

Physical Activity for
Health Collaborative:
Consultation with Equity-Deserving
and Less Active Families

Engagement Report



Physical Activity
for Health Collaborative

June 6, 2025

Prepared by: Be the Change Group



Be the Change Group acknowledges our office is on the unsundered land of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, which have been here since time immemorial. In our journey to reconciliation, our team is working toward understanding of and allyship with these nations, and decolonizing the systems of which we are a part.

Engagements for this project were carried out across the diverse and unceded territories of numerous Indigenous communities situated throughout what is now called British Columbia. We recognize the critical role that place—both geographic and cultural—plays in shaping opportunities for physical activity and engagement. Additionally, we respectfully acknowledge and affirm the traditional knowledge systems and lived experiences shared by Indigenous participants, which have enriched and informed this project in meaningful and substantive ways.

We commit to ongoing learning, unlearning, and relationship-building with Indigenous communities, and to upholding the principles of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance in all our work.



Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our appreciation to the BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society for their leadership and dedication to improving health equity for families across British Columbia (B.C.). This project was made possible through their guidance and collaboration, along with the support of the Physical Activity for Health Collaborative.

We are especially grateful to the community organizations who played key roles in the consultation process, either by facilitating focus groups or by supporting participant recruitment. In particular, we acknowledge:

- **McCreary Centre Society, Canucks Autism Network, MOSAIC Family Centre, YMCA BC, Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (I-SPARC), and Ahmad Tamim Sharifzai** for facilitating focus groups directly with their communities, and for creating culturally safe, welcoming spaces for open and meaningful dialogue.
- **Sunny Hill Health Centre, Q-Munity,** and the **RE-IMAGYN BC** study team for supporting recruitment by connecting us with youth, parents, and caregivers who brought diverse and valuable perspectives to the project.
- We also acknowledge the **Centre for Family Equity** for sharing the findings from their community engagement with low-income families across B.C. These findings, which reflect the lived experiences of parents and caregivers facing intersecting forms of marginalization, have been incorporated throughout this report—including the identification of barriers, facilitators, and recommendations provided by participants. Their inclusion ensures that the voices and perspectives of low-income families in B.C. are meaningfully reflected in our collective understanding of physical activity access.

These contributions were essential for ensuring that our engagement was inclusive and reflective of the lived realities of equity-deserving groups across the province.

Finally, we extend thanks to the youth, parents, caregivers, and community leaders who participated in the focus groups. Your stories, reflections, and recommendations form the foundation of this report and will guide future efforts to make physical activity more accessible and inclusive for all families in B.C.



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Citation:
Be the Change Group. (2025). BCAHL consultation with equity-deserving families: Final report. Prepared for the BC Alliance for Healthy Living.

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Executive summary

In collaboration with the BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society (BCAHL) and the Physical Activity for Health Collaborative, Be the Change Group conducted a series of community-led focus groups with equity-deserving families and youth across B.C. The engagement process involved 78 participants across nine focus groups, facilitated both by trusted community organizations and Be the Change Group. Participants included Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, newcomer and refugee parents, 2SLGBTQIA+¹ youth, parents of children with disabilities, and youth from rural and remote communities. In addition, this report integrates findings from a parallel engagement conducted by the Centre for Family Equity with low-income parents and caregivers across B.C. These findings ensure that the perspectives of families experiencing poverty and intersectional marginalization are reflected throughout the analysis of barriers, facilitators, and recommendations.

This report uses the Social Ecological Model as its primary framework for organizing findings and recommendations. This model recognizes that behaviour is influenced by multiple levels of interaction: personal, social, organizational, environmental, and public policy levels. By categorizing barriers and facilitators at these levels, and providing recommendations at the organizational, environmental, and policy levels of this model, the report ensures that the complexity of participants’ lived realities is reflected in the findings and can be used to create meaningful and successful interventions.

Through these engagements, participants identified a range of barriers and facilitators that impact their access to physical activity. Administrative barriers, lack of culturally safe programming, insufficient infrastructure, financial barriers, and systemic exclusion emerged as prominent themes across all groups. Meanwhile, community strength, culturally grounded programs, adaptable and accessible facilities, and social connection were identified as crucial facilitators.

Across all equity-deserving groups engaged, participants offered practical, actionable recommendations aimed at creating more accessible, inclusive, and supportive environments for physical activity. Key recommendations include:

- **Organizational recommendations:** Expand culturally safe, gender-inclusive, adaptive, and family-centred programming. Increase staff training, provide consistent facilitators, and integrate Indigenous worldviews and leadership in program design.
- **Community recommendations:** Strengthen infrastructure by improving access to recreation spaces, transportation, and community-driven programs. Foster welcoming environments through peer leadership, anti-discrimination policies, and community events.
- **Policy recommendations:** Implement funding strategies to reduce cost barriers, support transportation, mandate inclusive practices, and invest in Indigenous-led and culturally grounded initiatives.

Findings from this consultation affirm and expand upon previous research by offering deeper, community-specific insights into the factors that shape physical activity participation. By centring the voices of families and youth directly impacted by systemic inequities, these recommendations offer a pathway for creating a healthier, more inclusive physical activity landscape across B.C.

¹ Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other orientations.

Recommendations

This report begins with a series of community-driven recommendations for improving access to physical activity for five groups of equity-deserving families across B.C.: Indigenous families, newcomer and refugee families, families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, families of children with disabilities, families living in rural and remote communities, and low-income families experiencing intersectional marginalization.

Every recommendation reflects the voices, experiences, and wisdom shared from the participants from the Be the Change Group and Centre for Family Equity (CFE) engagements. The recommendations provided below are a reflection of the direct ideas participants shared, and have been slightly edited for clarity and organizational purposes. Quotations from the participants which inform these recommendations can be found in [Appendix A](#). Full details regarding this project’s methodology and findings are provided on pages 18–24.

The recommendations are structured according to the **Social Ecological Model**, which is used here to categorize the recommendations by their level of influence: organizational, environmental, and public policy. A focus on these three levels of the Social Ecological Model ensures these recommendations provide actionable insight for interested policy makers, program leaders, and community organizations.²

Because many participants hold multiple, intersecting identities, similar recommendations were shared across multiple groups. These overlaps reflect common barriers and opportunities for action that can benefit multiple equity-deserving communities and therefore are shared as common recommendations within the Social Ecological Model levels. The common recommendations reflect shared themes raised by two or more equity-deserving groups, including input from low-income families engaged by the CFE.

Conversely, unique recommendations from individual equity-deserving groups will also be shared. While many organizational recommendations were shared across multiple groups, several emerged as specific to the lived realities, cultural practices, or systemic barriers experienced by particular equity-deserving communities. Each of the unique recommendations was shared by only one participant group. This structure helps to reduce redundancy, to highlight opportunities for collective action, and to maintain the visibility of specific needs raised by individual groups.

Overall, these recommendations aim to honour the insights shared by community members and provide tangible pathways for policy makers, program leaders, and community organizations to enhance equity, inclusion, and participation in physical activity across the province.

² No recommendations were identified in participants’ responses that mapped to the personal and social levels of the Social Ecological Model. However, personal and social factors that act as barriers or facilitators to these groups’ engagement in physical activity are provided in [Appendices E](#) and [F](#) of this report (see pages 67–70 and 71–72).

Organizational recommendations

This section presents participant-informed recommendations to improve organizational practices that affect access to and experiences within physical activity programs.

Common recommendations

Design programming that welcomes all ages and supports whole-family wellness

- **Indigenous recreation and sport leaders** recommended ensuring that activities are family-friendly and multigenerational, welcoming little ones, youth, parents, and Elders. Programs should support holistic wellness, addressing mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical needs.
- **Newcomer and refugee families** shared that they benefit from programs that allow them to participate together, therefore recommending further development of family swim times, parent-child fitness classes, and outdoor fitness stations that support collective movement and bonding.
- **Families impacted by low income** recommended open family gym nights, so that their family, along with other families, can play together.

Create more sensory-friendly spaces and activities

- **Parents of children with disabilities** believe physical activity spaces should be designed to accommodate sensory needs, including quieter environments, smaller group sizes, and flexibility for individualized support. These changes reduce overwhelm and support participation for children with autism and other sensory processing needs.
- **Youth in rural and remote communities** recommended adapting lighting, noise levels, and group size to accommodate sensory needs. Offering noise-dampening tools like headphones and creating alternatives to overstimulating team sports environments is helpful.
- **Families impacted by low income** recommended creating standard best practices for all recreational facilities regarding low-sensory swim and skating times and other measures to provide unique access times for children and youth impacted by neurodiversity. They also recommended that school programs should use physical activity to treat ADHD—particularly the use of martial arts for concentration.

Offer a diversity of physical activity options that reflect community strengths and interests

- **Indigenous recreation and sport leaders** believe providing programs outside of mainstream sports to be important. They recommend providing a balance of team and individual activities, indoor and outdoor options, and opportunities to be active in nature—including trail running, skiing, and biking.
- **Newcomer and refugee families** would benefit from more non-competitive, and low-barrier recreational activities. They recommend options beyond traditional sports—like walking clubs, dance, yoga, and indoor playgrounds—that support physical and emotional well-being. It is also important to them that these activities are welcoming to all abilities and experience levels.
- **Youth from rural and remote communities** want to participate in more diverse offerings such as yoga, hiking, self-defence, dance, nature-based activities, and non-competitive recreation. They recommended teachers in school gym classes allow students to choose what works for their bodies, interests, and identities. They also shared beginner-friendly teams and trial options where youth can explore new sports without performance pressure, which can help break the barrier of unfamiliarity and fear of failure.

- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth** highlighted a big need for increased activity options beyond competitive team sports due to their gendered nature. Designing low-pressure, recreational, and non-competitive opportunities that emphasize fun and self-expression over performance are key. This helps create welcoming environments for youth who may not thrive in traditional competitive structures.
- **Families impacted by low income** recommended many ideas regarding diversifying physical activity options, such as:
 - » Programming should consider older teenagers aged 14 and up, as they have unique social and physical activity needs. This includes increasing physical activity options beyond costly team sports.
 - » School programming specifically should expand their options for physical activity, as the children and youth are already there, no need to travel, safe and accessible, peers and friends participate easily together.
 - » There should be casual public access to sports in public areas in the summertime, such as “pick up” volleyball at the beach and basketball.
 - » Neighbourhood houses and community centres should not focus solely on “scheduled” sign-up classes but reserve time for free play and sport drop-ins.

Make recreational hours more flexible and responsive to diverse schedules

- **Newcomer and refugee families, as well as families impacted by low income** would like to see expanded operating recreational facility hours to include evenings and weekends. Many families and lone parents—especially those balancing multiple jobs—are unable to participate during conventional hours. Recreation centres should reflect diverse work-life realities.



Facilitate community-building and knowledge sharing through inclusive activity programs

- **Newcomer and refugee parents** suggested creating segmented programs tailored to specific groups (e.g. newcomer moms, seniors, youth) that foster peer support, build local connections, to address the isolation they feel through shared physical activity.
- **Parents of children with disabilities** said they would benefit from facilitated community-building events for parents and caregivers during programming. They recommended sessions be structured to include opportunities for parents to connect, network, and observe. While children engage in play, parents should be supported in building their own sense of community, which will reduce isolation and strengthen informal support networks.
- **Youth from rural and remote communities** wish for physical activity programming to have more emphasis on collaboration, peer support, and shared growth in physical activity environments. Welcoming social structures reduce isolation and increase long-term engagement.

Foster safer, more inclusive environments across programs

- **Both 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and youth from rural and remote communities** shared that programs should actively address discrimination and bullying through staff training, peer leadership, and ongoing oversight. Safe, supportive environments are essential for participation and long-term engagement.

Provide free or accessible equipment to reduce cost barriers

- **Youth who live in rural and remote communities** recommended organizations to establish equipment libraries, swap programs, or gym spaces that provide gear at no cost. Ensuring youth have access to what they need eliminates a key barrier to participation.
- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth** shared that if equipment was offered for free for activities that require expensive equipment such as skiing and snowboarding, they would participate more often.
- **Families impacted by low income** also said equipment access is a core part of program delivery and support for those who cannot afford to buy their own should be available. They also recommended creating and expanding equipment exchange programs.

Foster mentorship and youth leadership in physical activity programs

- **Families impacted by low income** believe positive role models and mentors are key to the provision of physical activity programming to combat social isolation for at-risk, low-income children, youth, and whole families.
- **Indigenous recreation and sport leaders** recommended positioning Indigenous youth as leaders, not just participants. Build programs that elevate youth as facilitators and mentors, especially older youth guiding younger peers. Youth leadership fosters confidence, pride, and long-term engagement.

Unique recommendations

Indigenous families

- **Create culturally safe and creative programs.** Replace competition with collaboration by using traditional games, storytelling, and playful metaphors to encourage participation and create space for joy, healing, and belonging.
- **Integrate food into programs as a cultural connector and leadership tool.** Offer food at physical activity gatherings. Meals nourish participants, attract families, and provide leadership roles for youth—who can prepare, serve, and learn responsibility through this work.
- **Ensure programs are led by consistent, trusted local facilitators.** Ensure programs are run by the same community leaders over time. Consistency builds trust, supports youth growth, and keeps participation strong year after year.
- **Invest in formal training for Indigenous recreation leaders.** Provide culturally relevant, accessible training for Indigenous facilitators so they're fully equipped to run sustainable, safe, and inspiring programs in their own communities.
- **Re-centre programs on land-based learning and cultural connection.** Address the urban disconnection from land by embedding outdoor, land-based activities into all programming. Teach youth about plants, language, stories, and stewardship as part of every movement experience.

Newcomer and refugee families

- **Expand culturally adaptive gender-specific programming.** Community centres should offer gender-specific swim times, fitness spaces, and culturally safe options to accommodate diverse religious and cultural needs. These efforts are especially important for increasing participation among women and girls.
- **Invest in more trained recreation facilitators, especially for youth programming.** Many newcomer families experience repeated program cancellations due to staff shortages. Sustained investment in hiring and retaining facilitators—especially in dance, swimming, and community-based activities—is essential to program consistency and accessibility.
- **Provide on-site child care to increase parent access to physical activity.** Offer child-minding services at recreation centres to allow parents—particularly mothers—to attend classes and programs without needing external care arrangements.

2SLGBTQIA+ youth

- **Update registration and team forms to reflect gender diversity.** Replace binary gender fields on team sign ups and application forms with inclusive options and give youth the autonomy to choose which gender team they feel most comfortable playing on. Programs should consider grouping by comfort level or skill rather than enforcing gender-based divisions.
- **Provide flexible, hybrid participation models.** Offer recorded, online, or hybrid options for programming. This allows youth to participate when in-person attendance is not possible due to mental health, social anxiety, or energy levels, supporting autonomy and accessibility.

Families with children with disabilities

- **Expand accessible and adaptive programming in community centres.** Physical activity opportunities must be inclusive by design—not added on as extras. Community hubs and rec centres should offer adaptive programming as a standard, with one-on-one or modified options available, especially for younger children who need more individualized support.
- **Increase the availability of one-on-one support staff.** Programs must include higher support ratios without expecting parents to serve as caregivers during sessions. Many families are already navigating chronic exhaustion and systemic barriers. Having one-on-one support available increases independence for children and reduces the emotional and logistical burden on parents.
- **Restore or develop volunteer-based support models.** Programs should explore creative staffing solutions—such as trained volunteers—to provide one-on-one support for children who need it. This ensures families aren’t excluded due to financial limitations or lack of external funding, and creates opportunities for broader community engagement.

Families living in rural and remote communities

- **Implement proactive monitoring of behaviour and social dynamics.** Equip recreation leaders with tools and authority to address bullying and exclusion in real-time. Youth participation depends on feeling emotionally and physically safe in activity spaces.
- **Integrate mental health and mindset education into physical activity.** Teach youth that physical activity is for joy, well-being, and self-care—not just performance. Embedding mindset coaching within programming helps build healthy relationships with movement.

