

## **Toward the Next-Generation Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033**

Policy Implementation and Monitoring Work Group, September 2021

Planning is underway to develop the next-generation *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033*. A series of discussions among the CSP Renewal Working Group in summer 2021 highlighted areas of topical interest and a variety of recommendations based on experience and the summative evaluation of the second *Canadian Sport Policy 2012 (CSP2)*. This paper outlines an approach to policy development based on those discussions plus a review of relevant policy literature. The paper also highlights some policy issues that should be considered.

### **Why a Next-Generation Canadian Sport Policy?**

*“Sport transcends all aspects of Canadian life. It touches and connects people regardless of their gender, ability, lifestyle, ethnicity or economic status. It pervades our culture and is in our communities and schools, on our televisions and in our newspapers. Sport boasts more volunteers than any other community in Canada except the faith community. And, it provides us with enormous opportunities to instill the values we want in our children and to create the communities and society we desire.”*

*The Sport We Want Symposium Final Report,  
Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (2004)*

Sport can be a powerful force. As a form of physical activity, sport participation has many benefits, including improved physical and mental health. As a social phenomenon, sport connects and inspires people, and makes a significant contribution to the economy. However, there are many individuals, groups, and organizations involved in sport in Canada. Sport in Canada needs a policy to both align the activities of the many organizations making up the sport system, and perhaps more important, to create a shared vision for its future. Sport is as essential to Canadians as it was in 2004 when *The Sport We Want* report was written, but the sport environment has changed, not least by the COVID-19 pandemic. Now our collective vision and policy must change as well.

CSP2 set “direction for the period 2012-2022 for all governments, institutions and organizations that are committed to realizing the positive impacts of sport on individuals, communities and society.” It was designed to be “a ‘roadmap’ that establishes direction and desired outcomes.” As such, it provided “the flexibility for governments and NGOs to contribute to goals consistent with their core mandates and jurisdictions.” To do so, CSP2 was to be implemented by complementary action plans developed by governments individually and collectively, bilaterally and multi-laterally, and by non-government organizations (NGOs) in the sport and related sectors.”

Looking back at the CSP2, there have been varying degrees of success with action plan development, and bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements specifically, and enacting the CSP2 more generally.

The next-generation Canadian Sport Policy should articulate a positive future for Canadian sport. The intention is to inspire and guide the actions of a broad stakeholder coalition and its constituent organizations by distinguishing the target audience for the policy (e.g., governments) vs the target market (i.e., Canadians). Ultimately, informed by current evidence and analysis and confirmed by stakeholder consultations, the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* can be a roadmap for progress to the sport Canadians want.

### **What Are The Policy Interests?**

Sport is a form of physical activity existing in a continuum of other physical activities. The public policy interest in sport and the intention of supporting broad-based public access to and participation in sport are partly tied to the various health and social benefits associated with physical activity. This also represents an area of alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 3: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” Because the continuum of physical activity includes non-sport activities, the new Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033 should recognize the policies of other institutional actors (e.g. recreation organizations and public health) and define the particular place and benefits of sport along this continuum.

Although from a physical activity and health perspective sport is just one of many activities, competition and the performance aspiration of participants (i.e., athlete self-improvement) is central and unique to sport. This aspiration manifests differently in varied competitive and quasi-competitive contexts (e.g., finish a 5k run, beat my daughter down the hill, or win a Paralympic medal.) This characteristic of sport is defining and distinct from the role of sport along the physical activity continuum. It distinguishes the Canadian Sport Policy, and the need for it, from the policies of contiguous organizations.

Whereas the public policy interest in sport participation is tied to health outcomes, the interest in supporting pathways to sport excellence is directly tied to social outcomes and only indirectly tied to health outcomes. These social outcomes include identification with and modelling of a paradigm of excellence, national/regional/local pride, social cohesion, and civic participation (e.g. as a sport volunteer). The indirect health outcomes stem from the assumption that modelling the paradigm of excellence results in recruitment into sport (i.e., from physical activity) and adoption of a certain lifestyle (e.g., abstaining from unhealthy behaviours and engaging in healthy behaviours). Other indirect benefits, such as the economic impact of sport, also justify a policy interest in sport.

Figure 1 at the end of the document shows a conceptualization of the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* in context of the sport environment.

