



## Make the Connection with Public Health and Community Recreation Services

Community recreation services and your local public health department could be your most valuable allies in creating healthy active living opportunities for your young patients and their families. Although names and processes differ, virtually all municipal recreation departments in Canada have some form of programming for families, children and youth. Some public health departments offer direct programming (for example, in nutrition education) and a few have “physical activity” or “healthy living” promoters on staff.

Because they are mandated to promote healthy active living in the community, public health colleagues are likely to know about the existence of good programs offered by community recreation or other groups. They can also be important partners for making presentations and advocating change in the community.

### FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON

There are many ways to find out what programs and materials are available in your community. The Internet is an extremely valuable tool for large to mid-sized towns. A phone call might be the best way to start in a smaller community.

**On-line** – Most large centres have excellent websites that list recreation and public health services. Some are directly on the city’s website, often found under [www.city.\(your city name\).\(your province's initials\).ca](http://www.city.(your city name).(your province's initials).ca) (for example: [www.city.regina.sk.ca](http://www.city.regina.sk.ca)). With others, the public health and recreation departments have separate websites, which may or may not be linked to the city site. Your favourite search engine, such as [www.google.ca](http://www.google.ca), may be the best place to start. Searching terms like “city,” “recreation” and “public health” combined with your city name should yield good results.

Most websites list programs and materials by category, including “family”, “children” and “youth.” Some larger centres have searchable databases. Enter the age group or type of information you are seeking for a list of available programs.

**By telephone** – Most public health departments have either an information line or an intake line staffed by a public health nurse familiar with public health services available in the community. Healthy eating, physical activity and self-esteem are common program areas. Recreation departments have telephone information lines as well as booklets listing programs they offer each season (normally spring/summer and fall/winter). Some municipalities have combined health and recreation services, sometimes called “client services.”

While an on-line search can be as broad as you like, getting information over the telephone is more successful if you narrow your inquiry down to a specific age group or issue. Most programs or materials are geared to infants, preschoolers, school-age children, or adolescents. You might also ask about family programs.

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)

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## **ASK ABOUT OVERCOMING BARRIERS**

When requesting materials or information about programs, be sure to ask about issues that could be barriers to your patients. This information is generally not on websites, and must be specifically requested. Inquire about:

- costs involved
- options for subsidies for those who may not be able to pay
- whether programs are accessible to children and youth with physical or mental disabilities, or whether separate programs exist for them
- languages that the program or materials are available in
- programs specifically for single parents, where transportation or care before and after the program may be provided.

## **KEEP THE INFORMATION COMING**

Whether you search on-line or on the telephone, it's a good idea to ask to be put on a mailing list to stay informed of new programs and materials. Recreation departments will be happy to send their program brochures and information about special events for children and families. Some public health units offer on-line bulletins; others produce regular newsletters for doctors; and still others do targeted mailings when a new program is established. A catalogue of materials and programs may also be available.

## **ASK FOR ASSISTANCE**

Part of the mandate of public health and recreation professionals is to reach out into the community. They regularly make presentations in schools, to community groups and others. Some public health workers will present at Grand Rounds on a new program. The CPS slide presentation could be a great lead-in to a partnership presentation with someone from public health and/or recreation.

The best approach is to make the initial call yourself. For recreation, call the managing director or the director of services for children, youth and families. To contact public health, call the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) or the Medical Director of Health. Smaller communities may have Assistant MOHs.

An exploratory call is fine, but you might want to have a specific opportunity in mind – a presentation to other paediatricians, or a school council, for example. Once you have established a relationship, someone from your office can help with the communications and logistics involved in setting up a meeting or presentation.

## **OFFER YOUR HELP**

Make your relationship a true partnership by offering your assistance as well. A presentation or letter to the editor will be that much more effective with the voice of an experienced paediatrician added to that of the public health nurse and/or a representative from municipal recreation or city council.

## **REVIEW THE SOURCES AND RESOURCES**

The CPS has compiled a list of on-line Sources and Resources

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