Low-income families

- **Foster better information access.** Create a centralized accessible information hub for available programs and supports. Also, more support should be given to newcomers to help them access information about activities and support from government, schools, and other nonprofit and private organizations.
- **Create separate access for teens and youth.** Separate or reserve community centre gym times for youth/teens with coaches and mentors on site to help them learn the machines and design workouts.
- **Support lone parents to exercise independently as well.** Host single-parent gym nights so lone parents can meet and mingle without rejection or stigma—try not to lump all the “different families” into one event.
- **Create easier subsidy applications in the following ways:**
 - » Automatic enrolment for Leisure Access Passes based on taxes, CRA, or Canada Child Tax amounts, which reduces the constant need to apply with longer-term passes.
 - » Ability to apply the Student Affordability Fund available through schools to physical activities and costs for low-income families. Participants clarified that school supplies and sometimes food are available for low-income families through this fund—why not physical activities too?
- **Expand eligibility criteria that includes residency status.** All children should be eligible for activity programming regardless of their Canadian residency status.

Environmental recommendations

This section presents participant-informed recommendations to improve environmental practices that affect access to and experiences within physical activity programs.

Common recommendations

Build and maintain local recreation infrastructure

- **Indigenous recreation and sport leaders** recommend ensuring every community has access to safe, accessible, and culturally relevant facilities—walking trails, sports fields, bike paths, and more—to support skill development and youth success.
- **Newcomer and refugee families** hope for an expanded number of indoor playgrounds, covered parks, and walking tracks—especially in neighbourhoods with large newcomer populations. It is also important to provide well-lit, safe environments to support evening use, especially for women and families.

Remove transportation barriers to support equitable access

- **Newcomer and refugee families** wished for transportation support, such as shuttle buses, to ensure families can travel safely and affordably to recreation programs that may not be within walking distance.
- **Families living in rural and remote areas** recommend further investment in affordable, accessible transportation for rural youth. Transportation is a recurring barrier. Provincial and municipal governments must subsidize or provide low-cost options to help youth travel to recreation sites safely and reliably.
- **Families impacted by low income** recommended the following transportation considerations:
 - » Include transit and transportation as a part of program delivery to overcome mobility barriers for low-income families.
 - » Expand transportation access, bus routes, bus stops, and bike paths to all recreation centres, pools, and gyms.

Unique recommendations

Indigenous families

- **Use physical activity to build strong, connected communities.** Centre programming around shared experiences—group games, feasts, and land-based activities that foster togetherness and community pride.

Newcomer and refugee families

- **Increase availability of local, accessible, and culturally relevant programming.** Address waitlists for popular activities, reduce travel time by expanding local options, and ensure programs are located near newcomer communities. Provide subsidies for private-sector programming where community centre capacity is limited.

2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Note: no environmental recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

Families with children with disabilities

- **Make inclusion the default across all recreation services—not the exception.** Inclusive programming should not be limited to specialized services. Mainstream community centres must proactively include children with disabilities by embedding adaptive approaches into their core offerings. Reliance on niche programs alone is not sufficient to meet the widespread need.

Families living in rural and remote communities

Note: no environmental recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of families living in rural and remote communities.

Low-income families

- **Improve the safety of community spaces to support active living.** Participants emphasized the need for clean, well-maintained, and safe public parks—including access to usable bathrooms and regular removal of hazards such as drug paraphernalia—to ensure these spaces are welcoming and usable for families.



Policy recommendations

This section presents participant-informed recommendations to improve policies that affect access to and experiences within physical activity programs.

Common recommendations

Centre equity and community priorities in recreation policy and planning

- **Indigenous sport and recreation leaders** recommended community-controlled development of recreation spaces, to invest in the creation and maintenance of trails, gyms, and gathering spaces that communities themselves prioritize. Let Indigenous leaders guide how and where funding is spent.
- **Newcomer and refugee families** recommended that policies and funding strategies reflect the unique needs of immigrant and refugee families. This includes cultural safety, language accessibility, trauma-informed approaches, and prioritization of communities experiencing the most systemic barriers to participation.
- **Families living in rural and remote communities** recommended developing rural-focused physical activity strategies that address geographic barriers, cost burdens, and limited options. Policies must account for differences in access, community resources, and infrastructure.

Fund free or low-cost programs and equipment access to ensure all youth can participate, regardless of income or geography

- **Rural and remote youth** suggested funding rural programs that provide free access and equipment, as well as allocating funding to ensure rural youth can try new activities without cost barriers. Programs should include “try-it” nights, youth passes, and equipment rentals at no charge.
- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth** recommended removing financial barriers by offering free or sliding-scale programs and ensuring access to equipment without cost. These changes are essential for supporting equity, especially for youth who may lack family financial support or access to gear.

Implement equitable subsidy policies for essential youth activities

- **Newcomer and refugee families, alongside families impacted by low income**, recommend implementing better municipal and provincial policies that reduce or eliminate costs for families with low incomes, and subsidies should reflect the cost of living and household size. It is important that there are full or partial subsidies for swim lessons, gymnastics, team sports, and other structured activities that may be identified as core activities to growing up and acquiring life skills. For example, swimming and skating could be taught through the K–12 public education system; swimming lessons could be fully free until “proficiency” is reached for all young children in the entire province.

Unique recommendations

Indigenous families

- **Direct public funding to Indigenous-led, culturally grounded programs.** Ensure stable, long-term funding for programs that include food, traditional activities, and community leadership. Recognize that these programs often fall outside conventional funding models—and fund them anyway.
- **Make land-based learning a policy standard.** Recognize connection to land as a public health priority. Require and resource land-based learning in all Indigenous-focused physical activity programming—especially in urban areas.

Newcomer and refugee families

Note: no policy recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of newcomer and refugee families.

2SLGBTQIA+ youth

- **Implement gender-inclusive policies.** Allow participants to wear whatever workout clothes they feel most comfortable in. Removing gendered dress expectations helps queer and trans youth feel safer and more included in physical activity spaces.

Families with children with disabilities

- **Mandate inclusive program delivery across all publicly funded recreation facilities.** Establish province-wide policy standards that require public recreation centres to offer inclusive, adaptive, and accessible physical activity programming as part of their core services. These standards should include one-on-one instructional models and sensory accommodations.
- **Publicly fund one-on-one support staff for children with disabilities in recreational settings.** Implement dedicated funding streams to support the hiring of trained support workers in community-based programs. This should include full or partial wage coverage to ensure that staffing levels meet the support needs of children with disabilities without placing financial strain on families or recreation organizations.
- **Develop a provincial volunteer-based inclusion support program.** Create and fund a coordinated volunteer inclusion initiative that trains, certifies, and deploys volunteers to assist children with disabilities during recreation programs. This approach should be embedded into provincial inclusion strategies and supported through cross-sector collaboration between education, health, and community service ministries.

Families living in rural and remote communities

Note: no policy recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of families living in rural and remote communities.

Low-income families

- **Household structure should be taken into consideration when applying for activity subsidies.** Provide targeted financial support for lone-parent families.

Introduction

Background on BCAHL and the Physical Activity for Health Collaborative

The BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society (BCAHL) is a multi-sectoral coalition committed to advancing health equity and chronic disease prevention in B.C. Through evidence-informed initiatives and strategic partnerships, BCAHL supports upstream interventions that address the social determinants of health, particularly among populations facing structural barriers to wellness. The Physical Activity for Health Collaborative, an initiative supported by BCAHL, brings together leaders from across sectors (academic, health, sport, and recreation) to improve physical activity outcomes across the province. The Collaborative recognizes that despite the well-documented benefits of physical activity—from reducing chronic disease risk to enhancing mental health—inequities in access and participation persist, particularly among equity-deserving groups.

Purpose of the project

This consultation project emerged in response to growing evidence that less active families in B.C.—particularly those impacted by systemic and intersectional barriers—face unique challenges that require targeted, community-informed solutions. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical activity levels declined sharply across all demographics, with pronounced impacts among populations already facing structural inequities. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card and BCAHL’s 2021 public opinion research confirmed that rates of activity among children and youth in B.C. have decreased significantly, with barriers rooted in affordability, accessibility, discrimination, and systemic exclusion.^{3,4} The decline in physical activity observed during the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected groups already facing barriers, including Indigenous and racialized communities, people with disabilities, newcomers and refugees, low-income households, and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. While these patterns were exacerbated by the pandemic, they reflect longer-standing inequities that extend beyond temporary public health restrictions.

This consultation project builds upon the foundational work previously completed by the Centre for Family Equity (CFE) for BCAHL, whose 2024 Active BC Kids engagement focused on understanding barriers to physical activity among low-income families—many of whom were also Indigenous, racialized, disabled, or newcomers. Their findings, which included both

³ ParticipACTION. Lost and found: pandemic-related challenges and opportunities for physical activity. The 2022 ParticipACTION report card on physical activity for children and youth. Toronto: ParticipACTION; 2022.
⁴ As cited in: BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society. Engaging less active, equity-deserving families in a conversation on what they need to enjoy physical activity more often. Vancouver (B.C.): BC Alliance for Healthy Living Society, 2024.

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qualitative data and a set of detailed recommendations, highlighted systemic issues such as subsidy access, racism, lack of cultural safety, and limited support for children with disabilities and neurodiverse children and youth.

Of particular importance were the CFE’s recommendations for further engagement, which called for deeper community-based consultation with individual equity-deserving groups in B.C. These included families in rural and remote communities, families of children and youth with special needs or disabilities, and Indigenous and other racialized populations. In addition, BCAHL wanted to also engage newcomer and refugee families, as well as 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

These priorities directly informed the design of the present consultation. BCAHL, in partnership with Be the Change Group, launched a new round of community engagements to deepen understanding in these areas and expand the evidence base for equitable physical activity promotion. While the CFE study provided critical insight into the barriers and facilitators faced by low-income families, as well as direct participant recommendations, this new project sought to complement that work by also identifying facilitators, community strengths, and opportunities for systems-level change.

Ultimately, the consultation specifically sought to engage equity-deserving populations across B.C. whose physical activity levels and access to active living opportunities are shaped by intersecting forms of marginalization. The groups selected for engagement were chosen based on empirical evidence from our background review, CFE’s recommendations, and BCAHL-informed priorities.

Intersectional considerations in the community engagement process

The consultation applied an intersectional lens, recognizing that individual identities (such as race, gender, Indigeneity, disability, income status, and geographic location) do not exist in isolation, but interact to create complex and context-specific experiences of marginalization. Rather than seeking universal barriers or solutions, the project aimed to surface community-specific insights that reflect the nuances of each equity-deserving group’s reality in accessing and participating in physical activity.

To support this approach, community engagement principles were employed, and organizations with established trust and local knowledge facilitated the majority of the focus groups. Engagement strategies were co-developed with partners, and practical supports—such as translation, transportation stipends, child care, and accessible focus group venues—were provided to reduce barriers to participation. Indigenous engagements were grounded in [OCAP® principles](#) (see page 24), with Indigenous organizations and leaders playing central roles in the design, facilitation, and review of the research data and findings.

Methodology

Background review

A comprehensive background review was undertaken to contextualize this consultation within the broader landscape of physical activity research and health equity discourse in B.C. This review informed the development of key research questions, guided the structure of focus group discussions, and helped validate and interpret the insights emerging from community engagement.

In total, 42 documents were reviewed, comprising 25 grey literature sources (such as government reports, policy briefs, and professional guidelines) and 17 academic or peer-reviewed journal articles. These resources were selected from BCAHL’s foundational reading list as well as targeted searches by the research team. They represent a broad array of content types including theoretical models, health behaviour research, population-specific insights, and evaluations of physical activity programs and policies.

The reviewed materials addressed a wide range of populations and contexts, including:

- Children and youth (general and B.C.-specific)
- Newcomers and refugees
- Indigenous families and communities
- Racialized and immigrant populations
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- People with disabilities
- Women and girls
- Populations in rural and remote regions

In addition to this literature review, the project was intentionally designed to complement the Centre for Family Equity’s (CFE) prior work on this topic. The CFE conducted two focus groups with low-income families in B.C. (one in Vancouver and one in Prince George), as well as one virtual focus group, and three one-on-one virtual interviews. These engagements, with a total of 32 parents impacted by low income, explored intersecting barriers to physical activity for families with complex identities. Their findings—highlighting systemic, logistical, and social challenges—provided a comparative foundation for this consultation and informed the methodological approach and analysis. In particular, our focus was to build on CFE’s identification of barriers by further exploring facilitators, culturally grounded practices, and community-specific strengths that could inform future programming and policy.

By integrating insights from both the literature and CFE’s empirical work, the background review functioned as a critical bridge between evidence and engagement—ensuring that the consultation was not only grounded in current knowledge, but also capable of surfacing new perspectives and validating lived experiences within the broader evidence base.

Key research questions

The consultation was guided by a set of core themes designed to explore how physical activity is experienced and accessed by equity-deserving families and youth across B.C. The following key research questions informed development of the semi-structured focus group guide:

1. What role does physical activity currently play in the lives of equity-deserving families and youth?
2. How do equity-deserving families and youth become aware of and access opportunities for physical activity?
3. What facilitators and community strengths enable equity-deserving families and youth to engage in physical activity?
4. What barriers and challenges prevent equity-deserving families and youth from engaging in physical activity?
5. What recommendations do equity-deserving families and youth have to further facilitate their engagement in physical activity?

The focus group guide was reviewed by community partners prior to the facilitation of the focus group to ensure cultural relevance and contextual fit. The full guide, including specific prompts and preambles, is provided in [Appendix B](#) (see page 61).

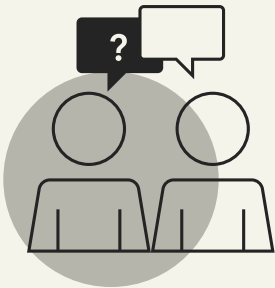
A second focus group guide was created and adapted from the original guide in partnership with I-SPARC to reflect the unique roles and insights of Indigenous sport and recreation leaders. Unlike other sessions, which focused on individual and family experiences, this discussion explored what is working well in Indigenous communities, the role of land-based and cultural activities, and recommendations for supporting active living through Indigenous-led programs.

At the request of our Indigenous partners at I-SPARC, the guide was also reframed to take a strengths-based approach. This shift was intentional and essential. Indigenous people are often represented in research through deficit-based narratives that focus on problems rather than potential. A strengths-based approach honours community resilience, cultural knowledge, and leadership, and reflects the fact that Indigenous communities already hold many of the solutions. This orientation supports more respectful, empowering, and culturally safe engagement.

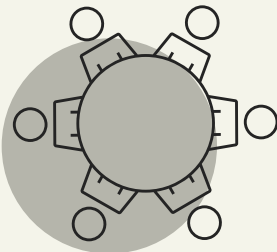
Engagement overview

Between February 1 and April 3, 2025, a total of nine focus groups were conducted in partnership with community-led organizations across B.C. These sessions were facilitated either by representatives of the organizations themselves or by researchers from Be the Change Group, depending on organizational capacity and preference.

In total, 78 participants were engaged, representing a diverse cross-section of families and youth from equity-deserving populations. The engagement overview table summarizes how focus groups were organized according to the following equity-deserving populations:



9 focus groups



78 participants

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Equity-deserving population	Group interviewed	Delivery mode of focus group	Number of focus groups	Number of participants
Families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth	2SLGBTQIA+ youth	Virtual (Zoom)	1	7
Families living in rural and remote communities	Rural/remote youth	Virtual (Zoom)	1	11
Newcomer and refugee families	Newcomer and refugee parents	In-person and telephone*	3	35
Families with children with disabilities	Parents of children with disabilities	Virtual (Zoom) and survey**	2	17
Indigenous families	Indigenous sport and recreation leaders	Virtual (Zoom)	2	8
Total			9	78

Each focus group was digitally recorded or documented via detailed notes, depending on community preference and consent. For focus groups that were conducted virtually on Zoom, Zoom chat text files were also included in analysis. In addition, virtual participants were invited to complete a brief demographic survey to support data disaggregation and enhance the analysis of identity-specific themes.

