



State of Youth Sport in Canada:

The Value and Cost of Participation

2025

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Executive Summary

Two Perspectives, One Picture

Understanding youth sport requires looking at it from two angles: what families experience and what young people themselves feel. This report brings both perspectives together, drawing on two major 2025 research studies (see Appendix: Methodology for details), to establish a baseline understanding of participation, identify systemic barriers, and inform evidence-based investment across the youth sport sector.

The **Cost of Sport Survey** captures the perspective of 5,891 parents representing nearly 10,000 children. The **State of Play Youth Survey** captures the perspective of nearly 4,000 young Canadians. Together, they reveal what's working in youth sport and where opportunities remain.

Key Findings



Sport transforms kids.

Among families with children in organized sport, 96% of parents report positive impacts on physical health; 93% on mental and emotional well-being. More active youth also report higher levels of wellness and life satisfaction.



Soccer leads the nation.

With moderate costs, broad accessibility, and widespread community programming, soccer has emerged as the #1 sport for both youth and parents. Swimming and basketball round out the top three sports preferred by Canadian youth.



Connection drives participation.

Youth play primarily for friends and fun – not competition. Programs that prioritize social connection and enjoyment sustain engagement.

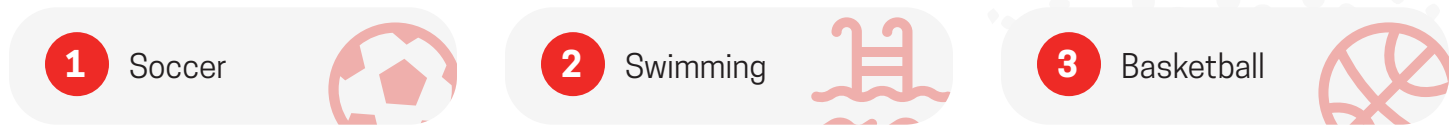


Community programs are the great equalizer.

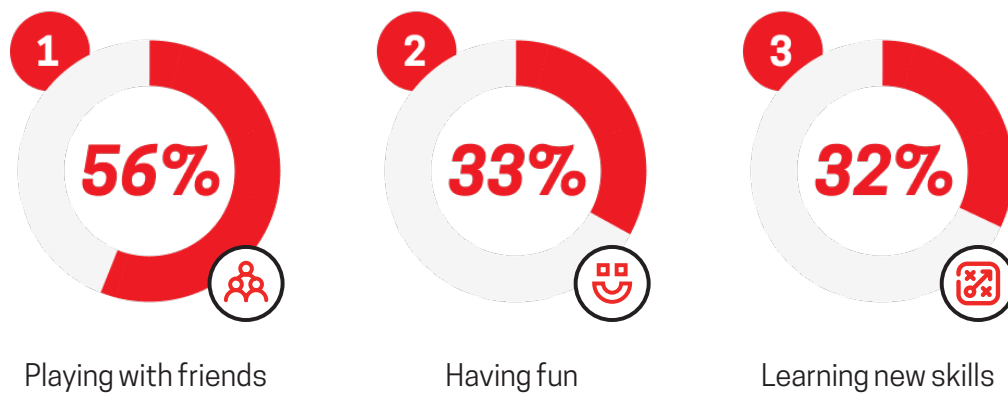
They are significantly more affordable – costing roughly half as much as private clubs for many popular sports – while delivering experiences that keep kids playing.