### **What Kind of Policy Do We Need?**

In order to be an inspiring yet practical guiding framework for sport in Canada, the Next-Gen policy should define:

- Its policy *scope* within the physical activity continuum, but also as a distinct social phenomenon;
- Policy *interests* providing a rationale for the policy and related public support for sport;
- Policy *coalition* of institutions affected by and contributing to policy goals;
- *Evidence* supporting the depicted current state, and likely future of sport in Canada;
- The policy *goals* themselves;
- The *theory of change*, describing how attaining the policy goals is expected to result in the desired future state, to facilitate evaluability; and
- The *accountability framework*, defining how members of the coalition will participate in meeting the policy goals. This accountability framework may be contained within the policy itself or produced separately (e.g. “F/P/T Priorities for Collaborative Action”).

### **What Can The New Policy Look Like?**

To advance a desired future state for sport in Canada, the goals of the Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033 should be two-fold:

- *Social goals*. These define who participates and the social conditions of their participation (e.g., “ethical”, “accessible”, “welcoming”, “fair”, “safe”, “inclusive”). A positive social environment will include more Canadians, help them enjoy sport more and participate longer, and enable those on the excellence pathway to reach higher.
- *Technical goals*. These define how sport is delivered in its various contexts (e.g., “by trained certified coaches”, “following principles of Long-Term Development”, “age appropriate”, or “state-of-the-art equipment”). Following good technical practice in sport delivery also enhances safety and enjoyment, again resulting in increased participation, retention, and performance.

In promoting these goals, the new Policy should recognize the set of relations that define the structure of sport and the experience of sport participants.

- *Contexts*: Participation in sport occurs in different contexts, defined (per CSP2) as Introductory, Recreational, Competitive, and High Performance. These contexts are related to the personal objectives of sport participants, who largely self-select their context of participation.
- *Complex and Dynamic*: Sport performance is the outcome of a complex interaction of individual (genetic, epigenetic), sport-specific (people/place/program), and extrinsic

(environmental: social/cultural/family) factors across the contexts of sport. This can be described as a dynamic network that includes stakeholders with different and sometimes diverging interests. It is also embedded within a worldwide context of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- *Pathway*: Athletes follow a path in their development and their progress toward their personal objectives. On this pathway, the developmental readiness of participants intersects with and is related to the context of participation.
- *Relationships*: Athlete-coach, parent-child, teacher-student, instructor-participant, and official-participant relationships are central to sport. This can include self-coached athletes (i.e., when coach-athlete are the same person). These relationships define the sport experience of participants and largely determine the participant's progress along their pathway.
- *Places*: Places to play are essential and often limiting resources. Access to public spaces to participate, and the quality of those places, is critical to enabling participation. Sport and recreation facilities including parks, fields, arenas and pools represent a major P/T and municipal investment; all need upkeep, many need rejuvenation, and there is always need for more. Sport competitions are also a "place" in that they require a specialized space (municipalities often control access) and have eligibility restrictions (sport organizations control access).
- *Sport and recreation organizations* exist to facilitate athletes' performance aspiration by providing resources (i.e., people, programs, places) either directly to the athlete or indirectly for the benefit of the athlete (e.g., NSO coach education curriculum development).

This set of relations creates a resource imbalance that generates a power dynamic (e.g., the athlete needs a coach, a club, and access to competition and is willing to invest to get them; thus the resource provider has power). Power imbalance may in turn generate a moral hazard, so efforts to promote social policy goals (e.g., "values-based sport") must address those who hold the power advantage and can therefore exploit the less powerful, typically, the athlete. These values and social goals are operationalized differently over time (i.e., the athlete's path through different contexts) because context shapes the nature of the power imbalance. This also means policy values and goals will be operationalized in different ways by different organizations. The accountability structure developed for the new Canadian Sport Policy needs to consider the ways sport may "look different" in different contexts, and why organizations may "act different" while upholding a common set of values. For example, "inclusiveness" is operationalized quite differently in a community youth sport context compared to a high performance context. The community context must be inclusive in every way; the high performance context is by definition exclusive, yet must be free of every discrimination other than the discrimination of performance.

The various goals, contexts, and related concepts can also be grouped by themes or policy domains (e.g., values and ethics, partnerships and collaborations, facilities and spaces, and programming).

