



Goal: Active Living and Getting Outside

Vancouverites are engaged in active living and have incomparable access to nature.

Healthy City Strategy Target

- ❑ By 2020: all Vancouver residents live within a five minute walk of a park, greenway, or other green space (*Greenest City Action Plan*).
- ❑ By 2025: increase the percentage of Vancouver residents aged 18 and over who meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines by 25 per cent over 2014 levels.

Indicators in this Fact Sheet

- Access to Nature
- Physical Health and Activity
- Community Centre and Recreation Use

Key Findings

- Most Vancouver residents have access to a park or green space, though there remain some gaps and variations in the quality and quantity of green space available.
- Vancouverites are **generally active**, compared to residents of other cities, but there are inequities in how different residents are able to take part in physical activity.

Why it Matters

Being physically active throughout our lives is good for our bodies and our minds. Regular and adequate physical activity, whether for recreation, work or transportation, improves our health and reduces our risk of numerous chronic conditions, including coronary heart disease, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, breast and colon cancer, and depression. Being active also provides mental and emotional benefits. Active people often have enhanced self-esteem, increased positive moods, improved memory, improved ability to manage stress, and decreased anxiety.

Physical activity benefits us throughout our lives. As children, physical activity supports our healthy development of our growing bodies and can help build social skills and encourage other healthy habits. In older adulthood, being physically active may reduce functional limitations, reduce our risk of falling, and protect against cognitive decline. And more physical activity means that we enjoy more of these benefits.

There are even more benefits if we are active outside in a green or natural environment. Natural environments have therapeutic benefits for human health and well-being. Being outdoors contributes to positive feelings about others, encourages people to love and protect the environment, increases social capital, and promotes healthy personal development and resilience to stress.

Natural spaces in an urban setting also influence the well-being of entire communities. Easily accessible green spaces can improve social cohesion by providing sites for interaction and shared activities, thereby both fostering a sense of community and providing psychological benefits to its members. Green spaces and trees throughout the city are also vital for ecosystem functioning and the well-being of our planet. Natural vegetation cleans the air, absorbs rainwater, and provides habitats for birds and other animals.

There are ample opportunities to connect active living and getting outside by encouraging outdoor play, active transportation, and access to high quality parks, public spaces, and infrastructure for people throughout their lives. Active living and getting outside are essential building blocks of a healthy city for all.

About This Fact Sheet

This series reports on social indicators and trends related to the 12 long-term goals of the City of Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy. More information on the Strategy is available online at vancouver.ca/healthycity4all.

Social research is always imprecise and uncertain. Collaboration, replication and information sharing are crucial to building a more complete and rigorous picture of health and well-being in Vancouver. Readers are encouraged to provide feedback, ask questions and to engage in exploring and interpreting the information presented here.

Areas of Study

Information in this fact sheet is presented for a number of different geographies. Comparisons between Vancouver and other cities refer to individual local governments, as defined by Statistics Canada's census subdivisions. Comparisons between Metro Vancouver and other regions refer to census metropolitan areas.

Metro Vancouver boundaries and constituent municipalities are illustrated below right. Data within the City of Vancouver is broken down by local planning areas (neighbourhoods), illustrated below left.



Readers should note that the Dunbar-Southlands local area includes the Musqueam First Nation community near the Fraser River, but it is excluded from citywide figures unless otherwise noted.

