

The Benefits of Aquatic Sport Facilities

This report is a resource for use by sport clubs or municipal staff to promote aquatic sport programs and aquatic sport facilities. It provides evidence-based benefits and support data for those preparing presentations to opinion leaders and government decision-makers:

- to implement aquatic sport programs
- to build aquatic sport training facilities
- to build aquatic facilities consistent with FINA standards for national and international competition

In presentations, include benefits best suited for the target audience. Remember that your written or oral proposals are only as credible as your weakest argument.

Presentations to municipal and provincial governments to build a training or competition facility (rather than a traditional 25 m 6 lane pool or a leisure facility) should focus on the following key points:

The scope of aquatic sports that require pool training facilities. The number of aquatic sports that require a pool training facility (25 m long, 10 lanes wide, abundant deck space, classrooms, dry land training/fitness area) is much broader than commonly recognized.

Pools are to women what hockey rinks are to men. Aquatic sports are the female sports of choice. To address the gender imbalance, municipalities need to address the facility imbalance between swimming pools and arenas.

The older adult transition to aquatics. Aquatic sports and aquatic facilities will continue to grow in popularity to match the adult demands of an aging Canadian population. Older adults require more swimming pools.

The benefits of sport. There are a host of benefits from participating in sport and from learning to swim. But these benefits can be met through a variety of sport facilities and community pools. They are not unique to aquatic training facilities and competition facilities.

The Benefits of Aquatic Sport Facilities

If Ontario is to attain its potential as the aquatic sport leader in Canada, aquatic training facilities are needed that allow athletes to train indoors 12 months of the year in their aquatic sport of choice.

Context

- ***Aquatic sports are some of the most popular activities in Canada.*** Canadians participate in nearly 100 different sports, but participation surveys always place aquatics near the top of the list.
- ***Sport Canada includes swimming as one of the four cornerstones of Physical Literacy*** – the development of fundamental movement and sport skills that permit a child to move confidently in a wide range of physical activities.

Aquatic sports are ideally suited for the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) initiative that supports long-term athlete development (LTAD) from the Active Start stage for young children right through to the Active for Life stage designed for lifelong physical activity.

- ***Half of public registration in municipal recreation is in aquatic programs.***
- ***Drowning Prevention.*** Drowning is second leading cause of accidental death in Ontario for children under the age of 10 years. Year after year, the majority of people who drown have no intention of going into the water.

In Ontario's water rich environment, swimming ability and lifesaving training are required life skills for survival. Participation in aquatic sports provides the confidence necessary to recreate in on and around water. Aquatic sports provide the basic skills and motivation to take aquatic lifesaving training to learn self-rescue and rescue of others.

The same sport training facility characteristics (deep water, large deck and classrooms) are required to properly train the over 65,000 Ontarians who enroll in lifesaving and leadership staff training programs annually in Ontario.

- ***Aquatic sports are a socially acceptable activity for most new Canadians.*** Ontario cities are chosen by a high percentage of new Canadians (54% of Toronto residents were not born in Canada). Ontario drowning data suggests that first and second generation Canadians need aquatic training.

- ***Fun and relaxation are ranked as the most important benefit of sport participation.*** Contrary to popular opinion, the majority of sport participants do not place winning and competition as the primary purpose of sport. Sport facilities provide fun and relaxation, physical health and fitness, new friends and acquaintances. (See Sport Participation in Canada, 2005)
- ***Definition of Sport.*** Sport is an activity that involves two or more participants engaging for the purpose of competition. Sport involves formal rules and procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills and a high degree of difficulty and effort. The competitive nature of sport implies the development of trained coaching personnel. It does not include motorized sports. (See Sport Participation in Canada, 2005)
- ***Canadian Sport Policy.*** Both federal and provincial/territorial governments in Canada supported the first ever Canadian Sport Policy in 2002 with 4 goals to enhance participation and excellence. The vision of the Canadian Sport Policy is to have, by 2012, a leading-edge sport environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels.

