



Outdoor Play in Canada

2021 State of the Sector Summary Report





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 people living in Canada. The leadership of OPC, along with diverse partners, developed the *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play* in 2015. This statement highlighted the unequivocal benefits of outdoor play for children's health and development. It was a significant advancement in uniting previously disconnected groups who each shared a passion for outdoor play. 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 propel the sector forward. It 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, an account of where we are now, and a map of where we need to go from here.

What It Is

The *State of the Sector Report* lives in various formats including a detailed research grade report, this 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.

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 63-person Consultation Group and a robust consultation process over four months; 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; translating all items into French; 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.

Outdoor Play Priorities

A central goal of this Report was to identify major priorities and actions needed to move these priorities forward to serve as a common vision for the outdoor play sector to thrive over the next five years. In consultation with 302 outdoor play stakeholders across Canada, we identified nine major priorities. These priorities are not listed in rank order given the diversity of interests and sectors they encompass. They are:



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. This priority is intended to recognize all these benefits and suggest how this information may be promoted across sectors.



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: built environments (e.g., playgrounds, streets) and natural spaces that already exist and do not need to be built. This priority considers the many factors associated with outdoor spaces (geographical, cultural, social, ecological) and differences between urban and rural, built cities and natural environments.

Advocate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion 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’. This is both a stand-alone priority and one that is embedded throughout all priorities.



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

The phrasing of this priority was agreed upon by those who identify as Indigenous within the *State of the Sector Report* Consultation Group and was based on language used in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. This is both a stand-alone priority and one that is embedded throughout all priorities.



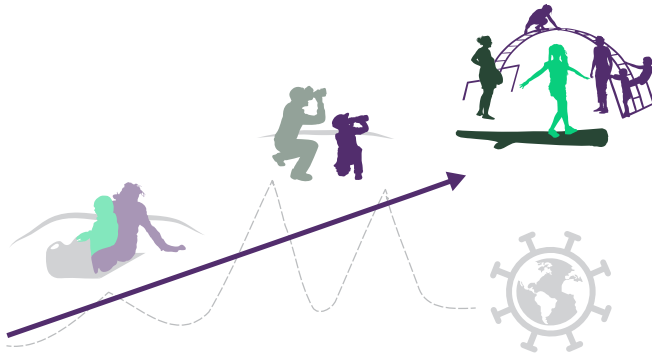
Reframe Views on Safety and Outdoor Play

This priority focuses on the need to reframe the way in which we provide outdoor play so that there is a better balance between protecting against injury and promoting beneficial play opportunities.



Research and Support Data Collection on Outdoor Play

This priority focuses on gaps in knowledge related to outdoor play, and what research and data collection efforts are needed to address those gaps.



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

This priority highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rediscovery of the outdoors for physical and mental health, for enjoyment, fun, relaxation, and for a way to feel ‘normal’. This rediscovery and renewed appreciation of the outdoors has great potential to be an accelerator for all these outdoor play priorities.



Increase and Improve Professional Development Opportunities in Outdoor Play

This priority highlights the need to increase and improve professional development opportunities for all those involved in outdoor play (e.g., educators, parents, coaches, students). Professional development opportunities can help shift mindsets and provide the tools to advocate for and promote outdoor play.

Expand and Enable Cross-Sectoral Connections/Collaborations

Outdoor play initiatives, programs and projects are found across many sectors. This priority emphasizes the need to promote connections and collaborations across sectors so that we work together, learn from each other and amplify each other’s work.

Conclusion

We hope that this *State of the Sector Report* and the above priorities will serve to unite the many diverse outdoor play-oriented groups in Canada, create a sense of community and provide a common vision for the sector to succeed over the next five years. Moreover, this Report aims to rejuvenate, amplify, power and guide the movement to encourage all people living in Canada to get outside – to play, learn, teach, grow and develop as healthy, caring and environmentally attentive stewards of each other and of the Land, water, plants and animals.

To find the full report, visit www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/ssr.