At a Glance

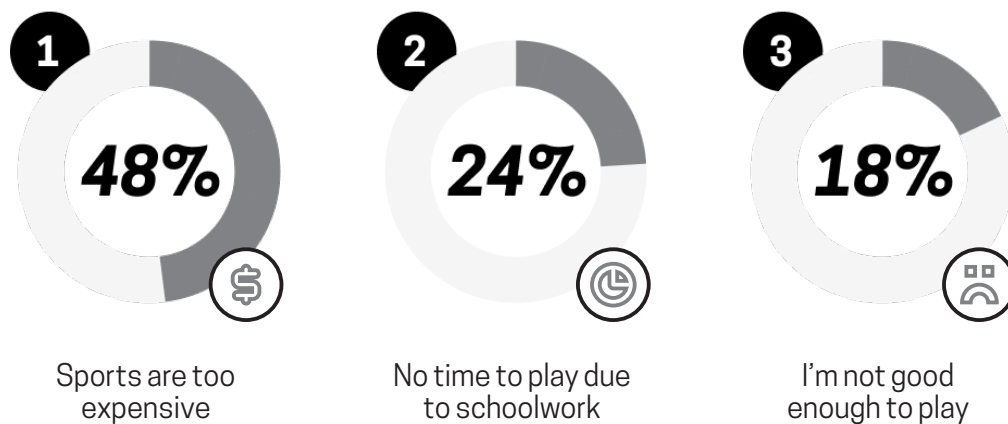
Top 3 Sports



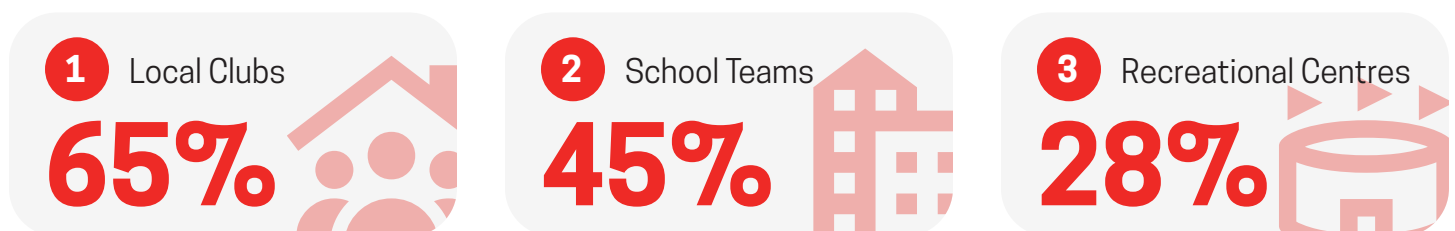
Top 3 Reasons Youth Like Playing Sports



Top 3 Reasons Youth Do Not Play Sports



Where Kids Play



Why Sport Matters



Why Sport Matters

Health & Well-Being

Kids feel it. Parents see it. Among families with children in sport, 96% of parents report positive impacts on physical health. Among youth, those who are more active report higher happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of purpose.



The kids in sport are mostly thriving. Administrators among us who are teachers notice it strongly. They have a sense of belonging and purpose. They are resilient and confident in their abilities.

– **Christina Lamey, President, Cape Breton Blizzard FHA**

The Parent Perspective

Among parents whose children currently participate in organized sport, the perceived benefits are substantial:



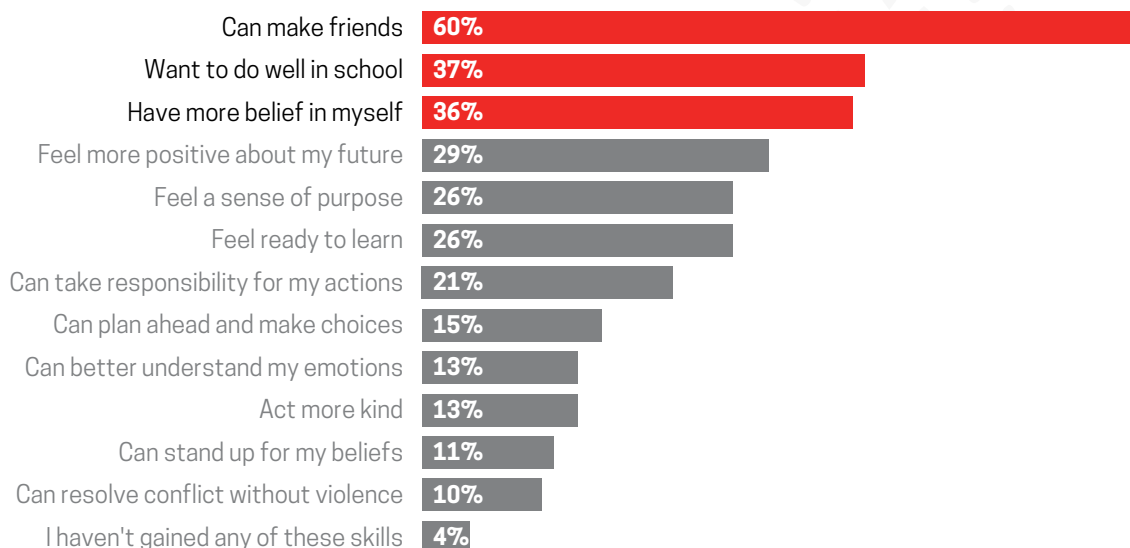
These benefits translate into real emotions for families. When asked about their emotional experience, parents most frequently selected pride (55%), joy and fulfillment (55%), and confidence in life skill development (54%) – making these the top three positive emotions associated with their children’s participation.

