



SASKATCHEWAN INDEX OF WELLBEING Guest Blog

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Rising to the Occasion: Responding to Inequality in Recreation, Now and in the Future

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Recreation has long been a foundation for personal, community, economic and societal wellbeing.

According to [A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing](#) (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association), recreation is defined as, “the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing.”

In this province, the [Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association](#) (SPRA) is the voice of the recreation industry, providing leadership, support and services that contribute to the quality of life for people in Saskatchewan.

We envision a Saskatchewan in which all people have equitable access to recreation experiences that contribute to their health and wellbeing. These experiences result in connected and engaged community members, and provide connection and attachment to the natural environment.

SPRA’s membership encompasses Provincial Recreation Associations, Community/Band Administration, Sport, Culture and Recreation Districts, and Associate and Commercial members. In partnership with our members, we have established an enviable recreation system that delivers a wide variety of programs, services, education, training and events across the province.

Yet, despite an understanding of the benefits of recreation and a sophisticated province-wide delivery system, insights from the October 2019 Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing (SIW) report demonstrate that Leisure and Culture (including recreation) has seen the biggest decrease of all domains, dropping 10.7% since 1994. From these statistics, we also see that inequalities in participation exist in physical activity, volunteerism and social leisure time - particularly among young and racialized women.

We believe that recreation is a public good; however increasingly, access to recreation is considered a privilege. While many in our province are able to enjoy the benefits of recreation, there are numerous barriers to participation, including age, gender, race, ability, socioeconomic status and geographical location, as well as many personal and perceived barriers such as confidence, motivation and time.

SPRA members have created programs and services that strive to address and reduce these barriers. Some examples include providing transportation to and from activities, assisting families with registration fees and equipment purchases, providing meals and networking opportunities, offering multi-generational activities, focusing on specific underrepresented groups, employing knowledgeable support personnel, and ensuring programs and facilities are accessible both physically and financially.

As an organization, SPRA is also committed to supporting inclusive access to recreation in Saskatchewan. We provide grants and funding, human resources, free and reduced-cost program and services, consultation, communications, research, networking, training and education delivered online and in-person - for a variety of ages and demographics. To ensure our programs and services remain relevant and effective, we regularly consult and partner with expert local, provincial and national organizations specializing in multiculturalism, Indigenous peoples, gender, sexual orientation, newcomers, children and youth, seniors and physical and mental abilities.

Progress is being made, but there is still much work to be done. To further complicate the situation, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to public health restrictions and the closure of many parks and recreation facilities - along with the postponement, cancellation or reduction of programs and services. There is also the concern of reductions in municipal revenues, secure jobs and the general health of the economy.

Access to recreation facilities, parks, programs and services will continue to evolve in coming months - and years - and it is unclear whether the system will ever return to the state we once enjoyed. Yet with any crisis, comes silver linings. Some of the initiatives that are taking place in Saskatchewan communities are very inspiring - people are adapting, innovating, continuing to work, play and connect online, getting outside, spending more quality time with family, celebrating front-line heroes and enjoying physical activity. There seems to be a renewed appreciation of our recreation system - and our beautiful parks and open spaces. We are continuing to build community and - We are coming together, while staying apart!

While society has been profoundly impacted by the effects of COVID-19, the benefits and importance of recreation and leisure activities remain a constant, perhaps now more than ever.

There will undoubtedly be challenges and changes ahead for the recreation industry and society in general. However, with a renewed appreciation for wellness and innovation, and a desire to address inequalities, we are confident that the people of Saskatchewan, and the recreation industry that supports them, will continue to rise to the occasion.



More information on the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association: sprask.ca

More information on the Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing: saskwellbeing.ca