

Charter for Recreation and Parks in Ontario



Everyone in Ontario has a right to quality, accessible and inclusive recreation and parks services in their communities – services that are essential for the health of Ontarians, the quality of life in our communities, and the sustainability of our environment.

Recreation and Parks Rights of Ontarians

Every citizen in Ontario has the right and freedom to:

- **Participation**

Participate in safe, affordable and quality recreation programs that are in harmony with the diversity of the community.

- **Active Living**

Be physically active through participation in both organized and informal sport and recreation activities.

- **Access to Nature and the Outdoors**

Experience nature and access open spaces within their communities.

- **Enriching Experiences**

Experience the arts, cultural, heritage, sport and recreation activities in their communities.

- **A Welcoming and Inclusive Community**

Be included in activities that build strong communities, engaged citizens and a healthy family life.

- **Engagement**

Be engaged in the planning of recreation and parks in their communities and to participate in volunteer activities.

Recreation and parks can help us to overcome the significant challenges facing our communities today, including physical inactivity and the rising cost of health care, a rise in youth violence and the protection of our environment.

GOALS for Ontario Communities

To fulfill the Recreation and Parks Rights of Ontarians, every community provides these opportunities and services:

- Active transportation opportunities – i.e. accessible and inclusive human-powered forms of travel that enable people to walk or bike safely around their community.
- Safe, accessible and sustainable facilities, parks, trails and natural spaces.
- Programs (formal and informal), that are responsive to and inclusive of community needs.
- Events that bring people together and build community pride and spirit.

To achieve these goals, every community:

- 1) Has a partnership for action supported by grassroots champions and professional competence (staff and/or volunteer).
- 2) Develops and implements a viable, comprehensive recreation and parks strategy as a vital part of a healthy, active community strategy.
- 3) Exhibits strong collaboration among recreation, education, health, social and other human services.
- 4) Develops and implements policies and standards that exceed current regulations in each of the following areas of parks and recreation services:
 - Affordable access to recreation
 - Infrastructure and lifecycle replacement of parks and rec facilities
 - Screening and training of recreation and parks staff and volunteers
 - Healthy child development based on the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child
 - Learn life skills, such as swimming
- 5) Ensures a sustainable recreation and parks system through continued capital and operating investment, in cooperation with the public and private sectors (i.e. municipal, not-for-profit, foundations, and industry).
- 6) Has the capacity to measure and account for its progress and performance.

The ROLE of Ontario's Recreation and Park Leaders

To support the Goals for Ontario Communities, the recreation and parks sector takes responsibility to:

- Be a strong voice in shaping and influencing public policy.
- Use effective systems for recruiting and developing the qualified human resources necessary to plan and deliver programs.
- Improve public awareness of the importance and benefits of recreation and parks in order to enhance the position of parks and recreation on the public agenda.
- Provide effective and timely applied research that supports the understanding of how recreation and parks contributes to inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities.
- Be recognized as an active and valued partner in cross-sectoral collaborations.
- Undertake innovative and evidence-based approaches.

Why this Charter is Important

Recreation and parks services contribute to the quality of life in our communities, the health of Ontarians and to the sustainability of our environment. In every community, recreation and parks makes a real and measurable impact on the lives of Ontarians. Research has shown that recreation and parks contributes to physical and mental health, acts as a protective factor for youth-at-risk and helps improve the circumstances for those living in poverty.

We must ensure that there is equitable access for all Ontarians, that our infrastructure and programs are responsive to community needs, and that our parks are protected.

This is why a “Charter for Recreation and Parks in Ontario” was created. While every community in Ontario is unique, there are common goals that all communities should strive to achieve to ensure that all of their citizens are able to enjoy the significant benefits provided by recreation and parks.

This charter supports a community’s commitment to ensuring that their citizens’ right to recreation and parks services is met.

Charter Development: Background

Senior leaders of recreation and parks services, representing small and large communities from across Ontario, have identified common issues and challenges facing municipalities. The number one priority identified is the need to ensure that the significant values and benefits of recreation and parks are:

- a) clearly understood as a significant contributor to healthy, sustainable communities; and
- b) realized by all Ontarians through effective infrastructure and delivery of services.

A task force was commissioned to work in cooperation with the boards of organizations in parks and recreation to develop a charter to:

- provide a common vision that communities can use to support and raise awareness of the value and benefits of recreation and parks; and
- provide common goals that can help to guide recreation and parks service delivery and evaluation.

In February 2008, the task force presented a “Draft Charter” to the delegates of a provincial Senior Managers’ Institute. Their review, revisions and subsequent ratification provided the basis for the content of this Charter for Recreation and Parks in Ontario.

Glossary of Terms

Accessible: Citizens are able to access (recreation and parks) services without having to surmount undue obstacles or barriers.

Active living: A way of life in which physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual activities are valued and are integrated into daily living.

Active transportation: Active transportation is any form of self-propelled (i.e. non-motorized) mode of transportation that uses human energy, such as walking, cycling or in-line skating.

Cross-sectoral collaboration: Different sectors (e.g. health, social services, economic development) working together to solve a common problem or achieve a common objective.

Facilities: Built or enclosed structures used for community recreation and leisure. May include multi-purpose recreation/fitness facilities, soccer fields, ball diamonds, arenas, pools as well as recreation centres, seniors' centres and community buildings.

Inclusive: Creating an environment where everyone, regardless of circumstance, is able to participate fully in their community to the best of their abilities and desires. Inclusive communities, programs and services are (to the greatest extent possible): accessible to those who cannot afford to pay; barrier free; able to accommodate special needs; safe and hate-free; and include activities that value and incorporate diversity in culture, race, language and sexual orientation; and that support gender equality.

Natural environment: The air, land and water, or any combination or part thereof, that occurs naturally within an area. May include lakes, rivers, forests, ravines and grasslands.

Parks and open space: Includes all outdoor open spaces that provide opportunities and benefits for active, passive and organized community recreation and leisure; contribute to the preservation and protection of open space and the environment; and are generally accessible to the public. May include parklands, trails, forests, wetlands and beaches.

Recreation: Includes all of those activities in which individuals choose to participate in during leisure time. Activities are not confined solely to sports and physical recreation programs, but include artistic, creative, cultural, social and intellectual activities. Defining attributes of recreation include: physical and artistic experiences; activities freely chosen by participants (non-mandatory and occurring out of school); opportunity for progressive skill development and fun.

Sustainable: Can be continued in the future and uses natural and human resources in a way that does not jeopardize the opportunities of future generations.

Contact

For further information about the Charter:

Parks and Recreation Ontario • 416-426-7142 • www.prontario.org • pro@prontario.org