The Youth Perspective

Among youth connected to participating sports organizations, these benefits are experienced firsthand. When asked to complete the statement “Because I participate in sports, I...”:

How Organized Sports Impact Youth Durable Skills

% of youth responding
“Because I participate
in sports, I...”



The top response – ‘I can make friends’ (60%) – underscores that sport is fundamentally about connection.



One data point that really resonates with us is the number of youth who report increased confidence and independence after participating in their chosen sport. We have the good fortune to know a 15 year old boy, who was non-verbal as a young child, and is now a confident young man of 15 who is giving back as a volunteer instructor himself. This is a perfect example of the positive impact sports can have!

– Heather Schoutens, Program Coordinator, BC Adaptive Snowsports

A Place to Belong



For most young people, organized sport is a place to belong. Among youth in organized sports programs, 88% report feeling physically safe almost always or frequently. Similarly, 89% report having fun almost always or frequently, and 85% report feeling happier after participating. Yet creating this sense of belonging requires intentional effort – 21% of parents have hesitated to enroll a child due to concerns about inclusion (see Pathways to Play).

Beyond sport, Canadian youth generally report high levels of well-being, with the majority scoring 8 or above (out of 10) on happiness (60%), life satisfaction (61%), and feeling that their activities are worthwhile (65%). Youth who are more physically active also report higher scores – highlighting the strong association between physical activity and mental well-being.

More Activity, Greater Well-Being

The youth survey reveals a clear pattern: both frequency and duration of physical activity are associated with higher well-being scores.

37%



Frequency matters:

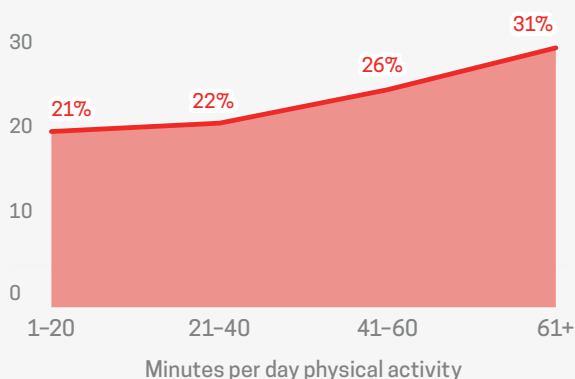
Among youth active 7 days per week, 37% report maximum worthwhileness (10 out of 10) – nearly three times higher than those active just 1 day per week (13%).



Duration matters too:

Sense of Worthwhileness & Minutes Physically Active

% with level of worthwhileness 10 out of 10



31%

report higher worthwhileness among youth active for 61+ minutes per day compared to those active for shorter periods.

Programs offering regular, sustained opportunities for physical activity and not just occasional participation, may support stronger wellbeing outcomes.

Soccer: Canada's Most Played Sport



Soccer: Canada's Most Played Sport

Soccer's rise isn't about elite competitions – it's about what's happening at the community level. Strong local programming, moderate costs, and broad accessibility have made soccer the #1 youth sport played in Canada.

