play for physical and mental health, how the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the amount of structured play children are getting, and the importance of replacing screen time with unstructured, unsupervised play.
2020 Basecamp Conversations and COVID-19 Principles and Practices for Led Outdoor Activity (Canadian Outdoor Summit, 2020)	Canadian Outdoor Summit	Canada	Report: Guideline	Environment, Recreation	Early childhood educators, teachers, recreation leaders	A guiding document for those leading outdoor activities on how to do so safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Grow Alberta (Pike, 2020)	Career and Technology Centre, Calgary Board of Education	Calgary, Alberta	Project: Free seeds to learn about food security and get outdoors	Education, Environment, Recreation	Parents and children	Free seed kits were sent to families during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote getting outdoors, growing vegetables and learning about food security.
The role of play during a global pandemic (Boyd & Leo, 2020)	Centre for Active Living	Alberta	Report: Discussion of play and its importance during COVID-19	Education	Parents, early childhood educators	This article discussed the importance of play during the COVID-19 pandemic and what adults can do to support children during times of high stress and uncertainty.
Thrive Outside (Child & Nature Alliance of Canada, 2020)	Child Nature Alliance of Canada	Canada	Program: Resource for parents, educators, caregivers, community leaders	Education, Environment	Early childhood educators	An online hub, launched during the pandemic, of resources to support outdoor play and learning.
Raising Canada Reports (Children First Canada, 2020)	Children First Canada	Canada	Report: The top 10 threats to childhood	Health, Recreation	Leaders in Canada	The 2020 Raising Canada Report highlights the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and their families, including reductions in outdoor physical activities.



Raising Canada Reports Webinar 2-Part Series (Children First Canada, 2020)	Children First Canada	Canada	Meeting: Webinar	Health, Recreation	Leaders in Canada	These webinars discussed the main findings of the 2020 Raising Canada Report, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on outdoor physical activities.
Canadian children's and youth's adherence to the 24-h movement guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic: A decision tree analysis (Guerrero, Vanderloo, Rhodes et al., 2020)	Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute, Dalhousie University, ParticipACTION, University of British Columbia, University of Victoria	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, policy leaders, researchers	An exploration of children's and youth's characteristics, including time spent outdoors and in outdoor play, and their association with meeting the 24-h movement guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Regional differences in access to the outdoors and outdoor play of Canadian children and youth during the COVID-19 outbreak (de Lannoy, Rhodes, Moore et al., 2020)	Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute, Dalhousie University, ParticipACTION, University of British Columbia, University of Victoria	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	A survey of parents on changes in their children's time spent outdoors and in outdoor play during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this differs by region of Canada.
Healthy movement behaviours in children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic: Exploring the role of the neighbourhood environment (Mitra, Moore, Gillespie et al., 2020)	Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute, Dalhousie University, ParticipACTION, Ryerson University, University of British Columbia, University of Victoria	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	An exploration of patterns of increased/decreased physical activity, sedentary and sleep behaviours among children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their association with the built environment including parks and outdoor spaces.

Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth: A national survey (Moore, Faulkner, Rhodes et al., 2020)	Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute, Dalhousie University, ParticipACTION, Ryerson University, University of British Columbia, University of Victoria	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	A survey of parents of children and youth aged 5-17 examining the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on movement behaviours of Canadian children and youth.
“You Can’t Go to the Park, You Can’t Go Here, You Can’t Go There”: Exploring the Parental Experiences of COVID-19 and Its Impact on Their Children’s Movement Behaviours (Riazi, Wunderlich, Gierc et al., 2021)	Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute, Dalhousie University, University of British Columbia	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	A survey on changes in children’s daily movement behaviours and outdoor play during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (City of Calgary, 2020)	City of Calgary	Calgary, Alberta	Program: Car-free streets	Community	Calgary residents of all ages	Select traffic lanes were blocked off to support active transportation and physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (City of Edmonton, 2021)	City of Edmonton	Edmonton, Alberta	Program: Convert select streets into shared spaces	Community	Edmonton residents of all ages	Bike lanes on select streets were converted to shared space to support active transportation and physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Brand, 2020)	City of Halifax	Halifax, Nova Scotia	Program: Increase active transportation routes	Community	Halifax residents of all ages	A motion was passed to increase active travel routes to support active transportation and physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Walker, 2020)	City of Moncton	Moncton, New Brunswick	Program: Open parks and trails with one-way paths	Community	Moncton residents of all ages	All parks and trails remained open with one-way routes on park paths to support physical distancing.

Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Ville de Montréal, 2020)	City of Montreal	Montreal, Quebec	Program: Active and family streets	Community	Montreal residents of all ages	Select streets in the city were blocked off to allow individuals and families to get active outdoors, while adhering to physical distancing guidelines.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Willing, 2020)	City of Ottawa	Ottawa, Ontario	Program: Convert select streets to local traffic only	Community	Ottawa residents of all ages	Select streets were restricted to local car traffic only to support active transportation and physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Tourism Saskatchewan, 2020)	City of Regina	Regina, Saskatchewan	Program: Open trails with one-way paths	Community	Regina residents of all ages	Wascana Lake Loop was turned into a one-way path to promote active transportation and physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (City of Toronto, 2021)	City of Toronto, ActiveTO	Toronto, Ontario	Program: Car-free streets	Community	Toronto residents of all ages	Signage and temporary barricades were placed at intersections across the city to encourage slower vehicle speeds and reduce vehicle access to promote outdoor recreation.
Coronavirus: is it safe for my kids to play outside with friends? (Gawley, 2020)	City of Vancouver	Vancouver, British Columbia	Media: Newspaper article	Community, Health	Parents	This article highlighted the importance of encouraging children's outdoor play during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (Bains, 2020)	City of Victoria	Victoria, British Columbia	Program: Increase active transportation routes	Community	Victoria residents of all ages	Active transportation routes were expanded to support physical distancing.
Canada-wide efforts to open streets to families and commuters during COVID-19 (City of Winnipeg, 2020)	City of Winnipeg	Winnipeg, Manitoba	Program: Restrict car traffic on select streets	Community	Winnipeg residents of all ages	Select streets were restricted to local car traffic only to support active transportation and physical distancing.
Virtual Summer Camp Program (The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, 2021)	Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario	Ontario	Resource: Virtual camp ideas to support children during the summer of 2021	Recreation	Parents, program providers	A virtual meeting to support summer program providers and parents in providing remote camp experiences over the summer of 2021.

Child Physical Activity during COVID-19 (Healthy Populations Institute, 2021)	Dalhousie University	Canada	Media: Whiteboard video	Health, Recreation	Parents	A series of 5 whiteboard animation videos focused on 'Staying Healthy During a Pandemic' describing how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting children and their movement, especially outdoors.
Outdoor classrooms to reduce viral transmission risk (Equinox Holistic Alternative School, 2020)	Equinox Holistic Alternative School	Toronto, Ontario	Program: Outdoor classrooms	Education	Early childhood educators, teachers	This school moved classes outdoors to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission.
COVID-19 resources for parents and teachers (Ever Active Schools, 2021)	Ever Active Schools	Edmonton, Alberta	Project: Resources for outdoor play and learning	Education, Health	Parents, teachers, early childhood educators	A compilation of resources (expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic) including YouTube playlists of activities, lesson plans and recommendations for outdoor play.
Exploring loose parts play at home (Ever Active Schools, 2020)	Ever Active Schools	Edmonton, Alberta	Project: Resource for loose parts play	Education, Recreation	Parents, teachers, early childhood educators	A resource including facts, tips and suggested materials for loose parts play to support children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Statement on Recess (Global Recess Alliance, 2020)	Global Recess Alliance	Canada	Report: Statement on the importance of recess	Health, Recreation	School leaders	A statement outlining the importance of preserving recess during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Physical activity – the forgotten core area of child development during the pandemic (Vaillancourt, 2021)	Globe and Mail	Canada	Media: Opinion piece	Health, Recreation	Government leaders, parents	Op-ed article describing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on children and youth.

