



**Written Submission for the
Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Budget**

**Improving the health and well-being of persons with a disability
through physical activity, recreation and community sport**

By

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALACD)

August 1, 2025

Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** That the federal government implement a requirement to proactively apply a ‘disability lens’ to all government decision-making including those that impact access to physical activity, recreation, and community sport, and in turn the well-being of persons with disabilities.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the federal government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million annually to the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability to serve as the lead national organization for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in physical activity, recreation, and community sport.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the federal government amend Canada’s *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* to include equal access to physical activity, recreation, and community sport as the fifth *Pillar of Action*.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the federal government provide multi-year and sustainable funding that supports initiatives to improve access to physical activity, recreation, and community sport for persons with disabilities.
- **Recommendation 5:** That the federal government play an integral role, in partnership with the NGO sector and universities, in implementing and funding a national surveillance and monitoring system to annually collect and analyze data related to physical activity, recreation, and community sport participation of persons with disabilities.

Introduction to the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability

The mission of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALACD) is to support communities and organizations to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in physical activity, recreation, and community sport.

We have an impact by (1) connecting organizations and communities that play a role in supporting physical activity, recreation, and community sport opportunities for persons with disabilities; (2) ensuring research and knowledge translates into action; (3) advocating for changes to reduce barriers to physical activity, recreation, and community sport opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Challenges and Opportunities

- 27% of Canadians (over age 15) have one or more disabilities
- This represents an increase of 5% since 2017 - in large part due to Canada's aging population and a significant increase in mental health-related disabilities among youth and working-age adults
- Of those who experience disability, the most common types are:
 - Pain (62%)
 - Flexibility (40%)
 - Mobility (39%)
 - Mental health-related disabilities (39%)¹

Persons with disabilities are consistently less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than persons without disabilities and are, therefore, at greater risk of serious mental and physical health issues, loneliness, low self-esteem and negative self-image. However, when persons with disabilities participate in physical activity, they see improvements in their mental, physical and cognitive health.

Physical activity participation results in reduced mental and physical health care costs, increased productivity, improved social and economic contributions, and greater personal independence thus decreasing the demand for social services and community supports and costs.

¹ Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability 2022.

Governments and organizations serving people with disabilities share several goals:

- ‘All people with disabilities in Canada can be **physically active** and experience **well-being**.’ *ALACD Vision Statement*
- ‘...we must remain true to Canadian values. Canada is a dynamic country that **celebrates our diversity, cares for the most vulnerable among us**, and strives for a better future for all.’ – *Prime Minister Carney’s Ministerial Mandate Letter*
- ‘...enabling persons with **disabilities** to **participate on an equal basis** with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities’ - *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

How can ALACD move this Canadian vision forward?

- Since 1989, ALACD has been the lead national entity that works with organizations and communities across Canada to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in physical activity, recreation, and community sport.
- ALACD works to remove systemic barriers including the ways in which persons with disabilities choose to be active.
- ALACD has developed the [*Municipal Guide to Promising and Best Practices for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity*](#), a comprehensive resource that supports municipal and community recreation departments to create fully accessible and inclusive recreation facilities and parks, as well as the provision of inclusive programming, workplace culture and management and accessibility in the built environment.
- Supporting and collaborating with communities and organizations, ALACD is able to positively impact persons in Canada who may have intersectional barriers – i.e., those with a disability who may also be newcomers to Canada, women, racialized groups, Indigenous or part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the federal government implement a requirement to proactively apply a ‘disability lens’ to all government decision-making including those that impact access to physical activity, recreation, and community sport, and in turn the well-being of persons with disabilities.

The federal government is clearly focused on current economic challenges. Improving the health of *all* people living in Canada is a significant contributor to the economy of the country both in terms of their participation in the workforce and the personal and societal benefits that are realized as a result of that contribution. The Prime Minister has

also emphasized that, on a parallel track, we must remain true to Canadian values – including ‘caring for the most vulnerable among us and strive for a better future for all’. Staying true to our Canadian values means ensuring that we act as Canadians when it comes to ensuring social issues are prioritized alongside economic issues -- our future is interdependent on both. **Physical activity, recreation, and community sport present the opportunity to break down barriers and provide the most vulnerable Canadians with the opportunity to build skills and confidence, practice leadership and fully participate in their communities.**

Recommendation 2:

That the federal government provide funding in the amount of \$1.5 million annually to the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability to serve as the lead national organization for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in physical activity, recreation, and community sport.