* Eight women participated in one-on-one telephone interviews.
** One participant who was unable to attend the focus group provided answers via virtual survey.

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Participant demographics and current physical activity experiences

This section discusses summaries of participants’ current physical activities, and their means of discovering and accessing these activities.

In addition to participating in this consultation’s focus groups, participants were invited to complete an optional online survey to provide additional demographic information. The findings for each group interviewed are presented in [Appendix C](#), while a full list of the demographic survey questions is provided in [Appendix D](#).

2SLGBTQIA+ youth (N=7)

2SLGBTQIA+ youth who participated in the consultation engage in a range of physical activities including yoga at home, gym workouts, school fitness sessions, archery, track and field, ultimate frisbee, and swimming. Many incorporate active transportation into their routines, such as walking or biking to school, which can take up to 50 minutes each way.

They shared that they learn about physical activity opportunities through Google searches, newsletters (such as those from the Vancouver Parks Board), and word of mouth. Programs that are specifically marketed as queer-inclusive or safe spaces are more likely to be accessed.

Rural and remote youth (N=11)

Rural and remote youth who participated in the consultation engage in a wide range of activities including hiking, biking, swimming, skating, skiing, yoga, racquet sports, climbing, weightlifting, and virtual reality (VR) sports (interactive, movement-based games and activities experienced through VR headsets and digital environments). Many also participate in school-based team sports such as basketball, volleyball, water polo, and track and field. Some youth are active 3–6 days per week, and most described physical activity as a medium to high priority.

They are active both independently and through school programs. Activities like walking and hiking are commonly done for social reasons. Access to some activities, like skiing, was noted, but limited.

Newcomer and refugee parents (N=35)

Newcomer families who participated in the consultation participate in a mix of informal and structured physical activities. Common activities include walking, playing soccer or volleyball, going to parks, skating, swimming, running, and gym workouts. Children also engage in physical activity at school and through play at home or in indoor play parks. For adults, household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and walking children to school are common forms of daily movement. Some parents also go to the gym or walk in malls for light activity and social connection.

Awareness of physical activity opportunities comes primarily through word of mouth, including friends, family, neighbours, landlords, and sponsors. Schools and community organizations like Mosaic also play a role in sharing information.

Transportation choices depend on distance—families walk when possible and use transit when locations are farther away.

As these focus groups were done in-person, no newcomer or refugee parents completed the online demographic survey.

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Parents of children with disabilities (N=17)

Families of children with disabilities who participated in the consultation engage in a wide range of physical activities, including walking, swimming, skating, hiking, snowboarding, trampoline, dance, playground visits, physiotherapy, and adapted sports such as gymnastics, hockey, and soccer. Many activities are done with family or through programs like Canucks Autism Network, Power to Be, or local adaptive sports organizations. Several families described participating in physical activity daily, often combining it with routines like walking to school or daycare. Physical activity was widely reported as a high priority, especially for its role in emotional regulation and family bonding.

Parents learn about programs through community centres, internet searches, health care providers, social media, and word of mouth—often while attending existing programs. Some noted the importance of sharing information with other families during activities.

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders (N=8)

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders who participated in the consultation support a wide range of physical activities, including school sports like basketball, volleyball, and soccer, as well as canoeing, kayaking, hiking, powwow dancing, traditional games, and seasonal activities like snowboarding, rodeo, and fishing. Activities are offered through schools, band programs, and community organizations, with some youth participating in competitive events such as the Junior All Native Basketball Tournament or the Indigenous Games. Physical activity is viewed as a high priority and a key part of cultural connection, community well-being, and family bonding.

Information about activities is shared through school newsletters, community bulletin boards, word of mouth, and a variety of digital platforms including band apps, social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), group chats, and door-to-door newsletters. Schools and friendship centres often act as hubs for programming, with promotion supported by flyers, text reminders, and direct outreach.



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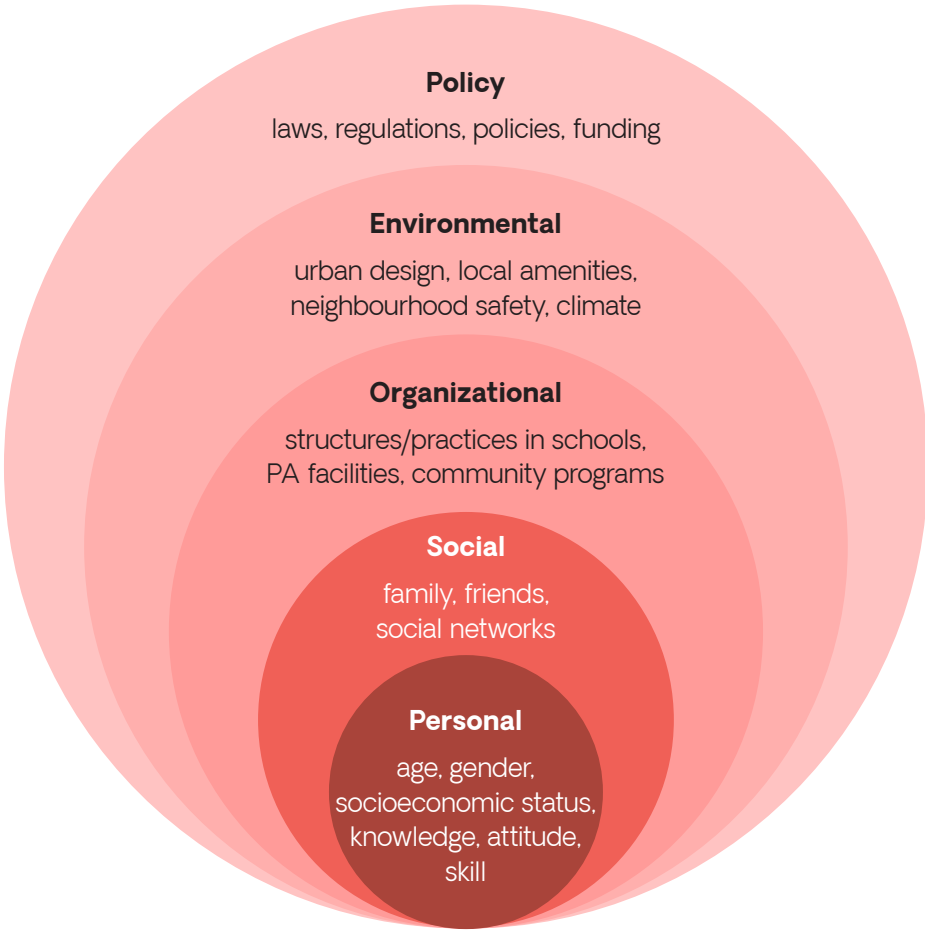
Analysis framework: The Social Ecological Model

The Social Ecological Model is used as a framework for analysis and presentation of this consultation’s research findings. The model, presented in Figure 1 to the right, is widely used in public health research to contextualize behaviour within structural systems and social environments. Most importantly, it is frequently applied in the literature on promoting physical activity.

This model effectively organizes factors, such as barriers and facilitators, into clear, digestible categories. This provides a structured approach for identifying and addressing these factors at their respective levels, to support the development of targeted recommendations and strategies for stakeholders, program leaders, and policy makers.

To ensure a rigorous and participant-centred analysis, two researchers independently coded all focus group transcripts, notes, and written responses in Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software. Quotations were first coded by the identification of specific barriers, facilitators, and recommendations. Quotations were coded to more than one barrier or facilitator where applicable. After completing their initial coding, the researchers met to review and refine the code list—ensuring consistency, removing any duplicated codes, and collapsing codes that shared the same underlying meaning. Once finalized, all codes were categorized according to the Social Ecological Model, grouping them by personal, social, organizational, community, and policy levels of influence. Importantly, no barriers, facilitators, or recommendations were inferred or created by Be the Change Group. All findings presented in this report reflect the direct responses of participants and have been organized for clarity and actionability without editorial interpretation. This approach enabled cross-cutting analysis of common and unique themes, allowing findings to be mapped onto actionable domains for program and policy development.

Figure 1. The Social Ecological Model



Engagement protocols and OCAP® principles

All focus groups were conducted using a trauma-informed, culturally responsive approach, with facilitators trained in community engagement and inclusive practice. Questions were designed to emphasize strengths, build rapport, and allow flexibility for community-specific expressions of wellness and activity.

For engagements involving First Nations, Métis, and Inuit participants, the project incorporated the OCAP® principles—Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. These principles informed how data was gathered, how questions were developed, and how findings were shared and validated with participants. Indigenous participants and facilitators were given the opportunity to review notes and transcripts and provide additional context, clarification, or withdrawal of content prior to analysis. They also reviewed the draft sections of the report once written to provide feedback on how their data was analyzed and then translated into findings.

Limitations and considerations

Despite careful planning and strong community partnerships, a number of limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Sample variability:** Some focus groups had smaller attendance than anticipated, due to capacity and availability constraints within community organizations.
- **Generalizability:** The data in this report are either self-reported or anecdotal, and have not been tested for statistical significance. Therefore, it is unclear if the findings are generalizable to the wider equity-deserving populations that participants have been assigned as representative of.
- **Language and accessibility:** Although efforts were made to accommodate language needs, not all sessions were held in participants’ first languages, which may have limited expression for some.
- **Survey completion:** Not all participants completed the demographic survey, which means a sampling bias may be present in the findings (i.e. findings may artificially reflect responses specific to those who answered the survey).

- **Scope:** Nine focus groups were conducted within the scope of the project budget. More focus groups or one-on-one interviews may have enriched the qualitative dataset. In addition, not all relevant barriers, facilitators and recommendations that emerged in the background review of literature were identified in the engagements for each equity-deserving group.
- **Differences in participant roles and perspectives:** The structure of participant groups varied across the focus groups. For example, the Indigenous engagement included physical activity leaders speaking on behalf of communities, while other groups (e.g. newcomers, parents of children with disabilities) reflected first-hand family experiences. These differences in vantage point may have influenced the nature and specificity of the recommendations shared.
- **Categorizing factors into the Social Ecological Model:** Several of the factors we discuss can be applied to multiple levels of the Social Ecological Model. Our decisions on where factors are placed within our findings are based on contextualization within participants’ responses.

Nonetheless, the methodology reflects a collaborative, ethical, and equity-informed approach to engagement, grounded in principles of inclusivity, cultural safety, and trauma-informed approaches.

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What we heard

To ensure this report focuses on actionable insight, the findings discussed in this section identify barriers and factors relevant to the organizational, environmental, and policy levels of the Social Ecological Model. Personal and social factors that act as barriers or facilitators to these groups’ engagement in physical activity are provided in Appendices E and F of this report (pages 67-70 and 71-72).

Throughout these findings, quotations from participants are featured in dark green text. These quotations have been lightly edited for grammatical clarity and length.

Barriers

Common barriers: Organizational factors

Administrative systems

A consistent theme that emerged across the focus groups with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, families of children with disabilities, newcomer families, and low-income families was the presence of administrative barriers within organizations that limit or prevent access to physical activity programs. While these barriers manifest in different ways for each group, the underlying challenge is the same.

Participants described a range of administrative hurdles, including:

- Inflexible or exclusionary registration forms.
- Overwhelming and repetitive paperwork.
- Complicated eligibility requirements for requesting child supports.

Although these processes intend to support service delivery, participants reported they often have the opposite effect, and create confusion, stress, and feelings of exclusion. Designed with assumptions about users' time, access to information, literacy, and normative identities, these systems systematically disadvantage those who don't fit what is assumed to be the typical participant profile. Instead of facilitating access, administrative processes often place the burden on equity-deserving families to navigate, advocate, and persist in the face of exclusion.

“ I also find filling out the paperwork and form for every single organization that provides funding for various supports to be exhausting and overwhelming. Especially knowing you may get rejected. We already have a lot more on our plates as parents with kiddos.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth** shared that organizational forms for sports teams and physical activity programs commonly require selecting a binary gender option (male or female) with no inclusive alternatives. This was shared as a major deterrent. Administrative forms can be sites of erasure, where those who identify outside of the traditional gender binary are not recognized or accommodated.
- **Low-income families** explained, especially in rural communities, administrative barriers are compounded by unreliable internet access, which limits their ability to complete online registration forms, access program information, or apply for subsidies. In the CFE engagement, 10% of participants reported that their internet access is unreliable due to factors such as rural location and cost. In addition, parents impacted by neurodiversity described administrative processes—such as registration and subsidy applications—as particularly burdensome and overwhelming. The lack of user-friendly systems make it harder to access physical activity opportunities for their children.
- **Parents of children with disabilities** described an overwhelming administrative burden when accessing physical activity programming, as each program or funding source required its own set of forms, assessments, and eligibility documentation in order for their child to participate, many of which were redundant or difficult to complete without support. For families already balancing the responsibilities of caregiving, this bureaucratic load is a significant barrier to getting their kids active. The emotional toll of frequent rejections, the time required to apply, and the lack of consistent or centralized access points discourage many parents from even trying.

Program and staff capacity

Across the focus groups with families of children with disabilities, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, and low-income family participants consistently pointed to organizational capacity constraints as a key barrier to accessing physical activity programs. While the exact nature of the challenge varied by group and region, the overarching theme was the same: many organizations do not have the resources or infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of the communities they serve. Participants highlighted the following capacity-related organizational barriers:

- Insufficient staffing.
- Limited availability of program spaces, often creating high-stress, competitive sign-up processes.
- Heavy reliance on community volunteers, leading to inconsistent delivery.

“ They had two staff members for 20 kids. So, my daughter ended up just sitting in a circle that they were supposed to tumble through, and then she just sat there and shooed every other kid away. And that’s because all the other staff were occupied and couldn’t give her the attention that she needed.

- Parent of a child with a disability

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Families with children with disabilities** described instances where they will bring their own support, such as a behavioural interventionist (BI), in an attempt to keep their children in group activities with limited capacity, but can still be denied participation due to the program’s inability or unwillingness to accommodate a support person.
- **In Indigenous communities** a lack of program staff causes many responsibilities to fall on volunteers or other community members such as elders. Although these volunteers are deeply committed, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders noted that the inconsistency of volunteer capacity (combined with other job and community demands) often leads to disruptions in programming.
- **Low-income families** in rural and remote areas shared staffing shortages and lack of program funding have led to the closure or reduced hours of indoor recreation spaces—particularly during the winter months. This disproportionately affects families with limited transportation options or those needing accessible, local alternatives to outdoor activity.

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Lack of awareness and effective communication

Across several focus groups, participants highlighted that even when programs and services are available, many families don't know about them. This lack of awareness often stems from weak outreach and poor communication channels, and was reported across 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, families with children with disabilities, Indigenous families, newcomer communities, and low-income families.

Participants identified the following barriers to awareness:

- Limited outreach or communication strategies.
- Information that is not accessible linguistically, culturally, or practically.
- Over-reliance on word of mouth, which delays awareness and creates inconsistent access.
- Misunderstanding and misrepresentation about what inclusive programs are.

“ But I think people just don't know these programs exist. Word of mouth can take a long time—unless it's juicy gossip, then it spreads like wildfire. But for meaningful things, it can take a while for people to even know they exist and that they're worthwhile. It's hard to get buy-in sometimes, but spreading the word is really important.”
- Indigenous sport and recreation leader



Common barriers: Environmental factors

Built environment and infrastructure

Participants across several focus groups described how the design and condition of their communities' physical spaces, such as streets, parks, and recreation centres, directly impacted their ability to be active. Participants made it clear: being active isn't just a matter of motivation, but it depends on having safe and inclusive places to move. For many, those spaces don't currently exist in their communities.