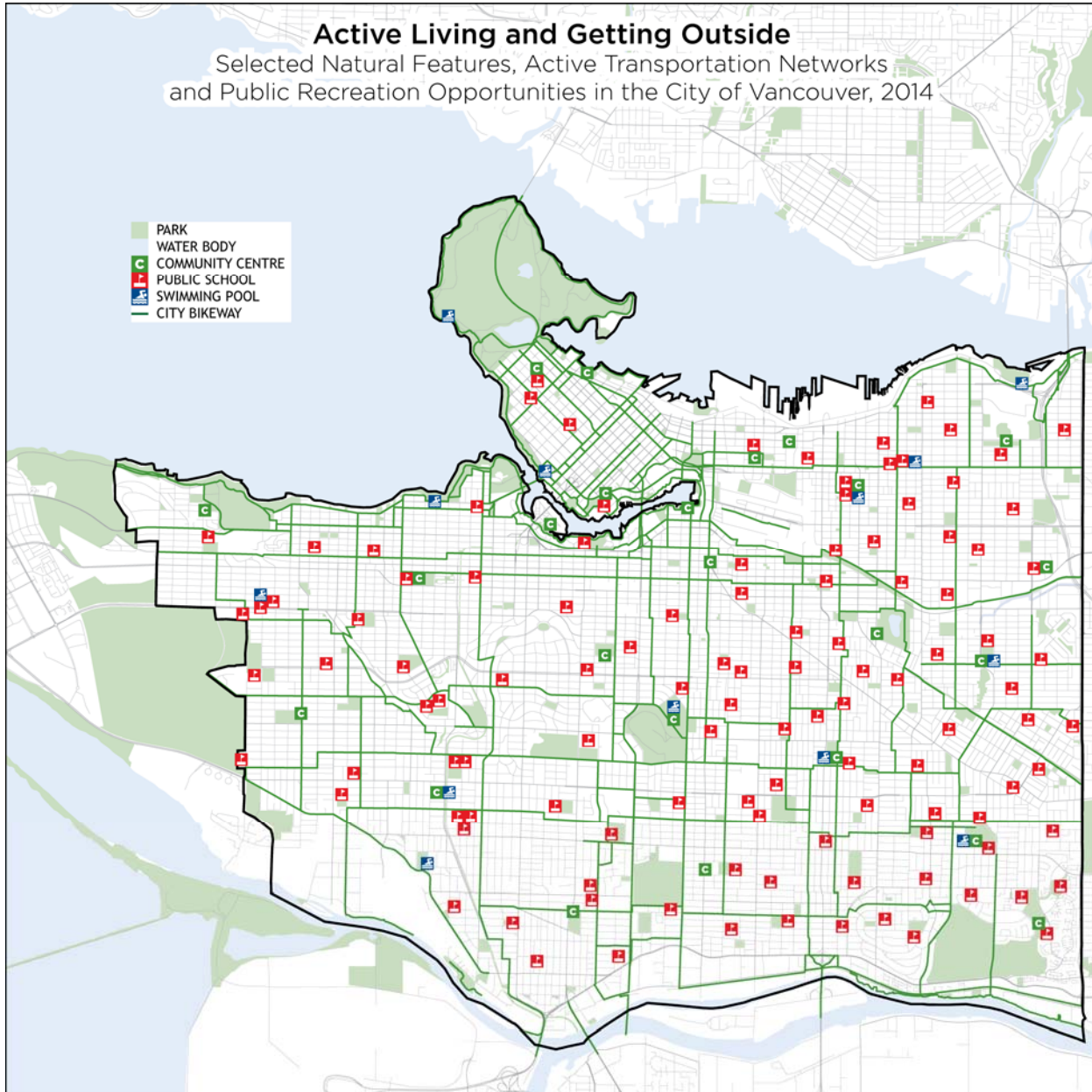
Health statistics are typically reported for the Vancouver Health Service Delivery Area, which includes the City of Vancouver, the Musqueam community and the University of British Columbia endowment lands.

Engaging with Data Sources

Sources used are noted in each section of this fact sheet. Key online resources include:

- Information from Statistics Canada's Census of Population and National Household Survey is available online at statcan.gc.ca. Custom neighbourhood profiles ordered by the City of Vancouver are available at data.vancouver.ca.

Active Living and Getting Outside in Vancouver



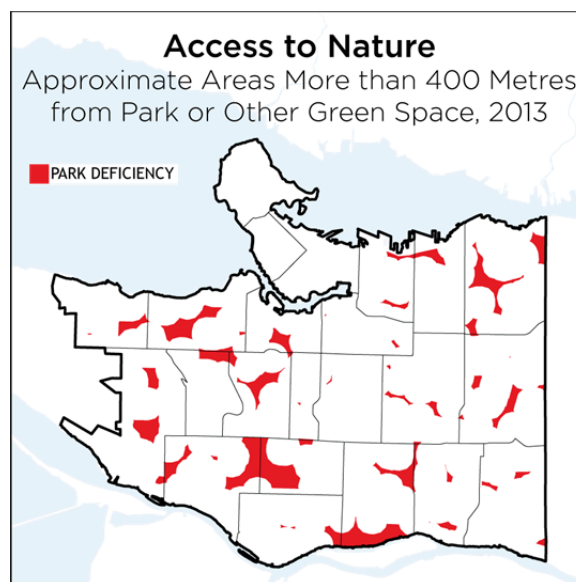
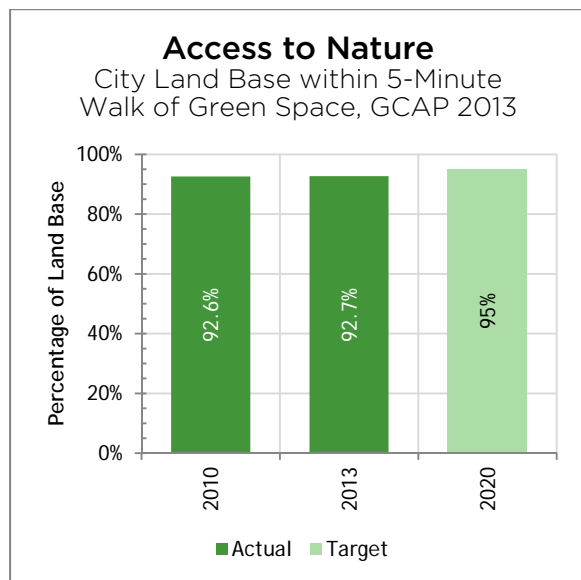
Vancouver has a reputation as an active city with abundant access to nature. Parks, beaches, water bodies and greenways throughout the city provide opportunities to spend time outdoors. Vancouver is renowned for its large urban parks, such as Stanley Park or Queen Elizabeth Park; for its neighbourhood parks and community recreation centres; and for its easy access to nearby regional and provincial parks and the North Shore Mountains. Vancouver has a high-profile recreational greenway network, particularly the seawall around Stanley Park and False Creek. Access to water defines Vancouver; beaches are among its most popular public spaces. Vancouverites use active transportation modes to a greater extent than many other cities; the city has a growing cycling network, a growing cycling culture and a target to make one third of all trips in the city entirely on foot or by bicycle, with an additional third by public transit.