Leading in Participation

Soccer tops the participation charts from both perspectives. Among youth, 50% play soccer, followed by swimming (46%) and basketball (41%). In organized sports specifically, soccer leads at 39%, with basketball (31%) and swimming (21%) rounding out the top three. Soccer ranks #1 in both surveys, leads in all four regions from coast to coast, and tops both casual and organized play.

The cost of youth sport varies widely. Swimming and athletics/track & field are the most affordable, with median costs of \$290 and \$335 respectively – both rely heavily on school and community facilities. Soccer, at \$450, sits comfortably in the accessible range. At the other end of the spectrum, equestrian (\$2,350) and hockey (\$1,938) carry significantly higher price tags. Yet demand for hockey remains strong: it ranks among the top sports youth want to try, including 26% of boys of colour and 23% of youth with disabilities. The pattern is clear: the sports with the broadest participation tend to be those with the lowest barriers to entry – and where aspiration outpaces access, there's an opportunity for investment.



The role of sports and soccer in the lives of children and adults provides so much more than just the experience of winning and losing. The enrichment of being part of a team and feeling a connection with your teammates and opponents is what drives the fulfillment of sport. Additionally, I find that soccer specifically really ties different cultures together, because the game is played everywhere and only requires a ball and some space. The beautiful game is about so much more than the competition, it's about the love of community and the expression of togetherness.

– Jesse Marsch, Head Coach, Canada Soccer's Men's National Team

Soccer's reach suggests that when sport combines moderate cost, broad accessibility, and strong community roots, participation follows.

Pathways to Play



Pathways to Play

Where Access Happens

Across Canada, community organizations, schools, and local programs are finding ways to make sport accessible. The data highlights what's succeeding – and where community investment can have the greatest impact.



Community Programs Deliver

Community and recreation-based programs – city leagues, YMCAs, and local recreation organizations – cost roughly half as much as private clubs for popular sports like soccer and swimming. They're available in communities across the country, and 32% of families say programs closer to home would increase access. Investing in these local organizations lowers costs for all families at the source.



When programs are brought directly into schools or housing communities and equipment is provided, youth are eager to participate in new sports... The data showing that youth play most often where access is easiest – parks, schools, and community spaces – strongly reflects our experience. It confirms that when barriers like cost and transportation are removed, participation grows.

– Mohammed Al-Salem, Founder, Play Forever

Schools as a Universal Entry Point

With 80%+ of youth active in PE class, schools are the most universal touchpoint for physical activity. Sports like basketball, volleyball, and track & field already rely heavily on school facilities. Expanding community access to these spaces outside school hours could extend reach further – bringing affordable programming closer to families without building new infrastructure.

Inclusion and Belonging

Access isn't just about cost and convenience – it's also about whether families feel their children will be welcome. One in five parents (21%) have hesitated to enroll a child due to concerns about inclusion. These concerns rise to 31–33% among Caribbean, Middle Eastern, African, and Indigenous families.

Representation matters too: approximately 25% of Black, Indigenous, and Mixed Race youth report that their coach “almost never” looks like them, compared to 13% of White youth. Creating genuinely welcoming environments requires intentional effort – along with open doors.

Access challenges extend to youth with disabilities: 8% of parents report their child has a condition that makes participation challenging, and 6% cite health or disability as a barrier. Yet youth with disabilities report the same top barriers as their peers – cost (42%), confidence (25%), and fear of injury (21%) and share the same aspirations: hockey and swimming top their list of sports to try.



The True Price of Play



The True Price of Play

Understanding the Full Cost

The typical Canadian family spends approximately \$1,200 annually on organized sports across all children. However, costs vary widely—the average rises to \$3,064, reflecting higher spending among families with multiple children or those in competitive travel programs. But registration fees are only part of the picture – typically just 20–35% of total costs. The rest includes equipment, apparel, travel, tournaments, and coaching.

