



BACKGROUND PAPER

SPORT CANADA AND THE PUBLIC POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATION AND EXCELLENCE IN SPORT

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*Sport Canada and the Public Policy Framework for
Participation and Excellence in Sport*
(Background Paper)

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
1	INTRODUCTION1
2	HISTORY OF FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT1
2.1	Intergovernmental Cooperation2
2.1.1	The Canadian Sport Policy 20122
3	FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN AND PRIORITIES FOR SPORT.....2
3.1	The <i>Physical Activity and Sport Act</i> (2003).....3
3.2	Sport Canada Programs.....4
3.2.1	The Hosting Program4
3.2.2	Athlete Assistance Program4
3.2.3	The Sport Support Program5
3.3	Other Sport Canada Initiatives.....5
3.3.1	Long-Term Athlete Development5
4	RESULTS AND OUTLOOK.....6
4.1	Participation Pillar6
4.2	Excellence Pillar7
5	CONCLUSION.....8



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides an overview of the programs and initiatives implemented by Sport Canada. The *Physical Activity and Sport Act* (PASA) defines Canada's objectives for sport, such as increasing participation in the practice of sport and supporting the pursuit of excellence in sport. The Hosting Program, the Athlete Assistance Program and the Sport Support Program are the top three funding mechanisms for achieving the Act's objectives. The Canadian Sport Policy 2012 provides a collaborative framework for harmonizing sport policies at the federal, provincial and territorial levels. As regards participation, the low levels of physical activity among Canadians are a public health concern. As regards excellence, the Own the Podium program improved Canada's performance at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, but some sports do not receive funding under this program.

SPORT CANADA AND THE PUBLIC POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATION AND EXCELLENCE IN SPORT*

1 INTRODUCTION

The federal government has been actively supporting amateur sport in Canada since the early 1960s. However, it is not alone: provincial and territorial governments, as well as the private sector and the non-profit sector, also invest in amateur sport in Canada. They each play an important role in supporting participation and excellence in sport.

This background paper focuses on Sport Canada's contribution to participation and excellence in sport. After providing a summary of the history of federal involvement in this area, it outlines the federal government's actions and priorities, as well as the Sport Canada programs that help achieve these priorities. This paper also includes a brief overview of recent initiatives to promote participation and excellence in sport.

2 HISTORY OF FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT

The 1960s were an important turning point in the federal government's involvement in amateur sport. With the *Fitness and Amateur Sport Act*, which came into force in 1961, the government officially committed to "encourage, promote and develop fitness and amateur sport in Canada."¹ The minister responsible for the administration of the Act was given the power to make grants to any agency, organization or institution carrying on activities in the field of fitness or amateur sport. These new responsibilities were carried out by the then Department of National Health and Welfare through its new Fitness and Amateur Sport Program.²

A few years later, the federal government created two new directorates: Recreation Canada and Sport Canada. The former was responsible for improving the lifestyle of Canadians, while the latter was charged with developing competitive sport.

In the early 1990s, the role of the Fitness and Amateur Sport Program was split between the Department of Canadian Heritage, which would be responsible for Sport Canada going forward, and the Department of Health.³

Today, Sport Canada remains under the Department of Canadian Heritage, and its mission is "to enhance opportunities for all Canadians to participate and excel in sport."⁴ As well, through its mandate, Health Canada "encourages Canadians to take an active role in their health, such as increasing their level of physical activity and eating well."⁵

2.1 INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

In Canada, amateur sport is a shared federal–provincial/territorial responsibility. The different levels of government reached an agreement to coordinate their efforts as part of the Canadian Sport Policy 2012.⁶

2.1.1 The Canadian Sport Policy 2012

The Canadian Sport Policy 2012 (CSP 2012) provides a framework for intergovernmental cooperation in sport in Canada. CSP’s policy vision is to create a “dynamic and innovative culture that promotes and celebrates participation and excellence in sport.”⁷ Five overall goals were set:

- **Introduction to sport:** Canadians have the fundamental skills, knowledge and attitudes to participate in organized and unorganized sport.
- **Recreational sport:** Canadians have the opportunity to participate in sport for fun, health, social interaction and relaxation.
- **Competitive sport:** Canadians have the opportunity to systematically improve and measure their performance against others in competition in a safe and ethical manner.
- **High performance sport:** Canadians are systematically achieving world-class results at the highest levels of international competition through fair and ethical means.
- **Sport for development:** Sport is used as a tool for social and economic development, and the promotion of positive values at home and abroad.⁸

CSP 2012 is a roadmap that gives general direction to the major stakeholders in the Canadian sport system while providing the necessary flexibility for governments and non-governmental organizations to fulfill their individual mandates and responsibilities. It is in effect until 2022.

3 FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT IN AND PRIORITIES FOR SPORT

The federal government is involved in sport primarily through programs and policies administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Pursuant to section 4(2)(f) of the *Department of Canadian Heritage Act*, the department is charged with “the encouragement, promotion and development of sport.”⁹

3.1 THE *PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT ACT* (2003)

The *Physical Activity and Sport Act* (PASA)¹⁰ sets out the federal government's objectives for sport. The government wants to encourage more people to take part in physical activity (participation pillar) and to promote excellence in high-performance sport (excellence pillar). The first objective targets all Canadians, while the second specifically targets elite athletes.