The question—and the challenge for building a healthy city for all—is the extent to which this image equitably reflects the experience of all Vancouver residents. This fact sheet explores the distribution and use of parks and amenities, and indicators of population health and physical activity. These indicators offer the beginning of an answer to this complex question.

Indicator: Access to Nature

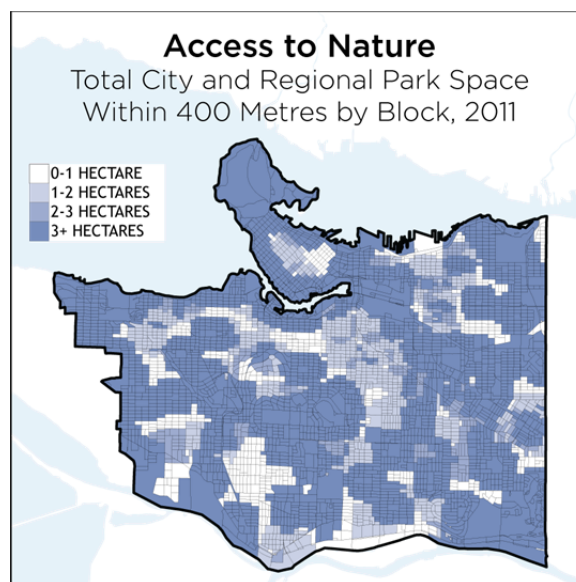
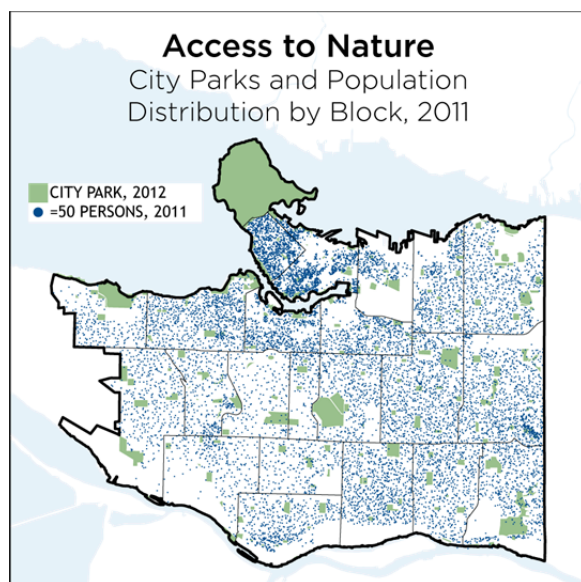
Access to nature means ensuring that both an appropriate quantity and quality of space can be accessed by all residents. Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan and Healthy City Strategy set a target that, by 2020, all Vancouverites live within a five-minute walk of a park, greenway or other green space. Proximity is only one component of access, but it facilitates comparing different parts of the city and identifying gaps.

The Greenest City Action Plan measures the total land area that is within 400 metres of green space; since five per cent of the city's land base is assumed to be industrial, the 2020 target is set at 95 per cent of the city's land base. The graph and map below illustrate reported progress toward this target. Given that the city is quite built-up and land acquisition is expensive, the City takes advantage of development and other opportunities to gradually add green space in park-deficient areas.