This breakdown points toward solutions: equipment lending libraries, local programming that reduces travel, carpooling networks, and community-based leagues all address costs beyond registration. For a full breakdown of costs by sport, [click here to access the detailed Cost of Sport report](#).



The Emotional Toll

The cost of sport isn't only measured in dollars. While pride (55%), joy (55%), and confidence (54%) dominate parents' experiences, 32% also report stress about affordability, and 25% feel overwhelmed by the logistics. These burdens fall hardest on those with the least – 41% of low-income families report affordability stress compared to 25% of higher-income families.

Stress on affordability

32%



Overwhelmed by logistics

25%



For families whose children aren't in sport, 30% report guilt about their children missing out, and two in five say their child has missed important opportunities because of cost or access barriers.



When participation becomes more affordable and accessible, it lifts a weight that many parents carry quietly. Sport should bring families together, not stretch them thin.

The Big Win



The Big Win

Unlocking the value of sport for Canadians

Sport is more than play—it's a catalyst for stronger communities, healthier youth, and economic resilience. Statistics Canada's Human Activity & Environment Report (2022) shows that the sport sector – excluding professional sport – contributes close to \$9B annually to Canada's GDP. It is accountable for over 90,000 jobs in Canada and includes over 1.8M volunteers who contribute an estimated \$2.7B in unpaid labour value annually.

But more importantly, parents and caregivers understand the deeper value of sport. The data tells a story that matters to healthcare, education, and social services: 96% of parents report improved physical health, 83% cite cognitive and academic benefits, and 94% see stronger social connections. These are outcomes that align with priorities across multiple sectors – reducing health costs, improving learning, strengthening social cohesion. And these are the reasons parents and caregivers continue to invest in sport for their children despite mounting costs.

By focusing on affordability and accessibility for Canadian families, we unlock more of the economic and social value inherent in sport through higher levels of participation.

Following are some practical recommendations for community leaders:



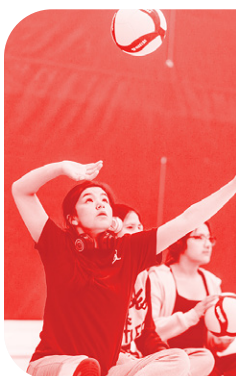
**REMEMBER THE
REASONS WHY
KIDS PLAY**

1



**TAKE BETTER
ADVANTAGE OF
SCHOOLS AND
COMMUNITY ASSETS
TO MINIMIZE TRAVEL
AND REDUCE COST**

2



**INNOVATE TO
TACKLE LOCAL
BARRIERS**

3



**CREATE INNOVATIVE
PARTNERSHIPS TO
IMPROVE ACCESS
AND AFFORDABILITY**

4





REMEMBER THE REASONS WHY KIDS PLAY

Design programs that prioritize youth motivations: playing with friends, having fun, learning new skills, and staying healthy, as these are the top drivers of participation. By centering programming around social connection and enjoyment rather than competition or specialization, leaders can reduce reliance on costly extras like travel, private coaching, and specialized equipment. Community-based, multi-sport formats delivered locally and informally not only align with what youth value most, but also lower financial barriers for families while maximizing participation and long-term engagement.

Programs like Free Play for Kids in Edmonton, Steel Town Athletic Club in Hamilton, and 13th Round in Toronto are examples of programs designed around youth needs that offer low-cost or no-cost participation models. This approach reflects the principles outlined in the Children Bill of Rights in Sports, which affirms that every child has the right to play sports in safe, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate environments. Recognizing these rights is key to closing gaps in access and quality, ensuring that sport remains a tool for health, equity, and social inclusion.