This was especially apparent among rural and remote youth, families with children with disabilities, newcomer families, and low-income families who identified the following built environment challenges:

- Unsafe or missing infrastructure, including sidewalks, bike lanes, public transit options, and public spaces with people who use substances and drug paraphernalia.
- Overcrowded or under-resourced facilities, limiting availability for inclusive programming.
- Lack of sensory-friendly environments appropriate for neurodivergent children.
- Inadequate lighting in public spaces, which reduces feelings of safety and limits access.



A lot of exercise can be a mode of transportation. Bike lanes in particular! Where I live, we didn't have many, but now we have some more. But it was so bad! It wasn't safe. Also sidewalks without a proper curb can make people feel unsafe, causing people to not want to walk!"

- Youth living in a rural and remote community

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Rural youth** in particular highlighted how missing infrastructure such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus routes make it difficult to engage in physical activity as part of daily life.
- **Families with children on the autism spectrum** shared how the design of community programs and facilities often fail to account for sensory needs of individuals. Crowded, loud settings with untrained staff were named as particularly difficult.
- **Newcomer families** emphasized the importance of well-lit streets and parks to feel safe while being active in their neighbourhoods. Without sufficient lighting, outdoor activity is less feasible, especially in the early morning or evening, and particularly for women and children.
- **Low-income families** explained that many of the public spaces near their homes that could be used for physical activity purposes (such as parks and playgrounds) lack the maintenance and cleanliness, reporting "filthy unsafe bathroom facilities strewn with needles, and public parks and playgrounds littered with drug paraphernalia and sometimes open substance use." This creates an unsafe environment for their children.

Distance and geographic accessibility

Participants across all equity-deserving groups highlighted distance to physical activity opportunities as a significant barrier, especially in rural, remote, and low-income families (often underserved urban) communities. While programs and facilities may exist, they are often located too far from where families live, and the time and energy to make it all work are factors that are not equally distributed across populations.

Across equity-deserving groups, the issue of distance appeared in various forms, including:

- Long travel times to access programs, facilities, or events.
- Lack of nearby options, leading to limited choice or reliance on a single location.
- Transportation challenges, especially for families without a vehicle or who rely on walking.
- Drop-off and scheduling difficulties due to geographic spread and lack of local infrastructure.

“Where I live, we’re a little bit more remote. We’re 25, 30 minutes from town, so we have to travel to town to access any sports programs.”

- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Distance to programming affects everyone.** Whether it is a 45-minute drive from a rural First Nation, a ferry or plane ride from a remote area, or travelling across city boundaries, families emphasize that proximity to programs matters deeply—especially when transportation isn’t guaranteed. In rural areas, the problem was often a lack of physical access altogether, while in urban settings, newcomer families described the practical burden of long commutes, drop-off logistics, or navigating unfamiliar transit systems. For families with children with disabilities, they explained the lack of adaptive programming makes suitable programs further outside their reach, which places a heavy burden on parents to coordinate travel, scheduling, and supervision. Low-income families, especially lone-parent families, face distinct logistical challenges that compound access barriers. With limited or no access to childcare, they often must bring multiple children to different activities, navigate overlapping schedules, or forgo opportunities altogether due to lack of time, transportation, or support. These constraints are intensified for those living on a single income or without access to a personal vehicle.

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Lack of physical activity program options

Across all focus groups, participants consistently described a lack of suitable, diverse, or sufficient physical activity options in their communities. While some regions had facilities or programs on paper, the types of activities, the environments they were held in, and the overall accessibility did not meet the needs of equity-deserving youth and families. The barrier was not simply about quantity—it was also about relevance, cultural fit, safety, and the ability to participate consistently.

Key community-level themes related to lack of options included:

- Insufficient range of activities, particularly in rural and newcomer communities.
- Limited variety, with programs that don’t match youth interests, abilities, or values.
- Overcrowded or short-lived programs with long waitlists.
- Few inclusive, identity-affirming options for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.
- Less options for older youth (12+ years)

“

There are only three public gyms, and all of the high schoolers who went to those gyms knew each other at the gym, and so it was really hard to start going to the gym, because everyone went to the same gyms at around the same time, because you go after school. And so everyone knew each other, and everyone saw each other, and everyone was talking about each other, and I remember that being one of the big reasons why I never went.”

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Youth in rural and remote communities** described their communities as having very few choices or none at all. One youth noted there are no swimming pools or climbing walls, which leaves only two “uninviting” parks. In places with small populations, having an insufficient number of kids to form a sports team is a common limitation, preventing even the most interested youth from participating.
- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth** highlighted how even when programs exist, social dynamics and facility culture can make them feel inaccessible. Public gyms, for example, were described as intimidating and cliquey, so youth avoid them due to peer surveillance and exclusion. Some also pointed out there is a lack of queer-specific or gender-affirming recreation spaces, like leagues or programs that explicitly welcome gender-diverse youth. One participant described avoiding the local gym altogether because of its association with toxic masculinity.
- **Families of children with disabilities** spoke at length about how adapted programs are either unavailable or oversubscribed, making participation difficult even when children are highly motivated.
- **Newcomer and refugee families** highlighted a consistent lack of suitable physical activity programs for young children, particularly under age five.
- **Low-income families** perceived their older youth, particularly teens aged 13–18, face a lack of accessible and relevant physical activity programming. Many parents and caregivers noted that most structured activities are geared toward younger children, with few options beyond formal and competitive team sports for adolescents. This programming gap disproportionately affects low-income families and youth who may not have the resources or confidence to join formal teams, and who benefit most from inclusive, low-barrier, and socially engaging physical activity opportunities.

Weather and climate

Across several focus groups, participants described how weather conditions like rain, snow, extreme heat, and seasonal variation present major barriers to consistent access to physical activity. While weather is uncontrollable, for many equity-deserving families it becomes a determining factor in whether movement is possible, safe, or enjoyable.

This barrier was highlighted by families from rural, urban, and remote communities alike, from focus groups with families with disabilities, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, newcomers and refugees, and low-income families. They all pointed to the following shared challenges:

- Rain, cold, and seasonal shifts that limit outdoor activity for families with young children.
- Lack of covered or sheltered infrastructure, making outdoor spaces unusable during extreme weather.
- Overdependence on outdoor facilities in communities with few indoor alternatives.
- Transportation challenges in winter months.

“If it is the rainy season, we can’t go outside, so we need a sheltered area to walk.”
- Newcomer and/or refugee parent

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Families of children with disabilities** shared that certain weather conditions, particularly rain, can be overwhelming for children with sensory sensitivities, leading to distress and avoidance of outdoor spaces. In addition, parents emphasized how cold or inclement weather limits access to outdoor regulation strategies, like intense movement or sensory play.
- **Rural youth** mentioned that rain and snow make biking or walking difficult and unappealing, especially in their communities with limited public transportation or unsafe infrastructure.
- **Newcomer families** shared similar experiences, explaining that without a car, they rely heavily on walking, which becomes nearly impossible in cold or wet conditions—particularly for those who arrived during the winter and were not prepared for the climate.
- **Low-income families** explained that the high cost of appropriate winter clothing and gear presents a significant barrier to outdoor physical activity, so families are often unable to safely or comfortably participate in outdoor recreation during the winter months.

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Gender identity, sexuality, toxic masculinity

Participants from both rural and remote communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth focus groups described how gender norms, discrimination, and unwelcoming sport environments serve as major deterrents to participation in physical activity. These barriers are not just about individual experiences—they are shaped by community-level norms, expectations, and cultures within gyms, schools, and sports spaces that marginalize women, “enbies” (non-binary individuals), and queer youth.

Participants spoke to the following challenges:

- Discriminatory attitudes toward women and non-binary individuals, especially in rural or male-dominated environments.
- Lack of safety or inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, leading to early disengagement from sport.
- Feelings of exclusion from both mainstream and queer-specific spaces, resulting in internalized isolation.

Across both rural and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth groups, participants described how gender norms and queer exclusion begin early and compound over time, shaping who feels welcome in sport and physical activity.

“Women and enbies are so very picked-on in sports, and discouraged from even trying.”

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth



Common barriers: Policy factors

Affordability and the cost of participation

Affordability consistently emerged as a barrier that limits access to physical activity, especially for families with additional needs. Programs that appear inclusive on paper often become inaccessible in practice when the cost of participation or support creates a barrier to entry.

Families with children with disabilities, Indigenous communities, newcomer families, and low-income families described a range of cost-related challenges, including:

- High program fees for sports, camps, or adapted physical activities.
- High cost of gear/ equipment for perceived low-cost outdoor activities.
- High costs for support, especially for children requiring one-on-one assistance.
- Insufficient subsidies or one-time access, like “intro” passes that don’t support continued engagement.
- Conflicting financial pressures, such as choosing between work, child care, and participation.

“Having a support worker [for physical activity programming] feels impossible, like [we have] no money for it.”
– Parent of a child with a disability

For most families, affordability is a compounded barrier shaped by broader financial precarity. Parents described how the cost of registration is only one part of the challenge; transportation or time off work makes participation logistically and financially out of reach. Even with some public funding, many said it wasn’t enough to cover consistent access, especially during school holiday breaks. For low-income families in particular, perceived low-cost activities like biking, hiking, or camping are out of reach due to the high cost of required equipment and gear, such as bikes, outdoor clothing, or entrance fees.

Funding

Participants from the focus groups of parents of children with disabilities, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, and low-income families described persistent and systemic gaps in funding as a major barrier to inclusive, sustained participation in physical activity within their communities. While some public funding sources exist, they are limited in scope, inconsistent across regions, difficult to navigate, or deprioritized in favour of other child care and support needs. As a result, physical activity becomes an optional extra—accessible only when families have time, resources, or the energy to pursue alternative supports.

The most common funding-related challenges included:

- Insufficient or narrowly restricted public funding.
- Lack of one-on-one or adapted program funding, despite high need.
- Post-COVID reductions in service delivery, particularly in publicly funded rec centres.
- Heavy reliance on community volunteers or charity supports to fill systemic gaps, where capacity is low.
- Lack of funding for perceived essential life skill activities; such as swimming.

“What it comes down to is money. It always comes down to money. And the weakest, the most vulnerable people that need [funding], which is our children [with disabilities], they’re the ones that pay the price”
– Parent of a child with a disability

Unique barriers

The barriers discussed in this section are unique to the needs and interests of each equity-deserving group engaged in this consultation.

Youth from rural and remote communities did not identify any barriers unique to their individual group. Within the [Common Barriers section](#), nuances that speak to these groups' specific needs and interests are described in the applicable Intersectional Considerations headings (pages 26–34). Additionally, emerging findings from recent engagements with youth living in rural and remote communities within the northern region of B.C. identified several barriers that were not reported by this consultation's participants. These include a lack of drop-in spaces, a lack of youth leader training, and outdated school infrastructure.⁵

⁵ Manyanga T, Tandy S, Dumo J, Fox G. A Multisectoral Physical Activity Engagement Strategy for Youth Living in Northern British Columbia: Preliminary findings from workshops 1–3; 2024.

Barriers for Indigenous families: Organizational factors

INCONSISTENT BUY-IN TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT INTEGRATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING

A barrier specifically identified by Indigenous sport and recreation leaders was the inconsistent commitment from non-Indigenous-led organizations to fully and relationally integrate First Nations concepts into their physical activity programming. While some progress has been made, participants noted that a program's success often hinges on the level of buy-in from individual organization staff or teachers in schools. This barrier was described not as a lack of interest, but as a lack of consistency across non-Indigenous organizational systems, particularly in school or recreation settings where programming is often delivered by staff who are not equipped or supported to embed Indigenous knowledge in meaningful ways.

“[Teachers] receptiveness often affects the relationship with, I think, fully, truly relationally integrating First Nations concepts. So, we're constantly coming up against a little bit of that, but it is shifting.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Barriers for Indigenous families: Environmental factors

MISTRUST OF COLONIAL SYSTEMS

A unique barrier identified by Indigenous sport and recreation leaders is the mistrust of systems (particularly the education system) rooted in historical and ongoing colonial harm. Participants described how this mistrust is not merely interpersonal, but deeply structural and relational, affecting how families engage with school-based and community programming, including physical activity opportunities. This mistrust is shaped by longstanding underrepresentation of Indigenous staff, broken institutional relationships, and a broader system that has not been built to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being, or doing.

One participant highlighted the numeric imbalance at their school they work in: 18.5% of students are Indigenous and 2% of the staff are Indigenous. This participant shared this statistic to highlight the fact that Indigenous families are commonly navigating systems that lack Indigenous leadership. As a result, there is a sense of isolation, and ultimately a lack of trust that those systems will understand or prioritize their children's needs.

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Barriers for newcomer and refugee families:
Organizational factors

WAITLISTS AND OVERCROWDED FACILITIES

Newcomer and refugee families shared that long waitlists for recreation and physical activity programs create significant barriers to participation. While public programs may exist in their communities, many families described the process of accessing them as uncertain, slow, and disheartening. In particular, several participants spoke about the challenge of enrolling children in programs under age five due to the waitlists. Even when programs were identified, there was often little clarity around how to get in, how long the wait would be, or what alternatives were available.

In addition to waitlists, newcomer families described how overcrowded facilities make it difficult to access physical activity spaces, even when they are open to the public. Pools and recreation centres were cited as being physically too small or overbooked to meet the needs of all users.

One parent shared that their local recreation centre is always so busy that their family has to wait one to two hours just to access the pool. Others pointed out that programs or spaces that are for general public access are frequently shared with senior groups and children’s programming, explaining that these facilities are too small and lack the necessary room for all community members. The result is not just inconvenience, but a deterrent to continued participation. When families arrive and find they can’t get in, they said they may choose not to come back at all.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

An intersecting personal barrier for newcomer and refugee families is the lack of personal or private space to be active at home. Unlike households with access to backyards, spacious living areas, or private recreation space, many families, especially those living in rental housing or apartment complexes, rely entirely on community spaces such as recreation centres, parks, or community halls to be physically active. This means that when public facilities are full, unavailable, or too far away, families simply have no alternatives.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

For newcomer and refugee families, language barriers were identified as a clear obstacle to accessing and participating in physical activity programs. Participants described this when referring to understanding instructions, enrolling in programs, navigating facilities, or interacting with staff. These barriers often result in families feeling uncertain, hesitant, or excluded, even when programs are available to them.

“Because of language, we are restricted from participating in all sporting activities.”
- Newcomer and/or refugee parent

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Barriers for newcomer and refugee families:
Environmental factors

CULTURAL GENDER NORMS AND RESTRICTIONS

Among newcomer and refugee families, a notable barrier to physical activity participation was rooted in cultural gender norms and expectations, particularly for women and girls. While many families actively encourage participation in physical activity for their children in Canada, others maintain a more traditional or conservative view on gender segregation and norms, particularly when it comes to mixed-gender spaces or types of physical activity that is considered acceptable for girls.

The issue was further compounded by the absence of female-only recreation options, particularly for swimming. In the Afghan focus group, participants noted that in some instances, women and girls are unable to participate because there are no separate pool facilities or designated times for female-only access.

These beliefs do not reflect a universal experience among newcomer families but instead highlight how different cultural and community factors can shape access differently within and between families with different backgrounds.

“

But I can talk about another family which is from the same background. They did not allow the daughter to attend sports activity from the school or in this school because they believe that the girl should not play any sport or go to any places that’s mixed with other genders.”

- Newcomer and/or refugee parent



Barriers for families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth:
Organizational factors

GENDER NORMS

A barrier uniquely identified by 2SLGBTQIA+ youth was the pervasiveness of gender norms within the design and implementation of physical activity spaces and school protocols. These experiences were described as exclusionary or alienating for youth who do not identify within the binary or who experience gender-based discomfort. The following organizational systems reinforce rigid gender expectations, forcing queer and gender-diverse youth to choose between discomfort and exclusion:

Bathrooms and change rooms

One participant noted how the need to shower after exercise is challenging and intensified by the gendered nature of change rooms.