Regarding the participation pillar, section 3 of PASA states that the objectives of the federal government's policy regarding physical activity are as follows:

- (a) to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being;
- (b) to encourage all Canadians to improve their health by integrating physical activity into their daily lives; and
- (c) to assist in reducing barriers faced by all Canadians that prevent them from being active.¹¹

Regarding the excellence pillar, section 4(2) of PASA states that the objectives of the federal government's policy regarding sport are as follows:

- (a) to increase participation in the practice of sport and support the pursuit of excellence in sport; and
- (b) to build capacity in the Canadian sport system.¹²

PASA gives both the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Health the ability to take measures to encourage, promote and develop physical activity and sport in Canada. These measures include undertaking studies, encouraging the private sector to invest in sport, providing bursaries and facilitating the participation of under-represented groups in the Canadian sport system. Section 6 of PASA authorizes the ministers to provide financial assistance in the form of grants and contributions.

While Sport Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage play an important role, it is also true that various entities, such as the provincial and territorial governments, are working to achieve the objectives for each of PASA's two pillars. In fact, the role of CSP 2012 is to provide an overarching framework to coordinate the actions of the various stakeholders.

3.2 SPORT CANADA PROGRAMS

Sport Canada helps achieve CSP’s goals and provides financial support to the Canadian sport system through three grant and contribution programs:

- the Hosting Program (HP);
- the Athlete Assistance Program (AAP); and
- the Sport Support Program (SSP).¹³

Table 1 shows that spending on these three programs reached \$214.7 million in 2018–2019.

Table 1 – Transfer Payments to Sport Canada Programs, 2008–2009 to 2018–2019 (\$millions)

Programs	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019
Hosting Program	44.5	58.5	23.8	23.1	33.1	142.8	281.9	30.5	23.2	19.8	25.7
Athlete Assistance Program	26.5	26.1	25.9	26.9	27.4	26.3	27.1	27.7	28.0	33.0	32.1
Sport Support Program	111.9	113.7	146.9	148.8	149.8	150.4	147.7	148.9	146.9	154.0	156.9
Total	182.9	198.3	196.6	198.8	210.3	319.6	456.7	207.1	198.1	206.8	214.7

Source: Table prepared by the author using data from the Public Accounts of Canada, *Transfer Payments*, corresponding years.

3.2.1 The Hosting Program

The HP supports the hosting and organization of national and international sporting events in Canada. The Canada Games are included in the multisport events receiving financial support under the HP. Table 1 shows that HP spending increased significantly in 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 in preparation for the Pan American and Parapan American Games in Toronto in 2015.

3.2.2 Athlete Assistance Program

Sport Canada provides direct financial assistance to high-performance Canadian athletes through the AAP. Financial support takes the form of a living and training allowance, as well as payment of a portion of tuition and expenses for special needs. The AAP provides financial support for athletes whose “performance is in the top 16 at the World Championships, Olympics, or Paralympics.”¹⁴ National sport organizations are involved in selecting AAP-funded athletes. Every year, approximately 1,900 athletes receive funding through this program.¹⁵

3.2.3 The Sport Support Program

The SSP distributes funding to national sport organizations, national multisport service organizations, Canadian sport centres and other non-governmental organizations that provide direct services and programs for athletes, coaches and other sport participants.

The SSP contributes to efforts to promote the participation pillar of the PASA through bilateral agreements with provincial and territorial funding recipients. It is also the funding mechanism for the Own the Podium initiative, whose goal is “delivering more Olympic and Paralympic medals for Canada.”¹⁶

In 2019–2020, planned SSP spending was \$162.2 million,¹⁷ \$5.8 million more than the previous fiscal year. The increase can be attributed to the launch of several initiatives announced in Budget 2018:

- establishing funding initiatives that expand the use of sport for social development in Indigenous communities;
- creating a secretariat for gender equity in sport; and
- implementing targeted measures to increase the participation of girls in sport by 2035, including efforts to reduce harassment, abuse and discrimination.¹⁸

The SSP also contributes to developing innovative sports approaches that can be shared nationally through the Innovation Initiative. This subcomponent of the SSP enables the testing of new programs, strategies, and technologies in sport.¹⁹ These approaches must be based on quality sports activities that are delivered in a safe manner and led by qualified coaches.

3.3 OTHER SPORT CANADA INITIATIVES

3.3.1 Long-Term Athlete Development

Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is a Sport Canada initiative that seeks to develop physical literacy among Canadians, promote athletic excellence and encourage people to be more active. It focuses on participants’ developing their sport capacities throughout their lives rather than on chronological age. The LTAD initiative covers seven stages of development:

- Stages 1, 2 and 3 correspond to mastering “fundamental movement skills” and enjoying being physically active.
- Stages 4, 5 and 6 correspond to the training – physical, cognitive and emotional development – necessary to compete at the highest level.