Hyperlinks:

- Free Play for Kids: <https://www.freeplayforkids.com/>
- Steel Town Athletic Club: <https://stachamilton.ca/>
- 13th Round: <https://www.13thround.life/>
- Children's Bill of Rights in Sports: <https://projectplay.org/childrens-rights-and-sports>



TAKE BETTER ADVANTAGE OF SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY ASSETS TO MINIMIZE TRAVEL AND REDUCE COST

Leverage schools and local clubs as primary delivery sites for youth sport – these are consistently the most affordable and accessible settings. By investing in shared-use agreements, after-school programming, and community-led leagues in existing facilities, leaders can reduce costs tied to travel, facility rentals, and specialized programming. Implementation will vary by community and require collaboration across multiple stakeholders. These local assets already align with youth preferences for fun, friendship, and health, and scaling them ensures broader reach without adding financial strain to families.

Programs like Canada Soccer's Soccer in Schools, Philpott Children's Tennis, and Fondation Laurent Duvernay-Tardif's La 6e Période offer examples that better connect schools and community assets to well-designed sport programs.

Hyperlinks:

- Canada Soccer's Soccer in Schools: <https://canadasoccer.com/soccerinschools/>
- Philpott Children's Tennis: <https://philpottchildrenstennis.org/>
- Fondation Laurent Duvernay-Tardif (La 6e Période): <https://fondationldt.com/>



I spent a significant part of my career in the US and have observed the more significant integration between sport and schools that occurs there. While this has its problems at times, the delivery of sport through the school system helps reduce costs and other barriers (e.g., transportation). It also enables more direct fundraising support for sport as people are more comfortable making philanthropic contributions to help schools than they are for clubs.

– Kevin Blue, Chief Executive Officer and General Secretary - Canada Soccer

“

Discovering and practising sports at school can be a powerful source of motivation and perseverance for young people. For many kids, school is the only place where they have the chance to move, play, and discover new passions. That's why access to sports and extracurricular activities should be inclusive and ideally free for all young people, no matter their social or economic background.

– Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, Super Bowl LIV Champion, Co-president of the LDT Foundation and Medical Resident

3

INNOVATE TO TACKLE LOCAL BARRIERS

Technology can be a powerful ally in connecting families with affordable programs, matching kids with the equipment they need, and helping parents discover financial assistance.

Equip Sport demonstrates how innovation can improve affordability at scale. Their app-based equipment lending platform provides free access to sports gear, reaching more than 350,000 users globally and powering more than 1,000,000 hours of play through 500+ free equipment lockers across Europe. In Canada, Equip Sport and Jumpstart have partnered to bring this model to communities nationwide. The initial pilot – 80 equipment lockers in Ottawa and Surrey – has already generated more than 16,000 borrowing sessions from 8,100 unique users, with approximately 500 uses per week and user satisfaction consistently at 4.5 out of 5.

4

CREATE INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY

Pursue innovative partnerships between sport organizations and community institutions that operate at the margins or tangents of sport – such as arts centres, libraries, housing agencies, or cultural hubs. The collaboration between Harbourfront Centre (Toronto) and Jumpstart demonstrate how shared infrastructure, staffing, and programming can expand access while reducing costs. Rooted in data around the needs of local youth, these partnerships unlock new spaces, audiences, and funding streams, allowing sport to be delivered in more inclusive, community-rooted ways that align with youth interests and reduce reliance on expensive facilities or specialized programs.



Jumpstart's State of Youth Sport 2025 report confirms what we see every day on Toronto's waterfront @ Harbourfront Centre: when you bring programming closer to where families live and gather, participation follows. The new and expanded outdoor rink, made possible through Jumpstart's investment, gives thousands of kids access to skating in one of Canada's most diverse neighbourhoods-no membership required, no barriers to entry. By collaborating with community organizations, we can amplify our impact even further, providing opportunities for both unstructured play and skill development.

– Cathy Loblaw, Chief Executive Officer - Harbourfront Centre



A Moment of Opportunity



A Moment of Opportunity

The state of youth sport in Canada presents both a challenge and an invitation.

Sport transforms young lives. The evidence is overwhelming: physical health, mental resilience, friendships, confidence, academic engagement. Parents see it. Kids feel it. Yet access remains uneven – cost, geography, and awareness leave too many children on the sidelines.



