



Government of Northwest Territories
Gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest

NWT ACTIVE LIVING FRAMEWORK 2023-2033:

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO
RECREATION, SPORT AND
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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NWT ACTIVE LIVING FRAMEWORK 2023-2033:

A strategic approach to recreation, sport, and physical activity

Executive Summary

The *NWT Active Living Framework*, previously referred to as the *Northwest Territories Framework For Sport, Physical Activity, And Recreation*, sets out the GNWT's vision, principles, and goals to promote physical activity, recreation, and sport for NWT residents over the next decade. The Framework reflects input from a public engagement process that involved territorial and regional recreation and sport organizations, Indigenous governments and organizations, non-government organizations that support underserved populations, and community active living champions.

This Framework will guide the allocation of revenues from the Western Canada Lottery Program and will also inform GNWT policy and funding decisions related to active living. Although it is a GNWT Framework, our goal is that all partners will embrace the vision, principles and goals so that we can work in collaboration to ensure that every resident of the NWT has access to opportunities for physical activity, sport and recreation.

Introduction

Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement that requires energy expenditure, and it occurs in countless situations ranging from the chores of daily living such as doing housework, to the most extreme high performance athletic challenges. The World Health Organization notes that physical activity is critical for cognitive development, motor skills, self-esteem, social integration, musculoskeletal health, academic achievement and overall well-being among children and adolescents, for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases among adults, and for maintaining good mental health in people of all ages.

According to the World Health Organization, active living refers to a way of life in which physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual activities are valued and are integrated into daily living. Governments across Canada have highlighted the importance of active living as contributing to a better quality of life for people of all ages. Active living can occur anywhere and everywhere – at home, in private or municipal buildings and facilities, outdoors in nature, or in fit-for-purpose outdoor spaces.

While active living occurs in many contexts, it can be especially beneficial when people come together in a group setting to share not only the benefits of physical activity, but also the social connection that occurs from participation in organized recreation or sport activities. People of all ages gather to share their love of active living in many places and spaces, and with varying levels of skill – from friends meeting to walk or ski together, to drum dances, to families spending time on the land at fish camps, to loosely organized pick-up games, to community recreation and sport leagues in local facilities, school sports teams, and high performance competitive sports. What they all have in common is that the people taking part share a passion for healthy active living.

Indigenous peoples in the Northwest Territories (NWT) have always lived healthy active lifestyles, and Indigenous governments and communities promote the importance of land-based programming as an opportunity to enhance all dimensions of individual and community wellbeing, while connecting with land, language, and culture. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) calls

on governments to ensure that Indigenous people retain the rights to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, including sports and traditional games (Article 31); and the *Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action* advocate for stable funding for community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional activities of Indigenous peoples (90).

Background and Purpose

In 2019, the *Western Canada Lottery Act* was updated to include specific reference to how the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) will allocate revenues generated through the Western Canada Lottery Program (WCLP). In addition to supporting administration of the lottery program, the *Act* establishes a special purpose fund to support:

- The promotion and delivery of physical activity, sports and recreation programs;
- The development of coaching;
- The support of high performance athletes; and
- Any other purpose that the Minister deems necessary for the support or advancement of physical activity, sport and recreation in the Northwest Territories.

This legislative change created a dedicated revenue stream to support and promote these aspects of active living, in addition to other funding that may be made available through annual GNWT budget appropriations. At that time, the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) committed to develop a policy framework for the recreation, physical activity, and sport sector to identify GNWT priorities and to guide program and funding decisions in this area. Initial engagement with non-government organizations and the public began in 2018, but progress on completing the Framework was delayed during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, MACA initiated foundational discussions with non-government organizations mandated to promote recreation and sport, Indigenous governments and organizations, organizations representing underserved populations, and community active living champions from across the NWT. The themes and priorities from these discussions are captured in the *2023 Northwest Territories Framework for Sport, Physical Activity, and Recreation: What We Heard Report*, and helped to guide the development of this Framework.

What We Heard

Although many varied and divergent opinions were shared, three priority areas for action emerged consistently:

- There is a need to promote and support grass-roots level active living for people of all ages and all ability levels, in communities across the NWT.
- At the same time, we also need to recognize and support high performance competitive athletes and enable them to achieve their best.
- 50% of NWT residents are Indigenous, and there must be strong government support not only for Indigenous sport and traditional games, but also for on-the-land programming and cultural activities.