In summary, the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* should include a *compelling vision* for the future of sport in Canada, and a set of *policy goals* that (a) include *social* and *technical goals* for sport that are (b) relevant to the SDGs, (c) operationalized differently across sport *contexts*, and (d) take into account the *complexity, dynamics, pathways, relationships, and organizations* that define the sport experience. Ultimately, the Policy must be based on the *values* that define the sport Canadians want, and facilitate *evaluability* and *accountability* among stakeholders.

### **What Do We Know?**

To create evidence-based policy, groups, including the Policy Implementation Monitoring (PIM) Working Group and the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Working Group, have been active over the life of CSP2 and the planning for the new Policy. Evidence on both the impacts of CSP2 and the continuously changing Canadian sport environment have been gathered to inform the next-gen Policy. In addition, ongoing data gathering conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) and academic research will deepen understanding of the state of sport in Canada and should contribute to the development of the Policy.

The creation of the PIM Working Group to monitor the effectiveness of CSP2 was a ground-breaking and critical step in supporting evidence-based policy. Between 2012 and 2020, the PIM led the development of thematic and summative reviews of CSP2. Some of the key findings are:

- The Canadian Sport Policy has been widely integrated into Canadian sport and related policies. The community at large stated the need for the Policy in articulating areas for action, influencing funding priorities and aligning the system around common goals.
- Some key sport stakeholders were less involved in CSP2 creation and less aware of it in practice. In particular, community sport and school sport are identified as areas for greater inclusion. The *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* should also be better aligned to sector strategies in recreation and public health to emphasize areas of common interest and action.
- The Next-Gen Policy should be clearer in its policy goals, objectives and indicators (i.e., logic model/theory of change). Values and principles should be separated. The resulting policy will be easier to evaluate and lend itself to clearer stakeholder accountability.

By considering what we have learned, using a strong evidence base for the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* and making an ongoing commitment to evidence-based policy, we can ensure that the new Policy will be an effective instrument in guiding the future of sport in Canada for the next decade.

## Who Should Be Consulted in Policy Development?

Creating a Next-Gen Canadian Sport Policy that will inspire, motivate, and guide stakeholders means building a “policy coalition” willing to participate in Policy consultations and be accountable to Policy goals. Per the discussions of the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Working Group as well as prior discussions (PIM Working Group and others), the members of the policy coalition should include:

- 1) *The Federal Government*, represented through Canadian Heritage/Sport Canada. The Federal government and Sport Canada should be accountable to embody Canadian Sport Policy goals in their funding and accountability frameworks and processes.
- 2) *Provincial/Territorial (P/T) Governments*, represented through their various Ministries and Departments and by their Deputy Ministers. Again, P/T governments should be accountable to embody Canadian Sport Policy goals in their own funding and accountability frameworks and processes. This can be outlined in the Policy document itself or in parallel through F/P/T Priorities for Collaborative Action.
- 3) *National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs)*. These organizations receive funding from Sport Canada and should be accountable for meeting objectives defined by the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* as integrated into Federal government funding agreements.
- 4) *Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations and Multi-Sport Organizations (P/TSOs)*. These organizations receive funding from their P/T governments and should be accountable for meeting objectives defined by *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033* goals, as included in F/P/T Priorities for Collaborative Action and integrated into P/T government sport funding agreements.
- 5) *Provincial/Territorial Sport Federations*. These organizations play an important role in supporting P/TSOs and quality sport delivery at the P/T level. They are an important link between national policy and programming and sport in communities across Canada.
- 6) *Community Sport Organizations (CSOs)*. Over 95% of sport delivery in Canada is at the community level. Tens of thousands of diverse CSOs exist across Canada, from clubs with facilities and multi-million-dollar budgets to tiny organizations with only a few members and volunteers. The assumption that NSOs, MSOs and P/TSOs alignment with Canadian Sport Policy goals will “trickle down” to CSOs is, at best, only partly true. As CSOs are not directly funded by FG or P/T G, the levers for policy compliance are lacking. The Canadian Sport Policy development process should, as a priority, determine ways to

include CSOs in the policy coalition and explore ways to create some degree of CSO accountability.