A Beginning, Not an Endpoint

This report marks a starting point. For the first time, we have a comprehensive picture of the nuances behind youth sport costs – not just registration fees, but the full reality of equipment, apparel, travel, tournaments, and coaching expenses. This depth of data enables something new: the ability to pinpoint specific barriers and work collaboratively on targeted solutions.

The Path Forward

Canada enters 2026 with unprecedented attention on sport. Major international events will inspire a new generation of young fans, but inspiration alone doesn't create participation. The question is how to convert momentary excitement into lasting opportunity – how to ensure the child inspired by what they see on screen has a place to play in their community.

The path forward requires intentional design that meets participant needs and reduces systemic barriers like cost. And it requires continued conversation – this research opens questions that communities themselves are best positioned to answer.

The opportunity before us is bigger than any single event. It's the chance to build a youth sport system where every child can experience what 96% of parents already see: that sport changes lives.

The data exists. The pathways are clear. What remains is ensuring clarity in the aspiration for change and the collective will to act.

Together, we can help every kid get in the game.



About Jumpstart

Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities (Jumpstart) is a national charity committed to helping kids overcome financial and accessibility barriers to sport and recreation in an effort to provide inclusive play for kids of all abilities. With an extensive national network comprising more than 1,000 grantees and 289 local chapters, Jumpstart is dedicated to supporting families in financial need and empowering community partners to develop inclusive programming and infrastructure for all Canadian kids. Supported by the Canadian Tire Corporation, Jumpstart has provided more than 4 million opportunities for Canadian kids to get into the game since 2005. For more information, visit jumpstart.canadiantire.ca

Appendix: Methodology

This report draws on two independent research studies conducted in 2025:

Cost of Sport Survey

A quantitative survey among 5,891 parents and caregivers of children aged 2–17 in Canada, fielded July 21 to October 14, 2025. Recruited through national consumer panels with quotas by province, gender, and age group. Includes families with children who currently participate, have lapsed from, or have never participated in organized sport.

State of Play Youth Survey

A survey of 3,942 youth in grades 3–12, fielded February 10 to June 30, 2025. Distributed through 221 sports organizations that registered via the Jumpstart survey portal, with an open link introduced in 2025 to reach unconnected youth. Regional concentration: 90% from Central and Prairie regions.

Interpretation Notes

- **Independent samples:** Findings should not be interpreted as matched parent-child dyads.
- **Selection effects:** Youth respondents are primarily connected to participating sports organizations.
- **Multi-select questions:** Some percentages may sum to greater than 100%.
- **Correlation vs. causation:** Associations should not be interpreted as causal relationships.
- **Dual-perspective approach:** Findings are attributed to the relevant survey-parent or youth.

Program Types

The Cost of Sport Survey distinguished “city programs, YMCAs, or local rec leagues” (community programs) from “independent or private sports clubs.” The Youth Survey used categories like “local association/club,” “recreation centre,” and “school team.” Cost comparisons are based on the Cost of Sport Survey data.

Definitions

Physical Activity:

Any activity that increases heart rate and causes harder breathing. In the State of Play Youth Survey, youth were asked to identify from a list of 42 sports and physical activities they had participated in during the past year.

Organized Sport:

Sports teams, clubs, lessons, or competitions led by a coach or activity leader. This includes programs offered through local associations/clubs, recreation centres, schools, and afterschool programs.

Very Active Youth:

Youth who are physically active at least 3 days per week for 41 or more minutes per day. In the State of Play Youth Survey, 60% of respondents met this threshold.

Level of Play:

- **Recreational:** Non-competitive participation focused on enjoyment and skill development
- **Competitive:** Participation involving structured competition, often with travel and higher costs

Program Types (Cost of Sport Survey):

- **Community Programs:** City programs, YMCAs, or local recreation leagues
- **Private Clubs:** Independent or private sports clubs
- **School-Based Programs:** Sports offered through schools

Program Types (State of Play Youth Survey):

Local association/club, recreation centre, school team, afterschool program

Well-Being Indicators:

The State of Play Youth Survey measured three dimensions of youth mental well-being on a 0–10 scale: happiness (“How happy did you feel yesterday?”), life satisfaction (“How satisfied are you with your life nowadays?”), and sense of worthwhileness (“To what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?”).