Risk mitigation tool for child and youth settings operating during the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020)	Government of Canada	Canada	Report: Tool for child and youth settings operating during COVID-19	Education, Health	Early childhood educators	A tool for use in child and youth settings, which includes recommendations to bring learning and play outdoors to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk.
Risk mitigation tool for outdoor recreation spaces and activities operating during the COVID-19 pandemic (Government of Canada, 2020)	Government of Canada	Canada	Report: Tool for parks and outdoor recreation facilities operating during COVID-19	Environment, Health	Recreation leaders	A tool to assist those responsible for parks and outdoor recreation facilities and programming in minimizing COVID-19 transmission risk.
World COVID-19 Survey on Access to Play (Gill & Miller, 2020)	International Play Association	Canada, international	Report: Study on impact of COVID-19 on children's play internationally	Health	Government leaders, parents	Global study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's play and comparing measures across countries.
Increasing Outdoor Play in Early Learning and Child Care in the Context of COVID-19 (Lawson Foundation, 2020)	Lawson Foundation	Canada	Report: Recommendations for reopening children's education settings	Community, Health	Government leaders, early childhood educators	Report with recommendations for reopening children's settings with a focus on outdoor play to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk.
COVID-19 Full Report Child and Youth Well-Being (Maximum City, 2020)	Maximum City	Canada	Report: Survey results and recommendations	Health	Parents	Survey of Canadian children and youth to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their health, highlighting the importance of outdoor play for overall health.
Nature Homeschool (Nature Canada, 2020)	Nature Canada	Canada	Project: Resources for educators, leaders and learners to help connect with nature	Education, Environment, Health	Teachers, early childhood educators, leaders, parents	A library of diverse resources to help educators, caregivers, guardians, community leaders and learners learn and connect with nature while working and learning from home.

Webinar series on outdoor play and education during COVID-19 (Toronto District School Board, 2021)	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education – Environmental and Sustainability Education (OISE-ESE)	Toronto, Ontario	Meeting: Webinar series	Education	Early childhood educators, teachers, parents	A series of webinars to help shift environmental learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Learning and Connecting through Play on the Land blog (Ottawa Forest and Nature School, 2020)	Ottawa Forest and Nature School	Ottawa, Ontario	Project: Blog	Education, Environment	Teachers, early childhood educators	A regular blog started at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic with recommendations for educators on how to support outdoor learning.
Being Active During COVID-19 (Ottawa Public Health, 2021)	Ottawa Public Health	Ottawa, Ontario	Report: Guideline	Health	Ottawa residents of all ages	Guidelines on how to safely be active outside and appropriate activities to reduce COVID-19 transmission risk.
Get Outside and Play! (Tremblay, 2021)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: Blog post	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, residents of all ages	A statement discussing the importance of getting outside and active during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Outdoor Play Strategy 2.0 project (Outdoor Play Canada, 2021)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: OPC 2.0 Strategy	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, teachers, early childhood educators, researchers	An outline of OPC's strategic priorities moving forward, including how OPC has served as a central portal of information on outdoor play during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Pandemic Play (Power, de Lannoy, Brussoni et al., 2021)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: Call to action	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders	A call to action for policy makers to preserve access to outdoor space and balance the priority of reducing COVID-19 transmission with the need to help Canadians maintain their health.
Reconceptualizing play across the lifespan (Bauer, 2020)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: Blog post	Health, Recreation	Residents of all ages	A blog post discussing the importance of outdoor play for all ages, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reopening Canada to the outdoors and nature (de Lannoy, 2020)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: Blog post	Environment, Recreation	Policy leaders, Canadian residents	A blog post outlining the different COVID-19 pandemic provincial and territorial plans related to opening/closing of parks and outdoor recreational spaces.
Should I go outside in the COVID-19 era? (de Lannoy, Brussoni & Tremblay, 2020)	Outdoor Play Canada	Canada	Report: Statement	Health, Recreation	Residents of all ages	A statement discussing the importance of getting outside and active during the COVID-19 pandemic.
6 things we need in Canadian urban parks in 2021 (Park People 2021)	Park People	Canada	Report: Research findings and recommendations	Environment, Recreation	Policy leaders, recreation leaders	A compilation of research and recommendations for Canadian city parks to create safe and equitable access, highlighting learning from the COVID-19 pandemic.
2019-2020 Impact Report (ParticipACTION, 2020)	ParticipACTION	Canada	Report: 2019-2020 Impact Report	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, recreation leaders, residents of all ages	Report discussing the impact of ParticipACTION initiatives, including those adapted to adhere to public health restrictions.
The Great Big Move (ParticipACTION, 2021)	ParticipACTION	Canada	Program: Virtual challenge	Environment, Recreation	Residents of all ages, parents and children	A challenge wherein participants gather a team and virtually explore Canadian destinations (given travel restrictions), log move minutes and unlock milestones to win a prize.
Sport Community Town Hall with Minister Guilbeault (de Lannoy, 2020)	ParticipACTION, Government of Canada	Canada	Meeting: Town hall	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders	A Sport Community Town Hall to hear proposals on how Canada can assist with the sport community's recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; OPC submitted a proposal on the importance of outdoor play as part of this recovery strategy.