Throughout the engagement, there was wide agreement on the following themes as priorities for a new GNWT Strategic Framework:

- Celebrate and support local champions and volunteers,
- Build capacity in the sector for recreation leaders, coaches, and officials,
- Prioritize Indigenous culture and traditional practices,
- Ensure that programming is accessible for all NWT residents – including but not limited to youth of all ages, seniors and Elders, people with mobility and other challenges, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people,
- Create a transparent, flexible, multi-year funding process that is responsive to community needs and priorities,
- Invest in infrastructure – support the development of new infrastructure and invest in maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Other priorities flagged by many of the individuals and organizations who provided input included the following:

- Recognize the critical role that the sector plays in individual and community well-being, and embrace access to sport, physical activity, and recreation opportunities as a social determinant of health,
- Develop a uniquely northern definition of recreation,
- Apply a reconciliation and decolonization lens to all sector activities, finding ways to take meaningful action and respecting the principles of UNDRIP,
- Prioritize investment in grass-roots activities that reach all communities,
- Prioritize and increase investment in on-the-land programming,
- Prioritize intergenerational connections, and
- Ensure that the funding policies include clear accountability and are linked to the Framework.

We also heard that a vibrant, inclusive active living sector requires partnership among all levels of government (federal, territorial, community, and Indigenous), the non-government sector, and businesses.

Scope

Guided by public input, this Framework sets out the GNWT’s vision, priorities and goals for active living over the next ten years. The vision and priorities will guide decisions about allocation of funding under the *Western Canada Lottery Program Contribution Policy* and other GNWT active living funding streams, and the goals will guide future GNWT action planning and enable us to address gaps and measure progress toward achieving the vision. It is our goal that the vision, principles, priorities, and goals set out in this document will become a shared road map for the sector, supporting us to work collectively with other partners to provide safe, culturally appropriate opportunities for all NWT residents to be physically active and participate in recreation and sport opportunities that meet participant needs and respond to community priorities. The Framework will also provide a foundation for GNWT to provide input into the development of national strategies, policies, and action plans.

The phrase “active living” covers a spectrum of unorganized and organized activities that may involve one or more people engaging in some form of physical activity. Recreation has been defined as, “the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing”, and includes a wide range of activities including dance, fitness programs, non-competitive sports, walking, hiking, paddling, sewing,

hand games, and drumming. Sport refers to activities that occur, “in an organized structure, and a competitive environment and a winner is declared”; but within this broad definition there can be a range of levels of competitiveness and performance, from elementary school sports team competitions to multi-sport games. There is no clear dividing line that distinguishes recreation from sport, and many activities fall into either or both categories.

This Framework focuses on recreation, sport, Indigenous cultural practices, and other programs that promote opportunities for NWT residents to be physically active.

Infrastructure for Active Living

Like the rest of Canada, NWT communities are challenged to meet the need to develop and maintain facilities to support recreational and sport activities. Active living infrastructure, including buildings like arenas and outdoor developments such as trails and softball fields, falls within the mandate of community governments. The GNWT builds and maintains schools which include gyms or play spaces that can be made available for public use through agreements between education bodies and community governments. In larger communities, private businesses or non-government organizations may develop smaller facilities like fitness clubs, and many territorial and local sport organizations develop and maintain infrastructure including ski trails and golf courses. Indigenous governments have also invested in the development or renewal of community facilities and equipment.

NWT community governments receive infrastructure funding from the GNWT and Canada and identify local priorities through a community infrastructure planning process. Larger tax-based communities also generate own-source revenues through property taxes. Although many communities place a high priority on supporting recreation facilities, they face numerous competing demands including water and waste treatment, solid waste management, and roads. The costs of developing and maintaining infrastructure in the NWT are high due to transportation and labour costs, and the unique challenges associated with building infrastructure suited to the harsh climatic conditions.

GNWT faces the same challenges in allocating its annual budget for infrastructure development and given the competing demands and limited potential for generating own-source revenues, it is not likely that there will be an opportunity for substantial increases to GNWT investment in community facilities in the near future. But there are opportunities for GNWT and sector partners to support community governments with technical expertise in areas like facility maintenance, best practices in facility development, innovative opportunities for active green infrastructure like walking trails and parks, and opportunities for maximizing use of existing infrastructure, such as improving opportunities for use of shared spaces such as school gyms. There are also opportunities for partnership approaches to developing, operating, and maintaining infrastructure, and this has already happened in some communities. For example, in Fort Simpson, the Łíídlı́ Kúé First Nation, Village of Fort Simpson, and NWT Snowboarding have partnered on the development of a snowboarding hill and offering training and other programs to local youth.