“Gendered bathrooms just in general [are a barrier]. But then that extra layer of like changing. And then like showering is a whole other can of worms.”

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Co-ed cabins and tents

Overnight school trips (such as hikes) or extracurricular physical activity programs were shared as another source of exclusion. Participants described how sleeping arrangements are sorted into “boy” and “girl” tents or cabins, with a co-ed option only being offered on certain years when there are enough gender-diverse participants to warrant it.

The co-ed space, while appreciated, was seen by the participants as a reactive, and unsustainable solution; something organizers only implemented when necessary, rather than building inclusivity into the standard structure of programs. This practice sends the message that non-binary and gender-expansive youth are an afterthought.

Uniforms

One youth spoke about team sports and the discomfort caused by gendered uniforms that reinforce gender norms, such as short shorts for girls’ teams. For those who do not identify with the gender binary (or for anyone uncomfortable with hyper-gendered dress codes) being required to wear a specific uniform serves as another barrier to participation. This highlights how organizations regulate bodies through gendered expectations, often without offering alternatives.

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Barriers for families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth: Policy factors

GENDER IDENTITY

A policy-level barrier uniquely affecting transgender youth is the increasing legal and political restriction of participation in sports based on gender identity. The current socio-political climate, where policy debates and public discourse around trans inclusion in sports, creates a ripple effect. Participants explained that even when no explicit legal barriers exist for them, the perception that transgender youth are unwelcome or controversial is enough to deter participation. The combination of policy uncertainty, media scrutiny, and public debate creates an atmosphere of fear, stigma, and self-censorship for young trans people wanting to participate in sport and recreation.

“With all the panic in the media surrounding trans sports, it abandons our transgender youth (like myself) who could hardly participate in a sport even if they wanted to. I mean kids are literally being banned from participating in some areas, and even where it is legal, it’s awfully discouraged.”

- Youth living in rural and remote community



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Barriers for families with children with disabilities:
Organizational factors

LACK OF INDIVIDUALIZED, ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

Families with children with disabilities described a persistent and widespread lack of on-site, individualized support within physical activity programs. This is particularly prevalent in community recreational and sport settings. While many programs promote themselves as “inclusive,” parents explained that once enrolled, they are often told they must stay on site to act as their child’s support person or cover the cost of hiring someone privately. This burden disproportionately falls on parents, many of whom are managing work, caregiving, and complex needs at home, which creates conditions where access is conditional on a family’s ability to self-supplement missing supports. Parents also noted that even when support is technically available, it often fails to meet the specific needs of their child. Child to staff ratios are often too high, activities aren’t being adapted, and the expectation is that families will either adjust to the program or opt out. This perceived and actual lack of support erodes trust in programs, and contributes to families avoiding new activities altogether, even when they’re motivated to participate.

“It’s really hard for us to get out into the community and try different things. We feel vulnerable ... because if you do, you feel like you maybe won’t be supported.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

“A friend’s child with cerebral palsy couldn’t attend a day camp because no support person was available. The mom couldn’t work as a result.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

LACK OF STAFF TRAINING IN DISABILITY INCLUSION

Families with children with disabilities consistently emphasized that staff for many physical activity programs lack the training required to meaningfully support neurodivergent or disabled children. While some instructors and facilitators may be well-intentioned, parents shared that good intentions were not “good enough.” Staff were described as unfamiliar with autism, sensory needs, behavioural regulation, or inclusive communication strategies.

Also, several parents shared frustration with the disconnect between how programs are promoted and what they actually deliver. One described enrolling their child in a one-on-one swim program, only to find that the instructor was a well-meaning teenager with no experience supporting children with higher needs. Another family described how their child would benefit from martial arts, but there were no local instructors trained in autism or neurodiversity. This absence of foundational training not only affects the quality of programming, and creates an unsafe and highly inaccessible environment.

“If there was a local program where instructors were trained in autism/neurodiversity, and with higher support ratios, we would love for [our child] to learn the skill. Then we could enjoy it as a family.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

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Barriers for families with children with disabilities: Environmental factors

COMMUNITY SIZE

Parents with children who are disabled who live in smaller or rural communities described how community size directly limits access to inclusive or adapted programming. Even in larger towns, participants noted that options were far fewer than in major urban centres such as Vancouver, making location a key factor in whether a family can participate at all.

In one case, a parent shared that without the Canucks Autism Network (CAN), their child would not be doing much, as they singularly rely on CAN programming in their community. While they expressed deep appreciation for CAN, the comment also reflected a lack of alternative options, making access fragile and heavily dependent on one provider.

Barriers for families with children with disabilities: Policy factors

FUNDING

Families with children with disabilities shared numerous examples of how funding structures are not aligned with the real costs of participation for children with disabilities. One parent noted that government autism funding drops from \$28,000 to \$6,000 as children age past 6, and even then, the process of reallocating support toward physical activity requires additional outside funding applications and trade-offs. Others explained that recreation centres, particularly post-COVID, have scaled back adapted swim or skate lessons to only a handful of spots, despite clear demand.

In some cases, parents have to prioritize physical or speech therapy over physical activity, not because they value one more than the other, but because funding limitations force hard decisions to be made. The result is that physical activity, which is recommended for regulation, socialization, and wellness for children who are disabled, is treated as optional in funding models, rather than essential.

“What it comes down to is money. It always comes down to money. And the weakest, the most vulnerable people that need it, which is our children, they’re the ones that pay the price. And this is the thing and the politicians don’t have the answers either.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

“Maybe I should try to get more money from another charity to help with things because 6,000 doesn’t cover much. And I’m a single mom, and I work full time, and it’s really hard to find the time to get my child to the things that she needs. And the priority is using the money for speech therapy ‘cause that’s her main challenge, is communication. And then I also use it for a bit of music therapy for her as well.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

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Barriers for low-income families: Policy factors

LACK OF A STANDARDIZED, ACCESSIBLE SUBSIDY SYSTEM

Low-income families described the emotional and psychological strain of constantly navigating complex, fragmented, and under-resourced support systems in order to access physical activity programs. Unlike other barriers that relate to logistics or cost, this burden reflects a deeper sense of burnout, discouragement, and system-induced exhaustion. Parents shared that the process of repeatedly applying for subsidies, managing rejections, or even gathering required paperwork often left them emotionally depleted. This emotional fatigue becomes its own barrier—detering families from pursuing opportunities they may otherwise value.

This policy-level barrier is rooted in the absence of a standardized, accessible subsidy system across B.C. In the current landscape, each municipality, school, and recreation centre must develop their own application processes and eligibility criteria, leaving families to navigate multiple systems and organizations to secure basic support. This patchwork approach places disproportionate stress on both families and service providers, and contributes to the very inequities the subsidies are meant to address.

“It’s real stressful [applying for subsidies]... I have more breakdowns now, and I’m tired, and it’s unbelievable.”

- Parent of a family impacted by low income

“I’d like to get a PhD for the amount of searching and resourcing... The stress makes all of my conditions worse.”

- Parent of a family impacted by low income



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Facilitators

Common facilitators: Organizational factors

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Across all focus groups, a strong sense of community was identified as a central facilitator of physical activity. Community dynamics within institutions—such as schools, local organizations, and community centres—deeply influenced participation. These findings point to the importance of an organization’s wider commitment to inclusion: participants feel that they belong where adaptations and accommodations to reflect their interests and needs are not just tolerated, but embraced as a core part of the program’s design.

When describing physical activity settings that foster a sense of community, three common design features were identified in participants’ responses:

- Programs that welcome different strengths and abilities and emphasize participation over performance, UNLESS all participants want to compete at the same level. Examples include:
 - » RASS (Richmond)
 - » I-SPARC Programs
 - » NAIG (North American Indigenous Games)
 - » Iceberg Camps
 - » Traditional Games
 - » Warriors Basketball Tournament
 - » Strengthening Early Years to Kindergarten Transition
 - » Strong Start
 - » JANT (Junior All Native Tournament)
 - » Poker Face Adventure Race
- Programs that operate as hubs of connection by creating both structured physical activities and (informal and formal) support networks for both participants and their families.
- Programs that offer consistency: in the days and times that they are run (particularly for drop-in programs), sustained over long periods of time (so that families can rely on it being there for them), and with consistent staff or volunteers (for recognition and familiarity).

“

We have men’s drop-in hockey on Tuesdays, but a lot of people come to watch. So, it’s not only those who are directly participating in our programs, but those who are also supporting the programs that are coming.”

- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

REPRESENTATIVE POPULATIONS

Being reflected within a program’s or service’s existing population was identified as an important facilitator to physical activity for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, and parents of children with disabilities. Whether it was being reflected in the existing client population or among the staff and volunteers, a sense of representation contributed to spaces feeling safe and inclusive.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth:** Several of our engagement participants enjoy playing ultimate frisbee and other co-ed activities that do not require them to choose between being on a “male” or “female” team.
- **Indigenous sport and recreation leaders:** The examples shared of successful programs were often Indigenous-led, and draw on the strengths of community members to teach local customs and traditions that also happen to be physically active.

“It’s amazing because it’s built by someone who ‘gets it.’”

– Parent of a child with a disability

“The few times that I’ve felt comfortable at the gym were when I saw someone with like brightly dyed hair and a ton of piercings and a ton of tattoos. I’m like, I have a feeling you’re queer, and this is great. We’re here for each other.”

– 2SLGBTQIA+ youth



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STAFF SKILL SET

Parents of children with disabilities, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, and newcomer and refugee families all shared specific examples of organizations that have invested in staff training and equipped instructors to recognize and respond to children’s individual needs with skill, sensitivity, and flexibility. The staff in these settings not only know how to make physical activity more fun and developmentally appropriate (e.g. incorporating imagination into movement for younger children), they were also reported to more readily create a sense of belonging for children who might otherwise feel excluded.

This approach was contrasted with more generic recreational settings, where staff may lack the preparation to make real-time adjustments based on children’s identities or abilities.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Parents of children with disabilities:** See the [Adaptive programming](#) and [Program design](#) sections, page 51.
- **Rural and remote youth:** Several participants spoke about the role that school staff and volunteers play in their physical activity; this may reflect the reality that schools are a primary and vital setting for physical activity in many rural and remote communities (i.e. where there are fewer community-based programs and services).

“Team sports at schools where there is a good role model or coach. This can be a make or break for some students when feeling comfortable.”
- Rural/remote youth

“In terms of language, there might be barriers, but [the local community centre staff] are accommodating.”
- Newcomer parent

“Using imagination is huge. We do squats, but I’ll say, “We’re picking up wood for raspberry tea.” If they drop one, we pick it up again—not squats, but gathering.”
- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

NAVIGATION

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ALL AGES

Almost all participant groups mentioned instances where it was beneficial for programs to be all-ages. Newcomer and refugee parents, parents of children with disabilities, and low-income families mentioned that they appreciated venues and programs that allowed them to be active with their children, citing fitness centres and gyms that offer family classes and packages. Parents with infants and younger children also cited programs that offer child care as facilitating their own physical activity.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **2SLGBTQIA+ youth:** One participant noted they enjoyed exercising at a community centre more commonly visited by older adults (while the primary reason was to avoid their high school peers at a closer gym, the welcoming of all ages facilitated their exercise).
- **Indigenous sport and recreation leaders:** Several intergenerational programs were raised as successfully facilitating sustained physical activity for local families; these programs also had the benefit of fostering community teaching and connection by bringing youth, their parents, and Elders together.
- **Low-income families:** Participants shared that the lack of child care support they have access to means they must bring all their children to every activity. This creates a logistical burden that can be overwhelming and often prevents participation altogether. This is especially true for lone parents with multiple young children.

PARTNERSHIPS

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders as well as newcomer and refugee parents discussed partnerships between organizations as facilitators to physical activity. These included partnerships to collaborate on grant writing, share funding and key resources, or simply raise awareness and access to other services (e.g. a complimentary community centre class pass).

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Indigenous sport and recreation leaders:** Several Indigenous sport and recreation leaders identified programs at schools as a particular strength being used in their communities to facilitate opportunities for physical activity.
- **Newcomer and refugee parents:** Several participants shared that they had been informed of physical activity programs and services in their community by staff at their local settlement and employment service organization.

“Two years ago, I started taking students transitioning to middle or high school golfing—just an hour-long lesson ... [the golf course] gives me a great deal.”
- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

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Common facilitators: Environmental factors

PROXIMITY

Proximity was noted as a common environmental factor that facilitates physical activity. Facilities and programs that were within walking or biking distance were especially advantageous, particularly when compared to those that participants had to either drive or take public transportation to. However, facilities that required a short drive or trip on public transportation were generally viewed as accessible (acknowledging here that short is subjective; a specific duration was not defined as part of these engagements).

One newcomer participant shared that they appreciated when parks have outdoor exercise equipment located close to a playground, so that they can keep an eye on their child while exercising. Indigenous sport and recreation leaders shared examples of successful programs being run in their communities such as men’s drop-in hockey, and traditional games hosted at schools and cultural gatherings, while both 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and youth from rural and remote communities cited proximity to mountains as enabling their participation in winter sports. Low-income families cited proximity as a facilitator to physical activity in another distinct way: participants shared that sending older children to run errands in the neighbourhood and encouraging them to use public transportation were strategies for keeping youth active.

MUNICIPALITY SIZE

Participants acknowledged that the breadth and depth of services tends to be greater in larger cities and municipalities. This, in turn, makes it more likely that services are close enough to readily access. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, parents of children with disabilities, and low-income families noted this is especially true for services that are designed for specific populations (such as theirs).

“There’s tons of [dance studios] where I live.”
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING

The proximity and resulting convenience of school-based programming (i.e. during or after school) was discussed by several of the engaged groups:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth discussed physical education classes and extracurricular clubs and activities hosted by their school (e.g. a hiking club).
- Newcomer and refugee parents also discussed these activities, and highlighted that they enjoy participating when invitations are extended to family members.
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders shared that school-based events encourage consistent and sustained participation.
- Low-income families identified convenient school-based programming with built-in peer engagement as a facilitator of physical activity, as it removes the need to organize transportation and meets children where they already are.

While this factor was not discussed by parents of children with disabilities, many of the benefits noted by the other engagement groups would likely resonate (and in some cases they would already have the support staff).

“We all have our own little worlds of being active, and it’s really nice when we can combine them.”
- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

All interviewed groups shared that outdoor activities facilitated physical activity. Several benefits to outdoor activities were noted:

- Outdoor activities and spaces often allow families to be active together (e.g. parks with outdoor fitness equipment, playgrounds, sport fields, and trails).
- Many outdoor activities are free to access.
- Many outdoor spaces are readily available and do not require scheduling.
- Being in nature can offer opportunities for spiritual connection.

“ We do a lot of walking in the woods and that’s kind of how we structure our day.”
– Parent of a child with a disability

“ When we go outside, we get fresh air, we connect with people, and we see so many different things.”
– Newcomer parent



Common Facilitators: Policy factors

ADEQUATE FUNDING

The provision of funding was identified as a physical activity facilitator by 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, newcomer and refugee families, Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, and low-income families. Whether provided for the sustainment, expansion, or proliferation of programs and services, the types of funding and amounts provided were seen to be a direct reflection of funding agencies’ policy priorities.

AFFORDABLE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Participants across all engagement groups noted their physical activity was particularly facilitated when organizations and agencies receive sufficient funding to offer their programs, including any required equipment or travel, at either a low cost or for free.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Indigenous sport and recreation leaders:** Reflecting on strengths in their communities, participants acknowledged the contributions of volunteers, fundraisers, families that offer to carpool to tournaments and other services, and in-kind donations. These efforts ultimately help to facilitate physical activity where funding gaps exist.