But What About Recess? Planning Safe and Effective Recess Experiences in the Time of COVID-19 (Physical Health Education Canada, 2020)	Physical Health Education (PHE) Canada	Canada	Meeting: Webinar	Education, Recreation	Policy leaders, teachers, early childhood educators	A webinar in which experts discussed strategies and approaches for safe and meaningful return to school and recess.
Play Outdoors Magazine (Play Outdoors Magazine, 2020)	Play Outdoors Magazine	Canada	Media: Magazine	Education, Recreation	Teachers, early childhood educators, researchers	A magazine with strategies and resources on how to support outdoor play and learning, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.
COVID-19 Guidance for Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12 (Government of Canada, 2021)	Public Health Agency of Canada	Canada	Project: Guidelines	Education, Health	School administrators, teachers, early childhood educators, public health authorities	Guidance for school administrators and public health authorities to support classes and mitigate risks associated with the resumption of in-school classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Free Virtual School Program (Recess Guardians, 2020)	Recess Guardians	Canada	Media: Video modules, communication boards, resources	Education, Recreation	Children and youth, teachers, parents	Video modules (brought online because of the pandemic) to empower youth, teacher-to-teacher communication boards, resources for teachers and parents to engage their youth, with ongoing outdoor weekly challenges.
Youth to Youth (Y2Y) (Right to Play, 2020)	Right to Play	Toronto, Ontario	Program: Games, music, etc. to help children gain critical skills	Education, Recreation	School administrators, teachers, early childhood educators	A program that uses play to support young people living in Toronto to develop skills and confidence to rise above adversity; focused on remote resources to support learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Room to play consulting (Zeni, 2020)	Room to play consulting	Canada	Program: Professional development resource for teachers	Education, Health	Teachers	Professional development resource for teachers on outdoor play-based curriculums, loose parts play, risky play, and COVID-19 specific strategies for teaching.