Vision

Every resident of the Northwest Territories has access to safe, culturally respectful active living opportunities that promote wellness while strengthening community.

Principles

These principles express the core values that will inform the implementation of this Strategic Framework:

- The principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls act as guideposts for GNWT and all partners in implementation of this Framework.
- Recreation and sport should be welcoming and accessible. Not all residents will want to participate in all forms of recreation, sport, or physical activity, but there should be no systemic barriers to prevent access for those who choose to participate.
- Collaboration and partnerships are foundational to the success of this Framework – including between and among the GNWT, Indigenous governments, community governing bodies, territorial and regional organizations funded to deliver recreation and sport opportunities, other non-government organizations, and northern businesses.
- Opportunities to stay active for life play a critical role in connecting generations and communities.
- Funding and reporting processes will be flexible, user-friendly, transparent and accountable.
- All participants in recreation and sport activities can expect to play, practise, compete, work, volunteer and interact in a safe space and be treated with dignity and respect.

Themes and Goals

Based on the priorities that emerged during the engagement process, the *Framework* focuses on six themes that are of critical importance to the NWT active living sector:

1. Prioritize Indigenous cultures and practices
2. Build sector capacity
3. Celebrate and support local champions
4. Improve access and increase opportunities for participation
5. Promote the value of the sector
6. Invest in the sector with sustainable, flexible funding.

Associated with each theme are goals which express the high-level outcomes that we will strive to achieve with this Framework. These goals describe the result or change that we hope to see in the future. Moving forward, this Framework will be supported by a more detailed strategic action plan and performance measures; recognizing that GNWT may not have the capacity to act on all the goals at one time. We hope that our partners will also contribute to achieving these goals over time, and that working collaboratively, we will see a measurable positive impact on the wellbeing of NWT residents.

THEME	GOALS
1. Prioritize Indigenous cultures and practices	1. Empower and support Indigenous governments to set priorities and implement strategies for land-based and active living programs and activities that connect their people to land, language, and culture that meet community priorities, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
	2. Adopt measures to implement the <i>Calls to Action of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission</i> to advance reconciliation
	3. Honour and continually strive towards decolonization and reconciliation approaches throughout the active living sector
2. Build sector capacity	1. Build, develop, and maintain a community of competent, connected, and supported NWT recreation, sport and active living professionals and leaders
	2. Enable and support a thriving network of active living organizations across the NWT
	3. Support an effective and efficient active living sector by increasing coordination and collaboration among partners
	4. Develop a culture of monitoring and evaluation that allows all partners to easily monitor progress and implement improvement
3. Celebrate and support local champions	1. Support and develop active living volunteers in all communities of the NWT
	2. Provide training and development opportunities for leaders, coaches, and volunteers in all aspects of active living
	3. Recognize and celebrate the efforts of individuals, organizations, businesses, and communities who volunteer and/or contribute to the active living sector

THEME	GOALS
4. Improve access to, and increase opportunities for, participation in recreation, sport, and physical activity	1. Lead and support efforts to ensure that all aspects of NWT active living opportunities are safe and free of abuse, harassment, or discrimination
	2. Increase the levels of participation by NWT residents in active living throughout the life course
	3. Ensure that there are active living programs which are accessible for all NWT residents, including but not limited to youth, seniors and Elders, women and girls, individuals with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQQA+ people.
5. Promote the value of active living	1. Promote the benefits of active living, and improve public understanding of the value of participating in recreation, physical activity and sport throughout the course of peoples' lives
	2. Inform and influence policy development and decision-making in the NWT and Canada, contribute to evidence-based approaches, and leverage opportunities at the national and international levels
6. Invest in active living with sustainable, flexible funding	1. Support program delivery with transparent, accountable, flexible, and user-friendly funding and reporting processes
	2. Support communities to develop and deliver programs that reflect and respond to their unique needs and interests
	3. Promote and support best practices that optimize the use of public facilities and spaces for recreation, sport, and unstructured play, and best practices in operations and maintenance of existing facilities, equipment and spaces
	4. Champion the development of parks, trails, and outdoor play and recreation areas

Partners

This Framework outlines the GNWT's vision and priorities for promoting active living in the NWT. While MACA is the lead department in implementing this vision, MACA will work with other GNWT departments to ensure that the vision and principles of this Framework are reflected in all initiatives related to healthy active living.