In 2024, the ALACD conducted consultations with key leaders in the physical activity, recreation and community sport sectors. They, unequivocally, endorsed ALACD as the organization to play a leadership role, related to persons with disabilities, in the areas of (1) facilitating connection between organizations and communities; (2) providing knowledge translation; and (3) advocating for changes to reduce barriers to physical activity, recreation and community sport opportunities.

Since 1989, the ALACD has worked with national and community organizations, schools, and municipalities to provide resources, support, and knowledge-sharing opportunities to improve the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their programs and services. ALACD’s *Moving to Inclusion* resource was provided to every school in Canada. *The Municipal Guide to Promising and Best Practices for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity* is being made available to every municipality in Canada to make facilities, trails, parks and programs fully accessible. Our network includes well over 4000 organizations, municipalities, and individuals who want more information on best practices, universal design, and inclusion strategies.

Recommendation 3

That the federal government amend Canada’s *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* to include equal access to physical activity, recreation and community sport as the fifth *Pillar of Action*.

According to the Canadian government, the Disability Inclusion Action Plan is the ‘roadmap to consider persons with disabilities in all the systems and networks the government operates in’. However, physical activity is not one of the key pillars of the Action Plan. Given that this significant contributor to health and well-being is not included as a pillar, the Action

Plan cannot be considered whole until this addition is made – reflecting both the federal government’s commitment to the Fitness and Amateur Sport Act (2003), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendation 4

That the federal government provides multi-year and sustainable project and operational funding that supports initiatives to improve access to physical activity, recreation, and community sport for persons with disabilities.

The key to achieving meaningful policy change and long-term, lasting impact is through the provision of multi-year, sustainable funding which will put best practices into action in communities across Canada - including rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities. This includes the ability to amplify *ALACD’s Municipal Guide* as a practical resource for communities. The work of the ALACD supports the Government of Canada commitments and mandates and provides a strong return on investment. Access to sustainable government funding—delivered through a more streamlined and efficient process—is essential to expanding reach, strengthening long-term impact, and increasing overall effectiveness; improving the quality of life and well-being for persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 5

That the federal government play an integral role, in partnership with the NGO sector and universities, in implementing and funding a national surveillance and monitoring system to annually collect and analyze data related to physical activity, recreation, and community sport participation of persons with disabilities.

In 2023, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute embarked on an ambitious project called *Measuring the Impact of SPAR*², to assess the value of sport, physical activity and recreation with concrete, detailed evidence about the social, health, environmental and economic impacts. The project provided evidence that clearly demonstrated that investments in sport, physical activity and recreation reach to virtually all aspects of society - including areas that the current Government has identified as its’ most important priorities (nature, crime, employment, environment and productivity).

The *Measuring Impact* report represents the first phase of the project. To uncover the extent of the return on investment of physical activity, recreation, and community sport, further analysis and data collection is required. Despite some collection of data on physical activity

² Measuring Impact. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2023

in the general population, there is very little population-level data on physical activity in people with disabilities. Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that governments and organizations must collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to formulate and implement policies giving effect to the rights of people with disabilities. Sustainable funding to this research and a data surveillance and monitoring system must include a focus on disability participation.

Conclusion

At a time when people living in Canada are aging and increasingly living with disabilities, now is the time for the government to invest in physical activity, recreation and community sport as a critical way to not only support individuals with their quality of life but also to restrain future health care costs, enhance the productivity and economic contributions of individual Canadians, and foster more inclusive and connected Canadian communities.

ALACD appreciates your careful consideration of our budget recommendations and welcomes the opportunity to appear before Committee to further discuss our shared vision.