

TO THE ATTENTION OF: Mayors, Municipal Councils and Recreation Directors

RE: Request to endorse Policy Framework on Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians

We are pleased to provide you with the recently created *Policy Framework on Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians* which on December 1, 2009, received support by the AMO Board of Directors. In so doing, AMO recognized that recreation is a highly valued and needed service for quality of life in communities across Ontario. We are asking all municipalities to support this commitment by AMO and formally endorse the Framework through Council resolution. By endorsing the framework, you will be demonstrating your agreement with the vision for affordable access to recreation and your desire to make it a reality in your community.

In addition, building on the Framework objectives and strategies, we are encouraging all municipalities to develop a Council-approved policy on affordable access to recreation, or to strengthen policies already in place. We recognize that given the current fiscal climate, municipalities may need to take an incremental approach. The Task Group encourages collaboration and long-range planning in order to achieve the broad goals

Access to recreation is vital. Recreation connects residents to the broader community and builds resiliency, particularly in youth at risk, children living in poverty, and families who are disengaged. In addition to the physical health benefits, recreation services can foster life skills, reduce risky behaviour, improve self-esteem, and create positive relationships. This in turn can help to break the cycle of poverty and reduce health and social service costs.

Unfortunately, low-income families often miss out on the substantial benefits that recreation provides. This can be due to user fees, complex or stigmatizing fee subsidy programs, equipment costs, lack of transportation, or simply not knowing about the value of recreation or where to find affordable programs. Municipalities and community service providers face challenges in providing affordable recreation due to cost pressures, competing priorities, insufficient infrastructure and affordable spaces, and the lack of sustainable funding.

Over the past few years, the Ontario Task Group on Affordable Access to Recreation has commissioned studies, collected best practices, hosted a symposium and discussion forums, and ultimately created the Policy Framework. The goal was to create a responsive framework to provide a shared vision for Ontario that can build community action and galvanize all levels of government and allied organizations.

The Task Group has also published articles, evidence-based research, promising practices and policy and program templates to help municipalities implement access policies. Staff in your Recreation or Community Services Department can access these documents at www.prontario.org. In addition, workshops will be scheduled in March 2010 to assist those communities ready to champion Affordable Access to Recreation.

I have included highlights from the Policy Framework on the reverse side of this letter in addition to the full document which is enclosed.

We thank you in advance for your commitment to affordable access to recreation.

Sincerely,



Howie Dayton,
Chair, Ontario Task Group on Affordable Access to Recreation

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Highlights from Policy Framework on Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontarians

The Access Policy Framework recommends policy objectives and strategies that municipalities can use to remove barriers to participation for low-income residents. The Task Group recognizes that every community is unique and the objectives and strategies are meant as a benchmark for excellence. Municipalities can implement these in various ways, with a wide range of partners.

VISION

Everyone has access to affordable recreation in their community in order to enjoy health and social benefits and to improve their prospects for a better future.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Affordability · Places to play · Awareness · Inclusion · Capacity · Collaboration · Accountability

FUNDAMENTAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. Municipal and community delivery organizations establish Affordable Access Policies
2. Communities identify a core set of free, universal programs

POLICY STRATEGIES

1. Community access to community space for formal and informal recreation activities
2. Partnership & collaboration to determine how to make affordable access to recreation a reality in communities
3. Targeted community outreach and engagement to build awareness among marginalized populations of recreation benefits and opportunities

The full Policy Framework and background documents are available online at:
www.prontario.org

Members of Ontario Task Group on Affordable Access to Recreation

- Association of Municipalities of Ontario
- Canadian Tire Jump Start
- Canadian Parks and Recreation Association
- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
- Ontario Municipal Social Services Association
- Ontario Public Health Association
- Parks and Recreation Ontario
 - In association with: Heart and Stroke Foundation; YMCA; United Way; Ministries of Health Promotion; Children and Youth Services, and Education.

Parks and Recreation Ontario also serves as the Task Group's secretariat with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion.

e: access@prontario.org

w: www.prontario.org