



April 23, 2021

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) urges the Government of Ontario to make outdoor recreational amenities available to Ontarians and to consult with the parks and recreation sector on these and any future measures that would change how Ontarians are able to safely access these amenities.

Since the start of the pandemic, the parks and recreation sector has demonstrated its expertise in managing the ever-changing regulations and public health directives that comes with delivering vital services during a pandemic. Parks and recreation professionals have worked tirelessly to provide Ontarians with the opportunity to connect with nature, play, and engage in physical activity safely. The sector stands ready to work with the province to ensure that all Ontarians have equitable access to quality recreation and parks.

When the province first shut down over a year ago, Ontarians turned to parks and open spaces as a way to cope with the anxiety of a looming health and economic crisis. Parks usage skyrocketed by 300% and communities pivoted to make parks and green spaces more accessible. Through it all, PRO worked closely with municipalities and recreation organizations to facilitate knowledge transfer and sharing on how to continue to deliver services in a starkly different environment. As a result, for close to a year, Ontarians have been able to enjoy outdoor recreational amenities safely.

This changed on April 16th, 2021 when the province enacted strict new measures aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19. As part of the new restrictions, outdoor recreational amenities including baseball diamonds, soccer fields, frisbee golf locations, tennis, platform tennis, table tennis, pickleball courts, basketball courts, BMX parks, skate parks, equipment rental and golf courses were closed. These measures also restricted the use of outdoor fitness equipment and picnic sites and tables in parks and other green spaces.

While doing little to flatten the curve, restricting access to outdoor recreational amenities will have an outsized impact on the health and well-being of Ontarians, especially marginalized communities and those without access to private spaces for leisure and play. These measures are simply not borne out by the evidence on how COVID is most often transmitted. They only further inhibit the ability of Ontarians to engage in physical activity, something that is critical to both physical and mental well-being.

Parks and recreation amenities are vital to Ontarians. PRO calls on the Government of Ontario to act immediately to reinstate access to these outdoor recreational amenities and work directly with the sector to ensure safe access.

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