Scope of Aquatic Sports that Require Pool Training Facilities

The number of aquatic sports that require the use of competition and training facilities is much broader than is commonly recognized. Training facilities provide aquatic programmers with greater flexibility for instructional programs than do leisure pools.

The aquatic facility requirements of the following sports should be confirmed within a community prior to making proposals to government decision-makers or planning a facility design. The following aquatic activities all require dry land and pool training time at indoor facilities.

- Adventure racing
- Aquatic staff lifesaving and leadership training
- *Canoeing
 - Canoe marathon (marathon racing)
 - Canoe slalom
 - Canoe sprint
 - Whitewater racing
 - Surf ski (ocean racing)
- *Diving
- Dragon boat racing
- *Fin swimming

- *Kayaking
- *Lifesaving sport
- Masters swimming
- *Rowing
- SCUBA diving
- Solo swimming
- Surfing
- *Swimming
- *Synchronized swimming
- *Triathlon (swim-bike-run)
- *Underwater hockey
- *Water polo

**Aquatic sports recognized by the International Olympic Committee.*

Female Participation in Aquatic Sport

Female participation should be the focus of any community-based presentation for a new training or competition aquatic facility.

Additional aquatic training and competition facilities will allow women to narrow the participation gender gap. Swimming pools are the female hockey arena. To address the gender imbalance, municipalities need to address the facility imbalance between swimming pools and arenas.

Gender makes a difference. There remains a huge gender gap in sport participation: men participate in sport much more than women; 36% of men and only 21% of women participate in sport. (See *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*)

Participation is highly concentrated in a few sports. Out of nearly 100 sports played in Canada, participation is highly concentrated in about 20 sports. Swimming is the 3rd most popular sport in Canada. For men the primary sports are ice hockey, golf, basketball and soccer. But for women there is a very different participation pattern – ***swimming is the female sport of choice*** followed by golf, soccer and volleyball. The reported participation numbers in swimming do not include the thousands that participate in canoeing, kayaking lifesaving, diving, synchronized swimming; water polo and rowing which collectively are also female dominant. (See *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*)

The following points are noted in *The Contribution of Sports to Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment* by Allison Huggins and Shirley Randell which was first presented at the International Conference on Gender Equity on Sports for Social Change, Kigali (2007).

- Women face many barriers to participating in sport which prevents them from reaping the many benefits that can be gained from playing sports. Women encounter discrimination and stereotyping. The sporting world epitomizes many of the gender stereotypes which persist around the world today and has proved to be highly resistant to meaningful gender reform. By creating opportunities for women and girls to engage in sport, communities empower women and girls on an individual level, by promoting self-confidence, leadership and a sense of achievement. They also challenge existing gender norms and roles within society. Sport provides a space in which women can demonstrate to their communities what they are capable of achieving. Promoting girl's and women's sport is an important tool in gender equity and women's empowerment.
- Throughout the 1900s there was considerable discrimination between men's and women's sport in terms of facility access. Boys own the playground space and the facilities.
- Sport personalities endorse a variety of products in this globalized world and are among the most recognized celebrities worldwide. Children wear T-shirts depicting sport stars. The stars serve as role models and idols for children around the world. Yet female sport figures were noticeably absent. As a result, girls have less exposure to female role models. Consequently, they are less likely to benefit from the positive example that these figures can serve.
- As women attempt to engage in sports they encounter different forms of resistance imposed upon them by society. Subtle forms of discrimination exist. Men's sports are given preferential access to sport facilities. Communities are more willing to build a hockey arena than a swimming pool.
- Despite advances in gender equity and the women's empowerment, women continue to lag behind men in opportunities and resources. Thanks to the advocacy work of committed individuals, the policies of sport organizations and governments have begun to change. The declarations which have emerged from the world conferences call on all governments, sporting organizations and individuals to promote opportunities for women and girls to participate in sport. This includes the Montréal Communiqué, which calls for the development of a sustainable infrastructure on which to build women's sports opportunities
- By participating in sports, girls can derive many of the benefits long reserved for boys. Just 4 hours of physical activity a week has been shown to reduce the risk of many diseases such as breast cancer and heart disease. Moreover, participation in sport promotes body consciousness, which is been shown to reduce rates of teen pregnancy. It is recognized that there is a strong connection between participation in sport with academic success. Girls can benefit from the

encouragement and leadership of a coach, who can serve as an important role model. Opportunities for leadership in sport arise early – becoming a team captain, going on to become coaches and administrators.

