



Having access to local facilities, spaces, and opportunities to participate in recreation and sport activities enriches residents' lives and helps to attract people to Niagara.

What's Emerging

- Municipal recreation departments have noticed a marked increase in program participation levels, since the COVID-19 pandemic. This presents challenges for Niagara's local communities to be able to provide equitably accessible opportunities to participate. The challenge exists in terms of both present-day capacity; and future demand, based on population growth projections as well as provincial priorities for increased housing builds.
- The Niagara Geopark Trail Network is being formed, as an outcome of the June, 2023, Niagara Geopark Trail Summit. The summit highlighted the importance of Niagara's trail systems, and how access to trails can draw both locals and visitors to areas of natural, Indigenous and local significance.
- Awareness is increasing about the lifelong importance of people being outdoors and having access to connect with nature. This was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic experience.
- Organizations across Niagara and beyond are seeing a shift in volunteering patterns. This trend is being closely watched by people working in recreation and sports.
- There is increasing cross-over of recreation and active living programs with the health and wellness sector in Niagara. Exercise programs are being offered by primary care Family Health Teams and Community Health Centres; municipal recreation departments are seeing program participation referrals from health professionals; and several local municipalities have Active Transportation or Active Living Advisory Committees.
- The 2022 Niagara Active Economy Report outlines a 10-sector ecosystem where the organized sport, active recreation, and active tourism sectors serve a key role in generating community value. This cluster model is now part of Niagara Region's 10-year Economic Development Strategy.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Acknowledge the benefits of innovative programming structures that have arisen from changes brought about during the pandemic period. These include safety protocols and accessible online programming.
- Work collaboratively across sectors in Niagara, to help engage people moving to the region, including those arriving as newcomers to Canada, in recreation and sport opportunities in our community.
- Invest in recreation and sport infrastructure in Niagara, to meet increasing demand for access to programs and facilities. Monitor provincial legislation that may benefit or inhibit putting the necessary infrastructure in place.
- Pay attention to workforce sustainability in the sector by creating jobs for young people to stock and restock the field, and to ensure we have workers to meet demand created by provincial policy priorities for projected home builds in Ontario.
- Expand on work already underway to develop the Active Economy model for Niagara.

Indicators

- Facilities
- Green and Open Space
- Participation Levels
- Benefits
- Partnerships



Happening Now

- From August 6 to 21, 2022, Niagara hosted the 28th Canada Summer Games. More than 5,000 athletes participated in 18 sports and 250+ events. More than 3,600 volunteers contributed 100,000+ hours to support the success of the Games; and 300,000+ spectators attended competitions, cultural festivals and ceremonies. The Games included an inaugural women's rugby competition, the return of men's lacrosse after a 37-year absence, and the first-ever women's lacrosse competition in the history of the Canada Games. This marked the third time in history, and the first time in 21 years, that the event has taken place in the province of Ontario.
- In 2022, the Centre for Sport Capacity at Brock University described work underway to inventory the breadth of diverse sport and sport tourism activity in Niagara, including participation, number of organizations, events, facilities and how they are driving economic activity. This inventory is informing legacy activities of the Canada 2022 Summer Games.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Active Niagara Network of municipal parks and recreation directors held frequent virtual meetings, to address the volume of decision points required to navigate restrictions on programs and facilities. As service delivery re-opened, network meetings focused on meeting pent-up demand, and matching skilled labour with that demand.
- A 2021 Brock University policy brief cites the health benefits of positioning parks and recreation as an essential service. The COVID-19 pandemic period raised awareness of the importance of people having equitable access to recreation experiences.
- The 2023 Sport for Life Summit hosted in Niagara highlighted the importance of aligning sport policies, programs and resources to engage diverse communities in benefiting from equitable access to quality sport programming and physical literacy development.
- Older Adult Infolink is an online tool launched in 2021 by the Age-Friendly Niagara Council. It draws on 211 Ontario data, to allow for easier, enhanced, more centralized access to information about community services, for older adults in Niagara. It also links to Recreation program details provided by each of Niagara's 12 local municipalities.