- 7) *School Sport (SS)*. Over 75% of Canadian youth participate in organized sport in SS and CSO settings. Similar to CSOs, SS is not directly supported by federal or P/T government sport funding, although P/T school sport associations may be supported by P/T government sport funding (i.e., as a P/TSO). Given the scope of participation in SS, it will be important for the Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033 development process to determine ways to include SS in the policy coalition and explore ways to create some degree of SS accountability. The PIM recognizes that education is a P/T mandate and efforts to include SS in national policy have been resisted in the past.
- 8) *Recreation*. Municipal recreation, represented by national and P/T recreation associations, is a focus for a large economic investment particularly in municipal infrastructure used for sport. They also have policies and programs directly affecting and supporting CSO-delivered sport. Recreation is thus part of the Canadian Sport Policy coalition, particularly with regard to the physical activity continuum and participation-health policy interest.
- 9) *Public Health*. Public health departments, represented by national and P/T associations, is a focus for investment in the physical activity continuum and thus a member of the policy coalition related to the participation-health policy interest.

### **What Else Should We Think About?**

Basic assumptions for the creation of the Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033 are outlined above. They describe key priorities for an effective policy planning process. However, the ever-changing sport environment and some current issues should also be acknowledged and addressed in the development of the new Policy:

*Equity and Diversity*. A strong direction of Federal and P/T governments in sport has been the promotion of greater equity in sport participation, for example Indigenous participation in sport. Over the years, and in previous iterations of Canadian Sport Policy, many goals and initiatives have been created to address the equity problem in sport. Yet research suggests that overall, sport participants continue to have higher income and higher education, and many others continue to be marginalized. In other words, disparities continue to exist and have grown wider for some Canadians. Inviting representatives of marginalized or under-represented groups to have a voice in the Canadian Sport Policy development process is essential. It may be useful to conceptualize this as a socio-economic problem as well as one of discrimination: how can participation in sport be made affordable for *all* Canadians?

*COVID-19 and Emergency Preparedness.* The pandemic has profoundly affected sport delivery. To give but one example, sport and recreation infra-structure, already in need of renewal, was never designed to mitigate virus transmission: new and retrofitted facilities will be more costly. Whether or not COVID-19 is on the decline, the lesson for policymakers must be that sport needs an emergency preparedness plan. Disease is not the only community disruptor. What is the plan to continue providing sport in the face of other disasters such as fire, flood, etc.? What disruption(s) is climate change likely to cause? What does a more flexible, resilient Canadian sport system look like?

*Safety vs. Sustainability.* Greater awareness of risks and abuses, physical, psychological, and sexual, have triggered an increase in educational and regulatory responses (e.g., Safe Sport, Rowan's Law re: concussions). This translates to a steadily increasing compliance burden on sport leaders and organizers, especially at the community level. One outcome of this highlighted in research both within and outside sport is a tendency to professionalize sport organizations with consequent increased costs to members<sup>1</sup>. This may tend to drive unequal access to sport. Other consequences may be volunteer drop-out, reduced CSO availability, and "grey market sport" when CSOs do not affiliate or participate within regulated P/TSO structures – limiting the potential reach of a sport policy. While nobody would argue that legislation and education in the name of safer sport should be curtailed, discussions of how to sustain an increasingly regulated system should be had considering the system's limited capacity. Technology may be part of this solution and should be included in these discussions.

*Environmental Concerns:* The effects of climate change are growing more pronounced, and heat, drought, and severe weather events are growing more common. This impacts sport in a number of ways: disruption to event hosting, adaptations needed for athlete safety, and the necessity of minimizing the environmental impacts of sport events to make sport "greener". The capacity to deal with these realities will be essential in managing sport in years to come.

*E-sport and E-gaming.* The pandemic had the effect of greatly boosting participation in various kinds of electronic sport and electronic alternatives to sport. One kind of e-sport is home exercise mediated by on-line connection, like Peloton. Growth in this area led to the first e-cycling world championship being held earlier this year. Another kind is competitive gaming with tournaments and prizes. There is also gaming as an on-line community outside and alternative to sport. All these alternatives directly affect the traditional delivery of sport and the business of the organizations forming the policy coalition.

We look forward to continuing the work on the *Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033*. It's a job for all of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Parent, M. M., Taks, M., Séguin, B., Naraine, M. L., Hoye, R., Thompson, A., & Lachance, E. L. (2020). 2020 Workshop report: Governance, branding, and social media in Canadian national sport organizations. <https://health.uottawa.ca/human-kinetics/sites/health.uottawa.ca.human-kinetics/files/workshop-report.pdf>



Figure 1: Canadian Sport Policy 2023-2033 conceptualization