- Though discrimination persists, and acts as a deterrent to girl's participation in sport, the value of challenging these norms has become increasingly recognized by government bodies and communities.

The Aging Population

The aging of the Canadian population affects numerous aspects of society from health needs to recreation and sport choices. Factors contributing to the aging of the Canadian population include low fertility rates, longer life expectancy and the sheer numbers of the baby boom generation. The combination of these 3 factors has meant that an increasing proportion of the Canadian population is 55 years of age and older.

The median age in Canada was 29.5 in 1981. It rose to 38.5 by 2005. In 1981 the proportion of the Canadian population aged 14 and under was 22.3%. By 2005 it had dropped 5% to 17.6%. Seniors in 1981 represented 9.6% of the population and by 2005 had increased to 13.1%.

This demographic change will have a significant impact on sport facility selection and construction as adults alter their choice of sports. Adults will continue to migrate to sports that provide long-term carryover potential for participation throughout their adult years. Low impact, low injury rate sports will dominate. Aquatic sports and aquatic training facilities will continue to grow in popularity. Aquatic sports current popularity is strong across all genders and all age groups from youth to seniors. Most aquatic sports provide excellent carryover characteristics.

Aquatics is an excellent choice to fulfill the Active for Life element of the long-term athlete development model designed for lifelong physical activity.

The Benefits of Sport

There are numerous articles and studies available online describing the health and social benefits of participation in sport. The following sources are particularly helpful:

The Benefits of Parks and Recreation. The catalog of *The Benefits of Parks and Recreation* produced in 1992 by Parks and Recreation Ontario is distributed by Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. The catalog summarizes the benefits of recreation and parks and provides an overview of research evidence backing up each of the benefit statements.

Strengthening Canada: The Socio-economic Benefits of Sport Participation in Canada by Michael Bloom, Michael Grant and Douglas Watt. This 2005 report from The Conference

Board of Canada outlines the socioeconomic benefits of participation in sport for federal, provincial and territorial governments to better understand its economic and social importance. The report examines the impacts and benefits of sport participation on individuals and communities. It finds that sport participation has important benefits related to health, skills development, social cohesion and economic performance.

Sport Participation in Canada, 2005. This report prepared by statistics Canada and published in February 2008 looks at sport participation by Canadians. It is based mainly on data from the 1992, 1998 and 2005 General Social Survey.

The Aquatic Sport Council

The Aquatic Sport Council of Ontario was formed in December 2007 to help streamline and consolidate available information on aquatic sport facilities and provide a long term focus for pool design. The Aquatic Sport Council will be of assistance to all interested parties in the development of:

- pool classifications, standards and designs
- an understanding of the value of aquatic sport
- a master plan for aquatic sport training and competition pools in Ontario

The Aquatic Sport Council's is working to make Ontario a global leader in aquatic sport. By 2015, Ontario will be a recognized leader in aquatic sport because of the:

- Sustained collaboration among stakeholders and communities
- Creation of a compelling picture of the multiple benefits of aquatic sports
- Development and dissemination of resources, research and expertise related to aquatic facilities

And as a result,

- Communities value and support aquatic sports.
- Ontarians of all ages, abilities, and aspirations participate in aquatic sports through the continuum of sport for life.
- There is an optimal mix of facilities accessible for training and competition.

The Aquatic Sport Council is comprised of representatives from diving, lifesaving sport, Parks & Recreation Ontario, swimming, synchronized swimming and water polo. The Aquatic Sport Council works under the auspices of the Aquatic Federation of Canada, which is the recipient of funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for this initiative.