Adventure Calendar (Saskatchewan in Motion, 2020)	Saskatchewan in Motion	Canada	Program: Calendar with daily adventure ideas	Recreation	Parents and children	A calendar with ideas for different daily adventures that require minimal supplies and adhere to public health guidelines.
Activity Finder (Scouts Canada, 2021)	Scouts Canada	Canada	Program: Webpage with hundreds of activity resources	Recreation	Parents, children and youth	A resource with hundreds of ideas for outdoor activities sorted by age, length, season and program area that adhere to public health guidelines.
Let the Children Play: Getting children and youth outdoors now for an active recovery (SickKids, NCFST & FIFSW, 2021)	SickKids, Native Child and Family Services Toronto, University of Toronto	Ontario	Report: Call to Action Report	Health	Policy Leaders	A call to action to the Ontario government to prioritize children's health and wellbeing by supporting outdoor physical activity and play.
Going Wild Program (Sierra Club BC, 2015)	Sierra Club	Victoria, British Columbia	Meeting: Workshops	Education, Environment	Parents, teachers, early childhood educators	Free environmental education workshops provided online and in-person while adhering to public health guidelines.
Walking Curriculum: An initiative for educators to take learning outside for part of the day for 30 days (SFU Faculty of Education, 2021)	Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Education	Canada	Program: School Challenge	Education, Environment	Teachers, early childhood educators	A friendly challenge for teachers to take students outdoors every day for 30 days, with an emphasis this year on the benefit of reducing COVID-19 transmission risk.
Exercise and screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic (Colley, Bushnik & Langlois, 2020)	Statistics Canada	Canada	Report: Survey results	Health	Residents of all ages, policy leaders	A series of surveys with Canadians on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on screen time and sedentary behaviour.
Take Me Outside 2020 Impact Report (Take Me Outside, 2020)	Take Me Outside	Canada	Report: 2020 Impact Report	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders	A report on Take Me Outside initiatives in 2020, highlighting the importance of getting outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic.
As schools reopen, will this be the least fit generation of kids? (Reilly & Tremblay, 2020)	The Conversation	Canada	Media: Opinion piece	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, parents	An article discussing the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on the overall health of children.

Free Range Kids (Riazi & Faulkner, 2020)	The Conversation	Canada	Media: Opinion piece	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, parents and children	An article discussing the grades children received on the ParticipACTION 2020 Report Card, highlighting the importance of getting outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote physical activity.
Rewild your kids (Reilly & Tremblay, 2021)	The Conversation	Canada	Media: Opinion piece	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders, parents	An article discussing the benefits of outdoor play and physical activity for children and why it should be a priority post-pandemic.
The Great Canadian Hike (The Great Trail of Canada, 2020)	The Great Trail	Canada	Program: Virtual challenge	Environment, Recreation	Residents of all ages, parents and children	A virtual challenge to share experiences hiking new areas of the Great Trail in Canada to encourage outdoor physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Young Canadians Roundtable on Health (YCRH) Webinar Series (The Sandbox Project, 2020)	The Sandbox Project	Canada	Meeting: Webinar series	Education, Health	School administrators, teachers, early childhood educators	A webinar series on how to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic as a family through engaging in physical activity and healthy eating.
National Guidelines: Responsible Trail Operations and Visitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Trans Canada Trail, 2020)	Trans Canada Trail	Canada	Report: Guideline	Environment, Recreation	Residents of all ages	A guideline and toolkit for operating trails while mitigating COVID-19 transmission risk.
Jouer dehors pendant la crise Covid-19: risques ou bénéfiques pour la santé? (Frohlich, Brussoni & St-Arneault, 2020)	Université de Montréal	Canada	Meeting: Webcast	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders	A webinar discussing the consequences of physical distancing on families' ability to get active.