“At home, the government covers everything so that everyone willing to participate is free.”
- Newcomer parent

“It comes back to the volunteers—team managers and coaches working their 9-to-5s, raising families, and still showing up for practices and fundraising. They worked hard to ensure every family participating had their travel, accommodation, and some meals covered. Without that, it just wouldn’t have been feasible for many.”
- Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Unique facilitators

The facilitators discussed in this section are unique to the needs and interests of Indigenous families and families with children with disabilities.

Youth from rural and remote communities, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, newcomer and refugee parents, and low-income families did not identify any facilitators unique to their individual groups. Within the [Common Facilitators](#) section (pages 43–49), nuances that speak to these groups’ specific needs and interests are described in the applicable Intersectional Considerations headings.

Facilitators for Indigenous families: Organizational factors

HOLISTIC WORLDVIEW AND CULTURAL CONNECTION

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders were widely in agreement that the most successful programs in their community do not only focus on physical activity—they support holistic learning and cultural connection. By offering traditional activities or incorporating medicine wheel teachings, programs use physical activity as a means of fostering social and emotional wellness, as well as spiritual connection and a greater sense of belonging to one’s community.

“Programs that focus only on the physical activity aspect often miss out. When the focus is on relationships, community, and support, they become much more successful.”

– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“Cultural games create fun, connection, belonging. It’s relaxing—it’s not just ‘go-go-go.’ And people of all ages respond well to traditional ways.”

– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Facilitators for Indigenous families: Environmental factors

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders also identified environmental strengths that help families in their community be physically active:

- **Building programs based on preferences:** Two leaders shared that they develop their programs based on particular physical activities that members of their community have historically enjoyed and taken part in (e.g. basketball, hockey, canoe pulling).
- **Local athletes, knowledge keepers, and sport champions:** Leaders shared that their programs’ successes were often facilitated, in part, by drawing on the skills and expertise of people in their community. These included local athletes who serve as role models, knowledge keepers who pass on cultural traditions and teachings rooted in movement, and sport champions who help create opportunities for families to be active (e.g. through fundraising or grant writing).
- **Developing seasonal programming:** Leaders shared examples of building their programming in accordance with the 13 Moons Curriculum (where different land-based activities, many of which require physical activity, are offered for each phase of the calendar). They also shared successful programs based on seasonal weather, such as canoe races and outdoor tournaments during spring and summer; indoor activities in the winter; and less programming during times for private ceremony and cultural work.

“I think [certain sports] are sort of like legacy in communities that the kids enjoy more.”

– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Facilitators for families with children with disabilities: Organizational factors

ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING

Adaptive programming emerged as a key factor influencing participation in physical activity for families with children with disabilities.

Organizational decisions made at the programmatic and operational level can have profound impacts on these families' ability to engage meaningfully in recreational activities.

AVAILABILITY

Families noted that their children's ability to engage in physical activity requires such programs be available. Recreation centres that advocate for the sustainment and expansion of these services, through sustained funding and staffing, demonstrate how shifts in organizational priorities can directly affect these families.

“They are welcoming, positive, knowledgeable, and willing to try new approaches; they adapt to our son's needs, and ask how they can better support him. We would be a lot less active and not in the community as much as we are without them and their incredible support.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

PROGRAM DESIGN

Generally, parents appreciate programs where their children are not overwhelmed by loud, chaotic, or highly structured settings. Programs that take these considerations seriously are more accessible for neurodivergent children, enabling sustained participation.

- Other design elements that help facilitate children's engagement in physical activity were discussed:
- One-on-one adaptive lessons, such as swim and skate programs in municipal recreation centres, are effective entry points for children with disabilities to build confidence and foundational physical skills.
- Behavioural interventionists or adequately trained support and respite workers are particularly skilled at identifying and accommodating individual abilities and interests.
- Programs that do not require parental supervision foster children's physical activity, autonomy, and social development, while also offering parents flexibility (in particular, the capacity to take a break or be elsewhere if helpful).

“As parents, we love our kids and we fight for them. Sometimes it's nice to have a break too.”

- Parent of a child with a disability

INTERSECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders and newcomer families: Both groups noted that adaptive programming helps to facilitate physical activity for children with disabilities. These school-based programs, which deliberately incorporate movement-based regulation into educational routines (either during or after school), were identified as being particularly helpful for children with ADHD and other attention-related needs. For example, children may be encouraged to run laps or play soccer before transitioning to homework. In these examples, organizational infrastructure and scheduling are designed to meet children's holistic needs—physical, neurodevelopmental, and academic.

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Summary of findings and conclusion

This report brings together the voices and experiences of equity-deserving families and youth across B.C. to inform a collective understanding of the barriers and facilitators that shape physical activity participation. Through engagement with Indigenous sport and recreation leaders, newcomer and refugee parents, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, parents of children with disabilities, and youth from rural and remote communities, nuanced and community-driven solutions have emerged.

The findings presented here highlight that many barriers and facilitators to physical activity are shared across groups. Challenges such as affordability, lack of inclusive programming, administrative hurdles, and inadequate infrastructure were common experiences. However, the experiences of these common factors are shaped by critical nuances that are rooted in intersecting identities, histories, and contexts that must be considered when designing solutions. Equally important are the unique barriers and facilitators identified by individual groups, reminding us that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient for achieving true equity in physical activity access.

The findings also help to validate many of the findings discussed in the Centre for Family Equity’s (CFE) 2024 report prepared for BCAHL, while necessarily building upon those findings. Data was disaggregated demographically, offering richer, more specific insights into the lived experiences of several of the engaged groups—and adding vital depth to the existing evidence base.



Together, these findings offer not just confirmation, but a clear direction for future work. Equity, inclusion, and access must be built intentionally into the design of programs, policies, and systems that support physical activity. The recommendations offered throughout this report are grounded in community expertise and lived realities, providing a roadmap to take action.

Moving forward, it is important to reflect on the voices, strengths, and solutions identified by these groups, and to apply these insights with care and intention to support a more inclusive and active future for all families across B.C.

Appendices

Appendix A

Participant quotations informing the report recommendations

Throughout this appendix, select participant quotations are featured in dark green text. These quotations have been lightly edited for grammatical clarity and length, and may be repeated if relevant to more than one recommendation.

Note: this appendix does not include quotations from parents of families impacted by low income, as these were not included in the Centre for Family Equity's 2024 Active BC Kids engagement report's participant-identified recommendations.

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Organizational factors

Common recommendations

Engagement groups

- Indigenous recreation and sport leaders
- Newcomer and refugee families
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Design programming that welcomes all ages and supports whole-family wellness

“[Programming] should involve everyone, from little ones to Elders. It should be accessible to all.” – Indigenous recreation and sport leader

“Here, the government is giving the most priority for the seniors and the children. What about the others? [Us,] the parents. Especially 18 to 60, that age group. So we need support from the government to access these facilities because we are also paying the tax and everything. We have to be a part of that.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

“Programs that allow families to participate together, such as family swim times or joint parent-child fitness classes, would foster family bonding while promoting healthy lifestyles. This would make it easier for busy parents to stay active while spending quality time with their children.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

Engagement groups

- Parents of children with disabilities
- Youth in rural and remote communities
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Create more sensory-friendly spaces and activities

“Considering sensory issues! I wish there were less exercise activities that involve bright lights and loud noises like team team sports. Physical activity can be chaotic and a lot to handle—headphones and dimmer lights would help.” – Rural/remote youth

“Smaller groups so it’s less overwhelming sensory-wise, easy access to one-on-one support for the child when needed.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“Less crowded, more sensory-friendly spaces.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Engagement groups

- Parents of children with disabilities
- Youth in rural and remote communities
- Families impacted by low income
- Indigenous recreation and sport leaders
- Newcomer and refugee families
- Youth from rural and remote communities
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Offer a diversity of physical activity options that reflect community strengths and interests

“Yes—wholeheartedly holistic. That’s what Indigenous programs naturally are. When kids do traditional games, there’s no competition—it’s teamwork. No one is singled out.” – Indigenous recreation and sport leader

“Using imagination is huge. We do squats, but I’ll say, ‘We’re picking up wood for raspberry tea.’ ... We make it playful and imaginative. That’s how we do things.” – Indigenous recreation and sport leader

“Even having a circle—like a talking circle—creates a sense of calm, love, connection, and sharing. People become real in those spaces. That’s what it’s about.” – Indigenous recreation and sport leader

“Offer a wide variety of activities that appeal to different age groups.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

“I would like to see more opportunities for yoga and mindfulness at school. Sometimes, I just need to breathe, not sweat.” – Rural/remote youth

“[More of] what may not be conventionally thought of during P.E.: Dance, yoga, self-defence/martial arts, gymnastics, rock climbing, hiking, nature-related sports in general, etc...” – Rural/remote youth

“I think one, like, thing for me that I would like to see is like a non, yeah, non-competitive, like sport or league or something. I think people were talking about that before like, because one thing for me is I was on the track and field team like a couple of years ago, but just like it being so like competitive, like the races and stuff I would get so nervous beforehand and like I would just feel like so bad about myself.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Engagement groups

- Newcomer and refugee families
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Make recreational hours more flexible and responsive to diverse schedules

“The gyms at the community centre are typically reserved for...adults, like 19 and over, or 18 and over. They might on a Friday night have youth time in the open gym. But other than that, it’s usually like one day a week, and you have to pre-register.” – Parent impacted by low income

“In Vancouver, there is no nightlife. There are no open places after 6, 7. Only some restaurants. That’s it. There are no leisure places open that are free for the society, for the public to come and freely spend their time. Everyone goes there to their home, eat, sleep, and then go and work. Like in support of the capitalistic way of living. But from the world that we are coming from, there are more opportunities to spend leisure time after 7, after working time, you know, just until sleeping time or over the night and having free time.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

Engagement groups

- Newcomer and refugee parents
- Parents of children with disabilities
- Youth from rural and remote communities

Recommendation

Facilitate community-building and knowledge sharing through inclusive activity programs

“More opportunities for families to observe/connect/network while their child enjoys the activity. A chance to build community!” – Parent of a child with a disability

“Creating community is good for the person when you’re an immigrant because you feel good here, you feel healthy.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Youth from rural and remote communities

Recommendation

Foster safer, more inclusive environments across programs

“Less discrimination, understanding of learning, options for other sports, free or cheap equipment, free or cheap transportation.” – Rural/remote youth

“Support, support, support! A lack of support, a lack of welcoming, leads to a lifetime of fearing physical activity.” – Rural/remote youth

“[More] supportive adults/youth around you.” – Rural/remote youth

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and youth from rural and remote communities
- Youth who live in rural and remote communities
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Provide free or accessible equipment to reduce cost barriers

“Equipment swap, or a gym provides the space for free.” – Rural/remote youth

“Less discrimination, understanding of learning, options for other sports, free or cheap equipment, free or cheap transportation.” – Rural/remote youth

“Supporting youth to get equipment they need.” – Rural/remote youth

Engagement groups

- Indigenous recreation and sport leaders
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Foster mentorship and youth leadership in physical activity programs

“Yeah, I definitely think leadership, giving students an opportunity to become leaders, if they’re a few years older, coming in with the younger groups, it’s a huge confidence builder for themselves, and it also builds those connections. And I think that’s really important too. So, giving the opportunity for older students to work with younger students would be ideal in any kind of physical activity programming.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“If I were imagining the perfect program, I think it would be youth-led. Less of me, more of them. They’d feel empowered to lead and do it all themselves, with me just in the background.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“Access to physical activities to be inclusive of positive role models and mentors to combat social isolation for at-risk, low-income children, youth, and whole families.” – Parent impacted by low income

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INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

Recommendation

Create culturally safe and creative programs

“Using imagination is huge. We do squats, but I’ll say, ‘We’re picking up wood for raspberry tea.’ If they drop one, we pick it up again—not squats, but gathering.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“We make it playful and imaginative. That’s how we do things.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“Even having a circle—like a talking circle—creates a sense of calm, love, connection, and sharing. People become real in those spaces. That’s what it’s about.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Integrate food into programs as a cultural connector and leadership tool

“If you can afford to come and have lunch with us—soup made from scratch and bannock—\$3 for soup, \$2 for bannock. If you don’t have lunch, you come and see us and we feed you anyway because that’s the way our people have been since time immemorial.

And it’s vibrant. Everybody wants to help with it. Our Indigenous students have an opportunity for leadership, so through food again and community, the money that’s generated from that has allowed us to offer a lot of the programs or to supplement so that we can do on a whole school scale a lot of these activities that promote physical activity and involve the whole school community.

But otherwise, if I’m being real, it wouldn’t happen without those things.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Ensure programs are led by consistent, trusted local facilitators

“The only thing I can think of is, and we’ve said it in different ways, but I think having that community person to be consistently there, like Courtney said, to run these programs and have somebody leading it in the community, I think, makes a big difference.

Yeah, I feel like communities that have someone running the programs or in that position is key to having consistency year after year and building up… giving the kids something to work towards, knowing that they can advance to the next level or they have someone supporting them to be part of these sports.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Invest in formal training for Indigenous recreation leaders

“Having that place to go and get the training [be a recreation leader], and not learning on the job and not learning as you go.

Having all the bits and pieces would be amazing for a start—to bring to communities and have properly trained recreation managers in the community to run community programming.

I think having proper [training] facilities is so important.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Re-centre programs on land-based learning and cultural connection

“The only other thing I’d add is about urban centres. There’s a real disconnect from the land when it comes to physical activity. We’re at the school, the community centre, the Friendship Centre—but not outside.

Over time, there’s been less access to outdoor spaces, less land-based knowledge—about plants, stories, language.

I think about that a lot. A couple of years ago, I asked kids if they’d ever been to the beach—and some hadn’t. That’s really sad.

So I would hope every program includes that land connection and land-based learning.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

Recommendation

Expand culturally adaptive gender-specific programming

“Providing more swimming pools and fitness facilities that cater specifically to women and girls would help.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

Invest in more trained recreation facilitators, especially for youth programming

“I have applied for my daughter [for] dancing. She wants to dance. And I have applied for that. Still, I didn’t get a facilitator. They are always telling me they don’t have a facilitator, so we are cancelling your program.

So we need more facilitators.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

Provide on-site child care to increase parent access to physical activity

“More places where you can leave your child for one hour or two hours for child minding.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

2SLGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Recommendation

Update registration and team forms to reflect gender diversity

“We need forms that actually say what we are. They always have ‘male/female’ or ask for a parent’s name like it’s a mom and a dad. Even the forms for sports teams. Just change the forms.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Provide flexible, hybrid participation models

“Sometimes I want to go, but I don’t want to go. Like, I want to be part of it but not be seen. If I could join something from home and just watch, I’d feel safer.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

“If it was an online thing, like a group or a class, I’d probably join more. It’s easier to try stuff if you’re not surrounded by people.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Recommendation

Expand accessible and adaptive programming in community centres

“The fact that none of these programs are designed for kids with disabilities [is an issue]. They are designed for average children, and then that leaves us scrambling to find ways that our children can join in.