Durable Skills:

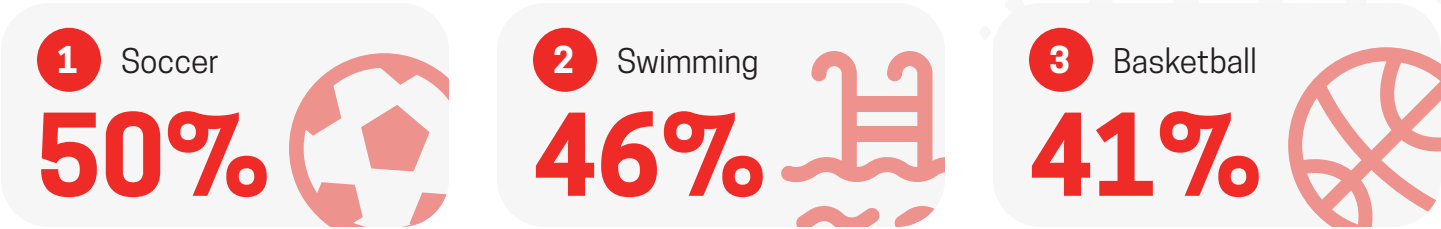
Social, emotional, and life skills that youth report gaining through sport participation, measured by completing the statement “Because I participate in sports, I...” Options included making friends, wanting to do well in school, having more belief in oneself, and feeling a sense of purpose.

Worthwhileness:

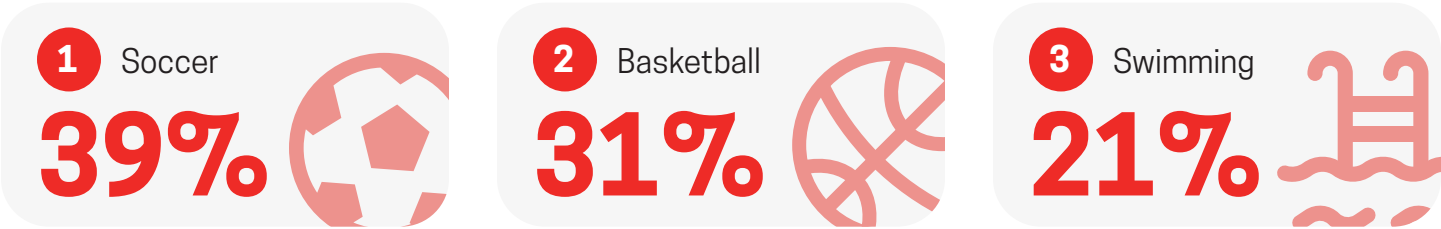
One of three mental well-being indicators used in the State of Play Youth Survey, derived from the ONS4 (Office for National Statistics) framework for measuring subjective well-being. Respondents rated the question “Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?” on a 0–10 scale.

Data Reference Summary

Top 3 Sports - Youth Participation (All Physical Activities)



Top 3 Sports - Organized Sports Programs



Cost Comparison - Canada’s Most Played Sports

Sport	Median Annual Cost	Average Annual Cost
 Swimming	\$290	\$692
 Soccer	\$450	\$1,105
 Basketball	\$515	\$1,068

Source: Cost of Sport Survey, State of Play Youth Survey (2025)

Acknowledgement

The following individuals and organizations played an essential role in bringing this research to life.

State of Youth Sport Team

- Dan Acosta – Senior Advisor, Data Insights & Social Impact
- Farah Bastien – Manager, Data Strategy & Measurement, Evaluation & Learning
- Kelly Kasper – Manager, Investment Design & Owned Properties

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Collaborative Partner:

State of Play Report:

- Aspen Institute Project Play

Cost of Sport:

- Burak Jacobson