Why COVID-19 loneliness can be especially hard on teens (Mcmaster, 2020)	University of Alberta Folio Journal	Alberta	Media: Blog post/ news article	Health	Policy leaders, parents	An article discussing the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on the mental health of teenagers and the importance of getting into nature for health.
Parent anxiety and perceptions of their child’s physical activity and sedentary behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada (McCormack, Doyle-Baker, Peterson et al., 2020)	University of Calgary, Waseda University, Brock University	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	An exploration of the association between parent COVID-19 pandemic anxiety and the physical activity and sedentary behaviours of school-aged children.
The Impact of COVID-19 on Health Behaviour, Stress, Financial and Food Security among Middle to High Income Canadian Families with Young Children (Carroll, Sadowski, Laila et al., 2020)	University of Guelph	Canada	Report: Research publication	Health, Recreation	Parents and children, researchers, policy leaders	A survey of parents and their children on changes in physical activity, sleep, screen time and dietary habits during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Guided Family Hikes (West Hants Parks and Recreation, 2020)	West Hants Parks and Recreation	West Hants, Nova Scotia	Program: Guided hikes	Environment, Recreation	Residents of all ages, parents and children	Guided hikes provided to family ‘bubbles’ to increase outdoor physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Outdoor Lessons and Blogs (Wild About Vancouver, 2021)	Wild About Vancouver	Vancouver, British Columbia	Program: Resources for Canadians to get active while at home	Education, Environment Recreation	Parents and children	A series of outdoor lessons and blogs to help support Canadians in getting active while at home.
Play & Resiliency During COVID-19 (World Urban Parks, 2020)	World Urban Parks Webinar	Canada	Meeting: Webinar	Health, Recreation	Policy leaders	A webinar presented by OPC discussing outdoor play and resiliency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Appendix C: List of Publications Included in the Outdoor Play in Canada Scoping Review 2015-2021

1. Adamo, K. B. *et al.* Does intervening in childcare settings impact fundamental movement skill development?. *Med. Sci. Sports Exerc.* **48**, 926–932 (2016).
2. Holt, N. L. *et al.* An intergenerational study of perceptions of changes in active free play among families from rural areas of Western Canada. *BMC Public Health* **16**, 829 (2016).
3. Janssen, I. Estimating whether replacing time in active outdoor play and sedentary video games with active video games influences youth’s mental health. *J. Adolesc. Health* **59**, 517–522 (2016).
4. Larouche, R., Garriguet, D., Gunnell, K. E., Goldfield, G. S. & Tremblay, M. S. Outdoor time, physical activity, sedentary time, and health indicators at ages 7 to 14: 2012/2013 Canadian Health Measures Survey. *Heal. reports* **27**, 3–13 (2016).
5. Barnes, J. D. *et al.* Results From Canada’s 2016 ParticipACTION Report card on physical activity for children and youth. *J. Phys. Act. Health* **13**, S110–S116 (2016).
6. Michaelson, V., King, N., Janssen, I., Lawal, S. & Pickett, W. Electronic screen technology use and connection to nature in Canadian adolescents: a mixed methods study. *Can. J. Public Health* **111**, 502–514 (2020).
7. Clark, E. & Dumas, A. Children’s active outdoor play: ‘good’ mothering and the organisation of children’s free time. *Sociol. Health Illn.* **42**, 1229–1242 (2020).
8. Fortier, M., McFadden, T. & Faulkner, G. Evidence-based recommendations to assist adults with depression to become lifelong movers. *Heal. Promot. chronic Dis. Prev. Canada Res. policy Pract.* **40**, 299–308 (2020).
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12. Truelove, S., Vanderloo, L. M. & Tucker, P. Defining and measuring active play among young children: a systematic review. *J. Phys. Act. Health* **14**, 155–166 (2017).

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14. Hewer, M. J., Scott, D. J. & Gough, W. A. Differences in the importance of weather and weather-based decisions among campers in Ontario parks (Canada). *Int. J. Biometeorol.* **61**, 1805–1818 (2017).
15. Potvin Kent, M. & Velkers, C. Not just fun and games: toy advertising on television targeting children promotes sedentary play. *J. Phys. Act. Health* **14**, 773–778 (2017).
16. Lim, C., Donovan, A. M., Harper, N. J. & Naylor, P.-J. Nature elements and fundamental motor skill development opportunities at five elementary school districts in British Columbia. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **14**, (2017).
17. Smart, E. *et al.* Creating an inclusive leisure space: strategies used to engage children with and without disabilities in the arts-mediated program Spiral Garden. *Disabil. Rehabil.* **40**, 199–207 (2018).
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