...They don’t do anything to make sure that the kids are staying regulated... like it’s sort of whatever. It’s just our responsibility. And if we can’t, no one cares.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Increase the availability of one-on-one support staff

“If we do put him in other activities such as the gymnastics... we have to bring in a BI or do it ourselves with him because he requires one-on-one. So... if they actually had somebody that could do that with him at the same time, that would be really helpful.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“Many places think they are being more accessible by letting the parent participate, or offering you can bring your own support worker... This is not really accessibility. Caregivers want a program they can enjoy as any other parent would: drop off their child, have them be successful, and just observe.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Restore or develop volunteer-based support models

“Wouldn’t it be amazing if you could register your child and get a volunteer for support if needed? Then I wouldn’t have to physically be there—and my child could interact with someone other than me.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“There used to be one-on-one funding. I worked in inclusion-based summer camps. The difference it made was huge. They took that away. Autism funding still exists, but physical disabilities lack funding.” – Parent of a child with a disability

FAMILIES LIVING IN RURAL AND
REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Recommendation

Implement proactive monitoring of behaviour and social dynamics

“Getting rid of the discrimination. Making it a safe place. Policing those areas for people who make fun of people.” – Rural/remote youth

“In team sports it is important to have a great role model. That makes for a good experience. Adults can help create a supportive environment.” – Rural/remote youth

Integrate mental health and mindset education into physical activity

“Offer more opportunities and choice, TEACHING ABOUT MINDSET IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES.” – Rural/remote youth

“Teaching healthy habits in P.E. classes instead of just sports.” – Rural/remote youth

Environmental factors

Common recommendations

Engagement groups

- Indigenous recreation and sport leaders
- Newcomer and refugee families

Recommendation

Build and maintain local recreation infrastructure

“We just built a walking trail and have some mountain biking trails, we would love to have a track facility, having the proper facilities in the community so kids can train regularly and learn the proper skills is so important.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“I’ve seen kids play backyard soccer and have never been part of a soccer team and then go and be recognized on a team and be scouted, and this child has had no official training. So there’s a huge amount of ability and talent in the community, and I think having facilities within the community would make a huge difference in the success of these athletes starting right at the elementary age and developing some of these skills would be huge.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“There is only one indoor playground for the kids, which is in Royal Mall City, and we can’t find any other option, which is a little bit far.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

“We need indoor playgrounds. An indoor jogging area, walking areas, we need it, we don’t have that.”
– Newcome/refugee parent

Engagement groups

- Newcomer and refugee families
- Families living in rural and remote areas
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Remove transportation barriers to support equitable access

“Receive any support for the transportation because there aren’t some like buses that take people from one place to another place specifically, so that’s another point.”
– Newcomer/refugee parent

“Free or cheap transportation.” – Rural/remote youth

Unique recommendations

INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

Recommendation

Use physical activity to build strong, connected communities

“It needs to be holistic—bringing in food, community, and supporting all aspects of wellness: mental, physical, emotional, spiritual. It should involve everyone, from little ones to Elders. It should be accessible to all.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

Recommendation

Increase availability of local, accessible, and culturally relevant programming

“More local recreational programs and sports activities should be introduced in Afghan communities, especially those that offer diverse activities like soccer, swimming, and gymnastics. Reducing travel time by having programs closer to home would make it easier for families to participate.” – Newcomer/refugee parent

2SLGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Note: no environmental recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Recommendation

Make inclusion the default across all recreation services—not the exception

But yeah, I think from my standpoint in terms of advocacy, if something comes out of this, it’s just kind of getting this word out to all the rec centers and the people that provide these programs that our kids are out there and that they need this extra support. I think it can’t just be reliant upon these individual programs like Canucks Autism Network and specific programs that we bring. If we really are talking about inclusivity, then it should be inclusive in the rec centers and set up that way. There’s so many kids that are gonna need this service. I think that there’s a huge demand just jobs wise for people in rec centers that could specialize in these areas.
– Parent of a child with a disability

FAMILIES LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Note: no environmental recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of families living in rural and remote communities.

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Policy factors

Common recommendations

Engagement groups

- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee families
- Families living in rural and remote communities

Recommendation

Centre equity and community priorities in recreation policy and planning

“If we really are talking about inclusivity, then it should be inclusive in the rec centers [to hire Indigenous leaders] and set up that way. There’s so many kids that are gonna need [Indigenous-focused sport and recreation programming]. I think that there’s a huge demand just jobs-wise for people in rec centers that could specialize in these areas.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“More local recreational programs and sports activities should be introduced in Afghan communities, as there aren’t enough.” – Newcomer/refugee families

“So we need support from the government to access these facilities because we are also paying the tax and everything. We have to be a part of that.” – Newcomer/refugee families

Engagement groups

- Families living in rural and remote communities
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Recommendation

Fund free or low-cost programs and equipment access to ensure all youth can participate, regardless of income or geography

“We talked a lot about money. I heard like equipment and stuff like that, maybe just having it be on a pay-what-you-can basis—having programs like that or even having programs be free.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Engagement groups

- Newcomer and refugee families
- Families impacted by low income

Recommendation

Implement equitable subsidy policies for essential youth activities

“The government could help in the costs of activities like gymnastics, taekwondo, and swimming would make these programs more accessible for families.”
– Newcome/refugee parent

“Recreation centres, they have leisure and such programs that have people with low income to participate in their programs too. And I think it’s very good. It’s very good that there is financial assistance for those that are low income.”
– Newcomer/refugee parent

Unique recommendations

INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

Recommendation

Direct public funding to Indigenous-led, culturally grounded programs

“For me in our community, I think having more community coaches and more programs that can be run in the community by community would be something that would help it run better and longer term and kind of create a sustainable program.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

We just built a walking trail and have some mountain biking trails... having the proper facilities in community so kids can train regularly and learn the proper skills is so important... I think having facilities within the community would make a huge difference in the success of these athletes starting right at the elementary age.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Make land-based learning a policy standard

“The only other thing I’d add is about urban centres. There’s a real disconnect from the land when it comes to physical activity.

We’re at the school, the community centre, the Friendship Centre—but not outside.

Over time, there’s been less access to outdoor spaces, less land-based knowledge—about plants, stories, language.

I think about that a lot. A couple of years ago, I asked kids if they’d ever been to the beach—and some hadn’t. That’s really sad.

So I would hope every program includes that land connection and land-based learning.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

NEWCOMER AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

Note: no policy recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of newcomer and refugee families.

2SLGBTQIA+ YOUTH

Recommendation

Implement gender-inclusive policies

“It’s not just about having one queer-friendly group. I want to feel safe anywhere I go. It shouldn’t be ‘special.’ It should be normal.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Recommendation

Mandate inclusive program delivery across all publicly funded recreation facilities

“So we feel pretty vulnerable when we do go out and we do trust those programs and what they’re offering us. And that’s, I think, why we really rely on the Canucks Autism Network.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“It makes us really nervous to even try different things because... that slogan of ‘we’re inclusive,’ but we’re not actually gonna support any of the needs that you have.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Publicly fund one-on-one support staff for children with disabilities in recreational settings

“Many places think they are being more accessible by letting the parent participate, or offering you can bring your own support worker... This is not really accessible. Caregivers want a program they can enjoy as any other parent would: drop off their child, have them be successful, and just observe” – Parent of a child with a disability

“We had the same experience with trying to get everyone to skating. They’re like ‘Yeah, you can sign him up, but you’re gonna have to be there with him or pay for somebody else to be there with him.’” – Parent of a child with a disability

Develop a provincial volunteer-based inclusion support program

“Wouldn’t it be amazing if you could register your child and get a volunteer for support if needed? Then I wouldn’t have to physically be there—and my child could interact with someone other than me.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“Resources are limited. That’s why I ran programs myself when I was a social worker and youth worker, teaching one-on-one. Parents would ask how their kid could join, so I started a program so everyone could do it.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“There used to be one-on-one funding. I worked in inclusion-based summer camps. The difference it made was huge. They took that away.” – Parent of a child with a disability

FAMILIES LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Note: no policy recommendations were identified as specific to the needs and interests of families living in rural and remote communities.

Appendix B

Focus group guide

General question set

Icebreaker

- 1. We will go around in a circle to hear from everyone. Please share your first name and your favourite way to be active.

Introductory questions

- 2. What role does physical activity play in your family’s daily or weekly routine?
 - a. Prompt: Is it a priority?
 - b. Prompt: Is it difficult to include in your routine?
- 3. How do you hear or find out about physical activity programming, or other opportunities to be active in your community?

Motivators/positive aspects of physical activity for children and families

- 4. What kind of physical activities does your family enjoy the most and why?
 - a. Prompt: What about your children?
 - b. Prompt: Are the activities that your children or family like or would like to participate in easy to access?
- 5. What motivates your children and family to engage in physical activity?
- 6. What kind of places or programs have made a positive impact on your children’s and family’s physical activity and motivation to be active?
 - a. Prompt: What worked well about these places/programs?

Limitations to physical activity for children and families

- 7. Are there activities that you think would be fun/good for your children, but they have not tried yet?
 - a. What stops your children from participating, or what makes it hard to try these activities?
- 8. What prevents your children from being active or doing physical activities?
 - a. Prompt: Are there financial, logistical, or systemic issues?
 - b. Prompt: How does location, transportation, or community infrastructure affect your children’s/family’s ability to be active?
 - c. Prompt: Are there social or cultural factors that make physical activity less accessible or comfortable for your children/family?
 - d. Prompt: Do you feel welcome or supported in local activities in your community?

Recommendations for making physical activity more accessible

- 9. What changes would make it easier for your children to participate in physical activity?
 - a. Prompt: Think about programs, facilities, cost, transportation, and the variety of activities available.
 - b. Prompt: Are there specific resources or supports that would make it easier for you to participate?
- 10. If you could design an ideal physical activity program for your children or families like you, what should it include?

Closing question

Do you have anything else to share that we have not already talked about?

Indigenous sport and recreation leader question set

Icebreaker

1. We will go around on screen to hear from everyone. Please share your first name, where you're calling from, what your role is and how long you've been in it, and what types of activities/programs you support for Indigenous children and youth.

Introductory questions

2. What role do you think physical activity plays in Indigenous youth and families lives in your communities?
 - a. Prompt: Is it a priority?

3. How do Indigenous youth and families find out about physical activity programming, or other opportunities to be active in your community?

Motivators of physical activity for Indigenous children and youth

4. What activities do Indigenous youth and families in your communities enjoy most?
 - a. Prompt: Why do you think these activities resonate with them?
 - b. Prompt: Are the activities that Indigenous children and youth like easily accessible?
5. What motivates the Indigenous children and youth in your community to engage in physical activity?
 - a. Prompts: School? Family? Friends?
6. What unique strengths or resources in your community have helped encourage physical activity for children and youth?
7. What traditions, cultural practices, or community values have inspired children and youth to stay active? How can these be built upon?

Lessons learned

8. Can you think of an example(s) when significant challenges to being active in your community were successfully overcome? What contributed to that success?
9. What kind of places, physical activity programs, or initiatives are making or have made a positive impact for Indigenous children and youth in your community?
 - a. Prompt: What is working/worked well about these places/programs?
10. How has your community addressed financial, logistical, or systemic challenges to increase access to physical activity?
 - a. Prompt: What has worked well?
 - b. Prompt: What else needs to be done?
11. Are there creative or community-driven solutions that have made transportation, location, or infrastructure less of a barrier to being active?
12. What steps could be taken to further enhance a sense of welcome and belonging in local activities?
 - a. Prompt: Are there examples of programs or spaces that already do this well?

Recommendations for making physical activity more accessible

13. What changes would make it easier for children and youth in your community to participate in physical activity?
 - a. Prompt: Think about programs, facilities, cost, transportation, and the variety of activities available.
 - b. Prompt: Are there specific resources or supports that would make it easier for them to participate?
14. If you could design an ideal physical activity program for Indigenous children and youth in your community, what should it include?

Closing question

15. Do you have anything else to share that we have not already talked about?

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Appendix C

Demographic survey findings

Demographic survey results, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth (N=6)

Age	n=6	Languages spoken at home other than English*	n=5
16	1	French	5
17	4	Greek	1
18	1	Mandarin	1
Do you identify as a person with a disability?	n=6	Annual household income	n=6
Yes	3	\$0 - \$29,999 per year	0
No	3	\$30,000-\$49,999 per year	0
Gender or gender identity	n=6	\$50,000-\$69,999 per year	1
Transgender man	3	\$70,000-\$99,999 per year	0
Transgender woman	2	\$100,000-149,999 per year	1
Gender fluid	1	\$150,000 or more per year	0
Regional health authority respondent lives in	n=5	I do not know	4
Vancouver Coastal	4	Prefer not to answer	0
Fraser	1	Primary means of transportation*	n=6
Race category*	n=6	Driving (own or family car)	6
White (e.g. European descent)	5	Taking public transportation (e.g. bus, SkyTrain)	5
East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese)	1	Walking	2
Latino (e.g. Latin American, Hispanic descent)	1	Carpooling (with others outside your family)	1

Demographic survey results, rural and remote youth (N=9)

Age	n=4	Languages spoken at home other than English*	n=6
13	1	French	4
16	1	Danish	1
17	2	Greek	1
Do you identify as a person with a disability?	n=9	Italian	1
Yes	1	Mandarin	1
No	6	Tagalog	1
Prefer not to answer	2	Vietnamese	1
Gender or gender identity	n=9	Annual household income	n=9
Woman	4	\$0 - \$29,999 per year	1
Man	2	\$30,000-\$49,999 per year	0
Transgender woman	1	\$50,000-\$69,999 per year	1
Gender fluid	1	\$70,000-\$99,999 per year	0
Prefer not to answer	1	\$100,000-149,999 per year	1
Regional health authority respondent lives in	n=9	\$150,000 or more per year	1
Interior	4	I do not know	5
Island	2	Prefer not to answer	0
Northern	2	Primary means of transportation*	n=9
Vancouver Coastal	1	Driving (own or family car)	9
Race category*	n=9	Taking public transportation (e.g. bus, SkyTrain)	2
White (e.g. European descent)	6	Walking	3
Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai)	2	Carpooling (with others outside your family)	2
Prefer not to answer	1	Bicycling	1

* Respondents could choose more than one response option.

NAVIGATION

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Demographic survey results, parents of
children with disabilities (N=13)

Number of children in parents' care	n=13
1	2
2	8
3	3
Ages of parents' children*	n=27**
Early years (0–5)	8
Childhood (6–11)	12
Youth (12–18)	7
Gender or gender identity	n=13
Woman	10
Man	3
Regional health authority respondent lives in	n=13
Vancouver Coastal	4
Interior	4
Island	4
Northern	3
Fraser	1
Race category*	n=13
White (e.g. European descent)	9
Indigenous (e.g. First Nations, Métis, Inuit)	2
South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo- Caribbean)	2
East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese)	1
Other	1

Languages spoken at home other than English*	n=4
Cantonese	1
French	1
German	1
Spanish	1
Swahili	1
Urdu	1
Annual household income	n=13
\$0 – \$29,999 per year	0
\$30,000–\$49,999 per year	2
\$50,000–\$69,999 per year	1
\$70,000–\$99,999 per year	1
\$100,000–149,999 per year	3
\$150,000 or more per year	4
I do not know	1
Prefer not to answer	1
Primary means of transportation*	n=13
Driving (own or family car)	13
Walking	4
Taking public transportation (e.g. bus, SkyTrain)	2
Carpooling (with others outside your family)	2
Rideshare (e.g. cab/taxi, Uber)	1

Demographic survey results, Indigenous sport and
recreation leaders (N=7)

Regional health authority respondent lives in	n=7
Interior	5
Northern	1
Vancouver Coastal	1
Island	0
Fraser	0
Supports or leads physical activities or programs accessible to people with disabilities	n=7
Yes	7
Primary means of transportation for community's children and families*	n=7
Driving (own or family car)	7
Carpooling (with others outside their family)	5
Walking	5
Bicycling	5
Taking public transportation (e.g. bus, SkyTrain)	4
Scootering	2
Rideshare (e.g. cab/taxi, Uber)	0
Other	1

* Respondents could choose more than one response option.

** Respondents reported the ages of each child: (2 parents x 1 child) + (8 parents x 2 children) + (3 parents x 3 children) = 27 children.

Appendix D

Demographic survey questions

Thank you for joining the focus group to share your experiences with physical activity in your community!

We want to learn how programs can better support people from all backgrounds. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey. Your answers will not be connected to your name or anything that identifies you, and the information is only being used to inform program and policy recommendations.

All questions are optional. This means you can skip any you do not want to answer.

Thank you for helping us with this important work!

Who is collecting this information?