But the success of this Framework and the wellbeing of NWT residents requires coordination and collaboration among many partners. While MACA can play a leadership role, many other partners have essential roles in advancing the sector. Territorial and regional organizations including the Aboriginal Sports Circle NWT, NWT Recreation and Parks Association, Sport North Federation, and Mackenzie Recreation Association, play a significant leadership role in the sector, providing training, developing resources, advocating for and developing policy, and delivering programs. Indigenous governments are contributing to the sector by funding and delivering programs, supporting local and regional programs and individuals, and supporting infrastructure development. More than 30 Territorial Sport Organizations play a huge role in providing opportunities for individual and team sports, and engage a large number of volunteers across the territory. Northern businesses are active and enthusiastic supporters of activities at the local, regional and territorial level, through both direct financial support and a variety of in-kind supports. Schools, non-government organizations, and the RCMP all support programs and initiatives to promote recreation and sport at the local level.

Working together, we can achieve the vision of healthy, active people engaging in safe, culturally respectful physical activities that promote wellness while strengthening community.

Glossary

Some definitions below have been drawn from Canadian or international sources and don't reflect the cultural context of the NWT, but they provide a starting point for developing our own unique understanding and expression of active living in a northern context.

Active Living

The World Health Organization defines active living as “a way of life in which physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual activities are valued and are integrated into daily living”.¹ Recreation, sport, and programs that provide opportunities for physical activity are all important dimensions of active living, as are Indigenous traditional and cultural practices ranging from hunting, trapping and fishing to drum dancing, hand games and moosehide tanning.

Community

“Community” can refer to a political administrative entity within specified geographical boundaries but can also refer to a broader concept of individuals with shared interests or characteristics.

Community government

A corporation established under or continued by the GNWT *Charter Communities Act, Cities, Towns and Villages Act, Hamlets Act, Tłı̄chǫ Community Governments Act*, the Délı̄nǫ self-government agreement or other self-government agreement, or any recognized First Nations Council.

Physical Activity

Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Physical activity refers to all movement including during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person's work.² Physical activity increases energy levels, helps us handle stress better and strengthens the heart and lungs - all important aspects of healthy living. The result is a better quality of life for people of all ages.³

Recreation

Recreation is the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing. Public recreation refers

¹ “Healthy Active Living for Aging Canadian Adults.” *Active Aging Canada*, www.activeagingcanada.ca/participants/get-active/active-living/what-is-active-living.htm.

² “Physical Activity.” *World Health Organization*, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity

³ “Mental Health and Community Wellness.” *Government of Manitoba*, www.gov.mb.ca/mh/activeliving

to the provision of recreation services by governments and non-governmental groups and organizations for the benefit of individuals and communities.⁴

Sport

“Sport is physical activity involving disciplined use of muscle groups requiring mental preparation and strategic method and whose outcome is determined by skill, not chance. It occurs in an organized structure, and competitive environment in which a winner is declared”, therefore, “Physical activities are those activities in which bodily movements are valued. Because the movements are valued there is a reason for making up games and contests where the movements have a central role, and are necessary. It is obvious that different features of movements are valued in different physical activities. In some physical activities, speed is the feature valued; in others, accuracy; in others, great force; in others, grace; in others, the length of time the movements can be continued; in others, the feeling and so:

- There must be competition;
- Practice and training are required;
- The dominant component must be physical and physical endurance of the entrant must be a factor in the outcome;
- A reasonable person must consider the activity to be a Sport; and
- The outcome must be dependent upon the physical exertion, direction and participation of the entrant whether or not a machine or animal is used”.⁵

Competitive sport can be played at many levels, from local beginner teams to athletes and teams that are focused on elite performance at the national or international level.

⁴ Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (February 2015). A Framework for Recreation in Canada - 2015 - Pathways to Wellbeing. Ottawa: Canadian Recreation and Parks Association

⁵ Sport North Federation Policy – Sport Membership Policy, Version 5.0, Sport North Federation, https://www.sportnorth.com/sites/default/files/sport_membership_policy_version_5.0.pdf