

Press Release

How Canada's investment in sport, physical activity and recreation pays off

New research shows emerging picture on impact of SPAR

Ottawa, ON (December 18, 2023) — In a significant step towards understanding the impact of the sport, physical activity, and recreation (SPAR) sector in Canada, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) have launched [Measuring Impact of SPAR in Canada](#). The initiative provides innovative new research, tools and resources that demonstrate the social, health, economic and environmental impact of the SPAR sector. SPAR includes things like team sports, athletics, walking and movement, and gardening, as well as venues like parks, community centres, and pools.

The comprehensive research report titled, [“The Price of Inactivity: Measuring the Powerful Impact of Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation in Canada”](#) offers an examination of the comprehensive impact of SPAR.

New research shows that investing in the sector creates a ripple effect that may lead to improved physical and mental health outcomes, helps mitigate the effects of climate change, generates revenue, creates jobs and encourages social cohesion and community engagement.

“Until now, economic assessments on the impact of SPAR in Canada, have been limited, dated or disparate. Our research provides an important emerging picture on the potential for powerful returns on investment in the SPAR sector,” says Dr. John Spence, Vice-Chair of the CFLRI Board of Directors. “Findings reflect our best efforts and will be continually updated as more data sources become available to help refine the impact, value and benefits of SPAR in Canada.”

With a focus on providing actionable data and insights, the report underscores SPAR's role as a pivotal sector in fostering healthy individuals, inclusive communities, and a thriving economy. The initiative offers valuable resources for decision-makers at all levels of government in Canada, emphasizing the substantial returns from strategic SPAR investment.

Research Snapshot:

- **Social Impact:** Sport, physical activity, and recreation are powerful agents of social transformation, contributing an estimated \$13.6 billion annually through volunteerism alone.
- **Health Impact:** Physical inactivity accounts for \$3.9 billion of annual health care expenditures. Integrating SPAR into daily life boosts public health, improves physical and mental well-being, and reduces the economic burden of physical inactivity.

- **Economic Impact:** The SPAR sector plays a vital role in Canada's economy, contributing \$37.2 billion annually to Canada's gross domestic product (GDP).
- **Environmental Impact:** SPAR can help build climate-resilient communities. The replacement value of aging SPAR infrastructure is estimated at \$42.5 billion. This underscores the essential role the physical and built environment plays in promoting health and reducing pollution, while highlighting the significant benefits derived from maintaining and upgrading aging community infrastructure amid a growing climate crisis.

"Decision makers need data and evidence to make the case for SPAR investment. By showcasing the sector's multifaceted impact, we aim to support policy development, strategic planning, and budget allocation for a healthier, more resilient, and prosperous Canada," says Howie Dayton, President of the CPRA Board of Directors. "We urge governments to consider these insights in their decision-making processes, recognizing SPAR as a cornerstone of sustainable development."

Governments in Canada invested approximately \$2 billion in SPAR infrastructure in 2022, with \$1.5 billion coming from municipalities (some municipal investment could be from federal or provincial/territorial funding through grants and contributions). Moreover, 61% of Canadians favour increased government funding for SPAR.

The research initiative presents a compelling case for strategic investment in SPAR by all levels of government and the private sector, as benefits from municipal investment in SPAR infrastructure can be seen and felt at the federal and provincial levels.

The ongoing initiative will continue to refine the data and impacts with additional research to further mitigate acknowledged data gaps and underestimates in the initial report.

For information, updates and helpful resources related to this initiative, please visit www.Measuring-Impact.ca. The website serves as a central hub for updates and collaborative efforts to further the reach and impact of SPAR across Canada.

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Contact:

For media inquiries, questions and to share your data, please [email us](#).

Resources: www.measuring-impact.ca/resources

About the Project Leads:

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

CFLRI was established in 1980. It is the leading national research organization dedicated specifically to research and surveillance on physical activity, sport, and recreation. The fundamental objective of the CFLRI is to provide credible data for policy- and decision-makers, practitioners

and researchers through knowledge creation, translation, and exchange to inform and affect evidence-based policy and practice across Canada. www.CFLRI.ca.

About the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) is a national nonprofit dedicated to fostering healthy, vibrant, and resilient communities in Canada by supporting the recreation and parks sector. CPRA convenes a national network, provides resources to the sector, and serves as a national voice on recreation and parks. By uniting the 13 provincial and territorial parks and recreation associations and their networks, CPRA reaches over 90% of Canadian municipalities. www.CPRA.ca

Acknowledgements:

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We also acknowledge and thank the Expert Committee and the Knowledge Mobilization Committee for providing us with their time, guidance and expertise.