

# Exercising Good Policy: Increasing Access to Recreation in Toronto's 2013 Budget

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## Executive Summary

Toronto's 2013 budget can build up our city, or tear it down. City councillors have opportunities, right now, to improve the health of Torontonians that don't require massive investments or complicated agreements with other levels of government. One of these opportunities is quite simple: increase access to recreational services for Torontonians.

Recreational services that reach into every neighbourhood are good for people's health and therefore good for the health of the city. Access to these programs can be improved.

*Exercising Good Policy: Increasing Access to Recreation in Toronto's 2013 Budget* will support conversations about concrete steps we can take in the Toronto 2013 municipal budget to improve health. Rather than responding to cuts after they happen, we are offering evidence on how access to recreation can improve our health. And, how barriers to access in Toronto's communities prevent many of us from enjoying not only the recreation services themselves, but the many health benefits that come with them. These health benefits are the result of not only physical activity, but also social cohesion and connection. When people feel better, they do better. In all ways.

This report offers three policy options that could be included in this year's budget. First, expand the number of recreation centres that provide all programming for free (to include more low-income neighbourhoods) and reinstate free adult programming at these centres. Research tells us that physical activity and recreation foster community relationships and strengthen neighbourhood connections.

Second, increase access to recreation through the Welcome Policy, a policy to support the use of recreation programs and services for low-income people across the city. With fewer barriers to access, more community members enjoy recreational services and the positive health benefits derived from them.

And third, stabilize funding to youth outreach workers programs. Community engagement programs associated with recreation centres have been linked with positive health outcomes for youth. In addition, a growing body of work on youth recreation programs notes their value in addressing violence and crime prevention.

A budget that improves the health of Torontonians just makes sense. The evidence that links recreation programs to improved health is clear. We can start now by making small investments and policy changes in the 2013 budget.