- Stage 7 corresponds to being active for life, participating in sports and recreational activities or investing in sports.²⁰

Since 2005, federal, provincial and territorial sport ministers have collaborated to implement the LTAD principles in their own programs.²¹

4 RESULTS AND OUTLOOK

4.1 PARTICIPATION PILLAR

The Canadian movement guidelines developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology recommend that children and youth aged 5 to 17 years should get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day.²² The guidelines recommend that adults aged 18 to 64 years get at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week.²³ Recent data show that Canadians fall well short of meeting these targets. In 2016 and 2017, approximately 40% of children and youth aged 5 to 17 and only 16% of adults aged 18 to 79 were meeting the recommended physical activity objectives for their age group.²⁴

The fact that Canadians are not getting enough physical activity has been recognized as a public health issue. In 2018, 83% of Canadians identified physical inactivity as “the most serious health issue facing society.”²⁵ The federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation made the same observation, saying “A lack of physical activity is a critical public health issue affecting Canadians of all ages.”²⁶ To address this issue, they established a common vision for a national strategy for “increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada.”²⁷

The federal government has implemented a number of special initiatives to increase participation rates among certain under-represented groups: Indigenous peoples, girls, women and persons with disabilities. Budget 2018 outlined measures targeting each of these groups:

- \$47.5 million over five years to expand the use of sport for social development in Indigenous communities;²⁸
- \$30 million over three years to promote women and girls’ participation in sport with a view to achieving gender equality in sport at every level by 2035;²⁹ and
- \$16 million over five years to support Special Olympics Canada in its efforts to empower youth and adults with intellectual disabilities.³⁰

ParticipACTION, an organization whose mission is to encourage Canadians to be more active, also received \$25 million over five years to increase participation in daily physical activity among Canadians.

In December 2019, the mandate letter to the new Minister of Canadian Heritage invited him to implement specific initiatives as regards participation:

- create greater links between our elite athletes and young Canadians to promote health and achievement among youth;
- work with the provinces and territories to foster an environment in the sport and cultural industries that is safe, welcoming and inclusive;
- foster a culture of safe sport; and
- develop additional programming to increase Canadians' participation in sport, with a particular focus on Indigenous peoples.³¹

4.2 EXCELLENCE PILLAR

Since 2005, the federal government has been injecting additional funding in high-performance sport through the program Own the Podium. This initiative was launched to increase the number of Canadian podium finishes at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Own the Podium's mandate is to make funding recommendations to Sport Canada, targeting sports and athletes that will increase Canada's medal potential at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The federal government is currently the primary source of funding, with a contribution of \$64 million a year, allocated through the SSP.³² According to a 2017 study, the targeted excellence approach taken by Own the Podium has led to an increase in the number of medals won by Canada between 2006 and 2016:

[O]ver the last 10 years ... [s]ports receiving targeted excellence funding have won a large proportion of the medals at Olympic and Paralympic Games and World Championships, and those receiving higher levels of targeted excellence funding won a higher proportion of the medals.³³

However, this international success came at a cost. The investment required to obtain a medal increased from \$4.6 million for the summer Olympic Games in Sydney (2000) to \$8.6 million for the summer Games in Rio (2016).³⁴ For the winter Olympic Games, the funding per medal doubled between the Salt Lake City Games (2002) and the Sochi Games (2014), going from \$1.7 million to \$3.8 million.³⁵ For Paralympic sports funding, the increase is proportionally even higher.

Canada is not the only country hoping to boost its medal tally. Other countries have introduced their own strategies for high-performance sport. For example, the United Kingdom provides performance awards to some athletes based on the level of performance they are capable of producing in the future.³⁶ Australia, France and Japan also invest significant funding in elite sport.³⁷

Furthermore, the Own the Podium program did not solve all the financial challenges athletes face throughout their sport careers. Athletes in sports that are not targeted by Own the Podium and young athletes just beginning their careers may still experience financial hardship. As a result, they have reduced access to programs that are essential for success, such as sport science, sport medicine and coaching services.³⁸ Some athletes do not pursue a career in sport because they lack funding.

To address this situation, a 2016 evaluation of Sport Canada programs recommended adjusting the funding formula for the Athlete Assistance Program to reflect the cost of living and sport-specific costs.³⁹ The federal government acted on this recommendation, making a commitment in 2017 to increase funding for this program by \$25 million over five years.⁴⁰

5 CONCLUSION

The initiatives and programs implemented by Sport Canada have led to positive outcomes for participation and excellence in sport. However, the participation pillar outcomes seem less successful, based on the low percentage of Canadians meeting the national physical activity guidelines. Under the excellence pillar, the Own the Podium program gave concrete results by improving Canada's medal count.

In the years ahead, the Department of Canadian Heritage intends to continue to “work to ensure that the Canadian sport system provides all Canadians the chance to get involved in sport at all levels and in all forms of participation.”⁴¹ Athlete safety and the participation of under-represented groups in sport are also core priorities.

NOTES

* This Background Paper is a fully revised version of Marie-Claude Langlois and Marion Ménard, *Sport Canada and the Public Policy Framework for Participation and Excellence in Sport*, Publication no. 2013-75-E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 25 July 2013.

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