Be the Change Group, the research group who is leading this project, and BC Alliance for Healthy Living, the project sponsor, are collecting this information for their project on less active families.

Why are you collecting this information?

Collecting this information helps Be the Change Group, the BC Alliance for Healthy Living, and other organizations better understand the needs of different people. This will help us:

- Make sure everyone can access physical activity programs in their community.
- Find ways to improve programs/communities so they better support children and youth across B.C.
- Share important information with provincial leaders about how different communities are affected.

What is this information being collected for?

Be the Change Group will include a small section in their final report summarizing the demographics of all focus group participants across multiple sessions to provide a summary of who attended the focus groups.

Survey questions

What is the date of your focus group? (month/day/year) _____

I am a: (please select one)

- a. Youth (ages 13 to 18)
- b. Parent or guardian of a child/youth between the ages of 5 to 18
- c. Community physical activity leader

If you are a youth, how old are you? [open-text] _____

If you are a parent or guardian, how many children do you have/care for? How old are they? [open-text] _____

Number of children/youth: [open-text] _____

Ages: [open-text] _____

What is your gender or gender identity?

- a. Man
- b. Woman
- c. Non-binary
- d. Two-Spirit
- e. Transgender man
- f. Transgender woman
- g. Another gender identity (please specify): [open-text] _____
- h. Prefer not to answer.

Which B.C. city or town do you live in? [open-text] _____

Which race category best describes you? [select all that apply]

- a. Black (e.g. African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian)
- b. East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese)
- c. Indigenous (e.g. First Nations, Métis, Inuit)
- d. Latino (e.g. Latin American, Hispanic descent)
- e. Middle Eastern (e.g. Arab, Persian)
- f. West Asian (e.g. Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian)
- g. South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean)
- h. Southeast Asian (e.g. Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai)
- i. White (European descent)
- j. Another race category: _____
- k. Prefer not to answer.

What languages do you speak other than English? [open-text]

What is your annual household income level? Select one.

- a. 0 - \$29,999
- b. \$30,000-\$49,999
- c. \$50,000-\$69,999
- d. \$70,000-\$99,999
- e. \$100,000-149,999
- f. \$150,000 or more
- g. I do not know.
- h. Prefer not to answer.

Do you identify as a person with a disability?

- a. Yes, I am a person with a disability.
- b. Yes, my child/youth is a person with a disability.
- c. No, I am not a person with a disability.
- d. Prefer not to answer.

What is the main way your family usually gets around? [select all that apply]

- a. Driving (own or family car)
- b. Carpooling (with others outside your family)
- c. Walking
- d. Bicycling
- e. Scootering
- f. Rideshare (e.g. cab/taxi, Uber)
- g. Taking public transportation (e.g. bus, SkyTrain)
- h. Other: [open-text] _____
- i. We don't have a regular way to get around.

Appendix E

Personal and social barriers

Throughout this appendix, participant quotations are featured in dark green text. These quotations have been lightly edited for grammatical clarity and length.

Common barriers

Personal factors

Barrier

Sensory sensitivities

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Settings designed for the general public are often too loud and crowded for both children and others who are neurodivergent.

“[A barrier is] autism and sensory issues—basketball and volleyball—the bouncing balls and loud noises caused harm.” – Rural/remote youth

Barrier

Busy

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Competing demands from school, work, and family life create time constraints that limit participation in physical activity, especially for youth and newcomer families.

“Getting busier in high school [makes it harder to work out].” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Barrier

Social anxiety

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Internal feelings of fear or anxiety and external social environments influence participation, particularly in settings that are either less familiar or feel less welcoming.

“And I think the biggest challenge is just getting [my daughter] safe with anxiety and with everything else, to feel comfortable and safe with her challenges in those settings and getting those comforts.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Barrier

Competition

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Explanation

Excessive pressure and competitiveness in school and community sports discourage participation by creating anxiety and exclusion for youth who want to play for fun or to learn.

“I had a big volleyball phase until the stress and competition outweighed the enjoyment of being with friends.” – Rural/remote youth

“Some teams are too competitive—some schools could benefit from rec teams, versus competitive teams. There is no in-between for a lot of schools.” – Rural/remote youth

Barrier

Fear

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Fear of physical harm or lack of safety from participating in physical activity creates a barrier for youth.

“A lot of people don’t learn how to swim because they are scared of going into the ocean.” – Rural/remote youth

“My son wants to go down a large water slide or roller coaster but he has low core strength and can have a fear of falling or have less balance than a typical child. He would have to go down the water slide alone and or ride on his own (not in mom’s lap) so therefore he does not feel safe to try.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Barrier

Fear, new activity

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Fear of failure when trying new activities can prevent youth from engaging in physical activity.

“They tried skating, but they don’t want to try again because of failure. They’re tall now, and being in groups with small kids makes them feel embarrassed.

So I try to teach them that failure is the first step.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Barrier

Self image

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Explanation

Concerns about body image and feelings of insecurity can prevent youth from engaging in physical activity.

“The gym made me kind of feel, like, insecure about myself a little bit, seeing all, like, the very muscular people.”
– 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Barrier

Skill, fitness

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Low stamina and physical fitness challenges can prevent youth from fully participating in physical activity, especially when they feel unable to keep up with others.

“I just don’t have enough stamina.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Social factors

Barrier

Bullying

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Bullying and peer intimidation, especially related to ability, gender norms, or skill level, can prevent youth from feeling safe and welcomed in physical activity settings.

“School gym classes have always been dominated by a certain type of person—they are usually popular, loud, and can exclude people who aren’t good. This can be discouraging not being in that group of people. Not getting picked to play, or being picked on on purpose. (I got hit in the face with a dodgeball eight times in an hour, this can seem like it’s on purpose). This makes you think that maybe exercise isn’t for me!” – Rural/remote youth

“Currently my daughter is feeling really unsafe in the world because of challenges with other children not being kind to her.” – Parent of a child with a disability

Barrier

Caregiver fatigue

Engagement groups

- Parents of children with disabilities
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Caregiver fatigue and the constant demands of supporting children with complex needs can prevent families from engaging in physical activity.

“I didn’t want to be my daughter’s support person for soccer, not just because I don’t play soccer, but because I need a break.” – Parent of a child with a disability

“In this area, we have a lot of housing projects and ongoing issues with access to money, which has been a barrier. Many families are just trying to survive—single-parent households, moms working multiple jobs—so getting their kids to programs often isn’t feasible.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Barrier

Equipment

Engagement group

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders

Explanation

Lack of access to appropriate or affordable equipment can prevent youth from participating in physical activity.

“I feel like the problem is the equipment as well. It’s really expensive to even rent.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Barrier

Individual activity

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Some participants described individual activities as less enjoyable than group activities, preventing them from being physically active in certain circumstances.

“I used to do weightlifting too, but that didn’t last long. It kinda sucked buttcheeks when I wasn’t doing it with a friend.”
– Rural/remote youth

Barrier

Lack of encouragement

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Lack of encouragement from peers, school systems, or caregivers can prevent youth from pursuing and continuing in physical activity.

“But the challenge is the school system doesn’t take them to a higher level. It stops at a certain level. So the courage path is very limited. And they can’t continue.”
– Newcomer/refugee parent

“You get no encouragement from your friends even if you really want to do a new sport.” – Rural/remote youth

Barrier

Socialization with peers, non-friends

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Parents of children with disabilities

Explanation

Fear of exclusion, judgment, or discomfort around peers who aren't friends can prevent youth from participating in group physical activity.

"Swimming is very individual, and you don't have to talk to anybody else, and I feel a lot more comfortable doing that than, like, group sports or team sports." – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

"We definitely prioritize physical activity, but [my daughter's] anxieties, and fears, and social challenges make it really hard to access, like, recreation or things in group settings [with other kids]." – Parent of a child with a disability

Unique barriers

Indigenous families

Barrier

Attendance

Explanation

Overwhelming responsibilities, feelings of isolation, and a lack of personal connection to school systems can prevent Indigenous youth and families from engaging in physical activity or school-based programs.

"But sometimes we'll offer these fantastic events where we're out in the forest and we're showing them how they were traditionally built and constructed, and we're doing all these different activities, and our two Indigenous students in that class are not present. Absenteeism is one of our biggest challenges. And again, for success and consistency, getting our kids here is still to this day one of the biggest challenges. I hate to say it, but like, yeah, I wish it wasn't that way."

– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Newcomer and refugee families

Barrier

Busy

Parenting responsibilities, exhaustion, and daily demands can prevent newcomer families from having the time or energy to participate in physical activity.

"I don't have 'me' time. In the morning when I leave my child with daddy for one hour or like from 7:00 a.m. to 8 a.m., I don't have energy to do anything else. I'm like 'I wanna sleep.'" – Newcomer/refugee parent

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Barrier

Sexuality and gender identity

Explanation

Discomfort with one's identity in sport spaces can prevent queer and trans youth from continuing to participate in activities they once enjoyed.

"And then the gender stuff. I used to love playing soccer. But I do not do that anymore because of it." – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal and social

Barrier

Habitualization

Explanation

Difficulty building physical activity into daily routines can prevent youth from consistently engaging in movement or exercise.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Barrier

Clothing

Explanation

Gendered uniform requirements in team sports can prevent 2SLGBTQIA+ youth from participating in physical activity when the clothing does not align with their identity or comfort.

"When and if [gender-diverse or trans people] choose to fit into one of the two teams, they'll have to wear a specific uniform. Like, okay, on the women's Rugby team you wear short booty shorts." – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Barrier

Gender norms

Explanation

Rigid gender norms and expectations around clothing and appearance in fitness environments can prevent queer youth from feeling comfortable participating in physical activity.

"Also, it is that idea of like in the cardio section. It's just going to be women, and they're going to be wearing very tight clothes, which is fine. Everyone can wear what they want to wear. But I feel like I stand out wearing stuff that the women aren't wearing and stuff that the men aren't wearing." – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Families with children with disabilities

Barrier

Clothing

Explanation

Sensory sensitivities and discomfort with uniforms or equipment can prevent children with disabilities from participating in physical activity.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Barrier

Lack of encouragement, parental support

Explanation

When parents are expected to act as support staff or coaches, a lack of training, confidence, or capacity can prevent children with disabilities from fully participating in physical activity.

“I enrolled her in soccer, and the soccer association was super enthusiastic about how inclusive they were until we got there. And they’re like ‘Well, we’re inclusive.’ And basically, what they said was ‘We’re inclusive in allowing her to sign up, but we can’t support her. So mom, you need to be out on the field at every practice.’ I’m like, ‘I don’t know how to kick a ball. I have no coordination.’” – Parent of a child with a disability

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Families living in rural and remote communities

Barrier

Motivation

Explanation

Lack of interest or personal drive can prevent youth from engaging in physical activity.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Barrier

Skill, athleticism

Explanation

Fear of judgment, benching, or not being good enough can prevent youth from participating in physical activity, even when they want to learn.

“Not being able to join sports because you know you’re bad, you will be benched, people will make fun of you, and you won’t learn anything. I want to learn, but you have to be good, and you have to win. Some coaches will make fun of you too. If you’re not good, you’re not going to play.”
– Rural and remote youth

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Barrier

Team sports

Explanation

Fear of letting others down, being judged, or not performing well enough can prevent youth in rural and remote communities from participating in team sports.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Barrier

Team sports

Explanation

Pressure to conform to competitive norms and gender expectations in team sports can prevent youth in rural and remote communities from feeling safe or welcomed.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Appendix F

Personal and social facilitators

Throughout this appendix, participant quotations are featured in dark green text. These quotations have been lightly edited for grammatical clarity and length.

Common facilitators

Personal factors

Facilitator

Jobs and incidental physical activity

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Rural/remote youth
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Several participants have jobs that require physical exertion or are physically demanding (e.g. lifeguarding, construction, lifting heavy items).

In addition to paid jobs that require physical labour, participants engage in activities that are incidentally physical in nature, such as housework or going for a walk in nature.

Facilitator

Familiarity and routine

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Being familiar with an activity can make it easier to sustain and build into a regular routine.

“We have many hockey families here and they’re always bringing up their kids, their grandkids, their nieces and

nephews.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

“Regular routines like taking children to the park or playing games after work have become habitual, making it easier for families to stay active and motivated.” – Newcomer parent

Facilitator

Fun

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Explanation

Enjoying an activity is a great facilitator to wanting to do it again.

“My daughter loves swimming.” – Newcomer parent

Facilitator

Individual activities

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Explanation

Individual sports and activities and online classes offer welcome opportunities to be active without a sense of competition or needing to be social.

“Fun is my main motivation. Brazilian Jiu-JitsuBJJ and wrestling were a breath of fresh air since the mistakes and ‘losses’ I experienced during the sport only affected me instead of bringing the whole team down.” – Rural/remote youth

Facilitator

Mental health benefits

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Physical activity was seen to offer valuable mental health benefits, including self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

“I always feel better after [exercising], I’m like, ‘Oh, I should do this more’. Yeah, it just feels good.” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

“[Exercise] makes me feel better about myself.” – Rural/remote youth

Facilitator

Physical health benefits

Engagement groups

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Engagement in physical activity offers important benefits to physical health.

“I like to go [to the community gym] and connect with other people and do some exercise for my body to be healthy ... I’m not really there every day or every week, but whenever I get the chance.” – Newcomer parent

Social factors

Facilitator

Socialization, family

Engagement groups

- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Participants enjoyed physical activities that they can do with their families.

“For many families, sports like basketball are a tradition.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Facilitator

Socialization, non-family

Engagement groups

- Rural/remote youth
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth
- Parents of children with disabilities
- Indigenous sport and recreation leaders
- Newcomer and refugee parents

Explanation

Team sports and other communal activities offer an opportunity to connect and bond with friends, peers, and other community members.

“I like team sports in school because you get to connect with people around school and meet new people you may not have met otherwise.” – Rural/remote youth

“The reason I started skating is because my friends were like, ‘Oh, let’s go. Let’s go skating.’” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

“Anything that gathers people together, the more age groups, the better.” – Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Unique facilitators

Indigenous families

Facilitator

Empowerment

Explanation

When describing the strengths of successful programs in their communities, several leaders described opportunities for leadership as being particularly motivating for the youth they work with. Programs that promote self-growth through physical activity are more likely to sustain participation over a longer duration.

One leader also noted a recent interest in boxing among female youth in their community. They shared this reflected participants’ interest in feeling safe and empowered, particularly when visiting cities and locations outside of their home community.

“What we try to do through our physical activity is to work with the students to learn about themselves too and what their capabilities [are] ... it’s trying to make the students grow as individuals while they’re being physically active.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Facilitator

Collaboration

Explanation

Indigenous sport and recreation leaders appreciated the camaraderie and inspiration they felt when collaborating with others to facilitate programs.

“It’s one thing to start a program, but without continued connections, positive energy, that feeling of family—it’s hard to keep going. But that’s what inspires us in the schools. That’s why we keep doing it.”
– Indigenous sport and recreation leader

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Families with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Facilitator

Gender euphoria

Explanation

Physical changes from exercise can help trans youth achieve body shapes they associate with their gender identity.

Additionally, endorphins released during exercise offer mood-boosting benefits. This may be particularly helpful for youth experiencing gender dysphoria.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

Facilitator

Social pressure, appearance and health benefits

Explanation

Participants described social pressure as motivating them to exercise, both in terms of pressures to adhere to certain physical appearances as part of their gender expression as well as pressure from family and friends to incorporate physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle.

“Especially my parents are kind of like, ‘you need to go outside. You need to exercise.’” – 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Social

Families with children with disabilities

Facilitator

Sensory effects

Explanation

Swimming was identified by several parents as a powerful tool for sensory regulation, and can be calming for children with sensory processing challenges.

Factor level, Social Ecological Model

Personal

BETHECHANGE^{GROUP}

www.bethechangegroup.com

connect@bethechangegroup.com | +1.604.283.1476