Public Parks

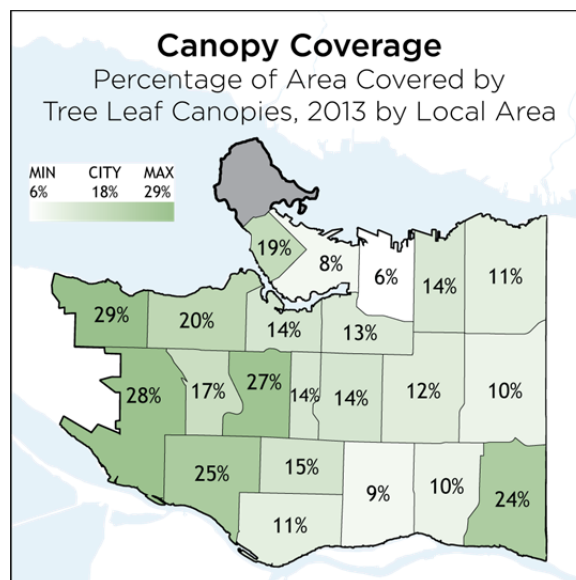
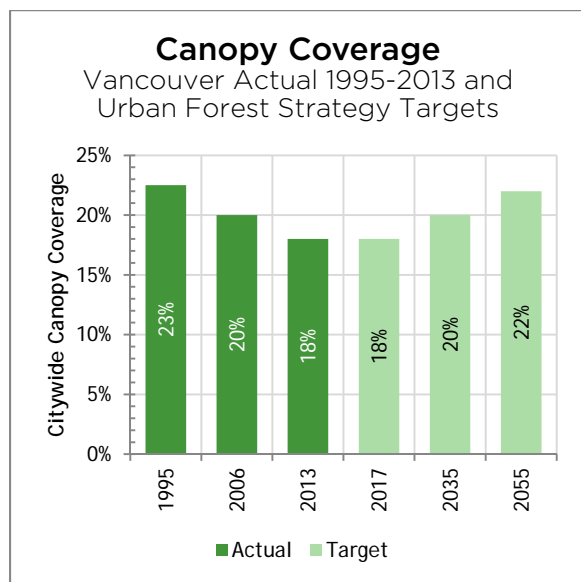
Vancouver has more than 220 parks, beaches and gardens maintained by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (Park Board). These parks vary considerably in size, treatment and amenities provided, as well as in their neighbourhood context. The maps below provide a small-scale analysis: the map below left juxtaposes population density with the location of parks, while the map below right visualizes the total area of parks (including Pacific Spirit Regional Park) accessed within 400 metres of each block.



Trees and Other Green Spaces

In addition to park space, smaller green spaces, such as yards and medians throughout the city provide vital support to our ecosystem. Trees and other vegetation clean the air, filter rainwater, absorb sound and provide habitats for birds and small animals. As part of the Greenest City Action Plan, the Vancouver Park Board has been planting trees on public and private property. The Greenest City Action Plan target is to plant 150,000 new trees between 2010 and 2020; as of 2013, 23,385 new trees had been planted.

In addition to increasing the number of trees, the Park Board also aims to increase canopy coverage. Canopy coverage refers to the proportion of land area covered by tree branches and foliage and is an indicator of tree size and quality. Greater canopy coverage is better able to filter air pollution and reduce temperature. In 2013, canopy cover was estimated at 18 per cent of the city's total land area. Although this is similar to other Pacific Northwest cities, Vancouver's canopy coverage has declined over time.



Water Access

Vancouver's waterfront is a focus for public recreation. As of 2011, 63 per cent (42 km) of Vancouver's 67 km waterfront was accessible to the public. This included public park land, seawall or waterfront pathway; spaces managed by other levels of government (e.g. Granville Island, Canada Place); public rights-of-way over private land; or temporary arrangements. The Park Board manages an additional 1.1 km of waterfront park beyond the city boundary along Spanish Bank West.

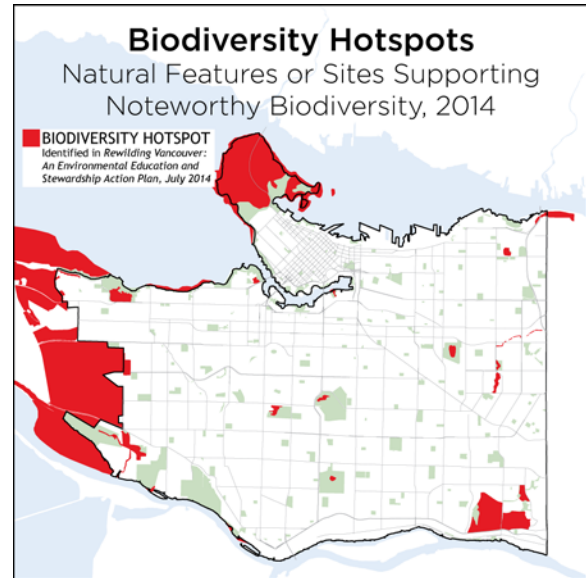
The level of public access varies by area; 99 per cent of English Bay and 96 per cent of False Creek were accessible in 2011, compared to 41 per cent of Burrard Inlet and 43 per cent of the Fraser River waterfront. Trout Lake, located in Kensington-Cedar Cottage, offers additional water access within the city limits. Vancouver has nine public beaches: eight beaches are located on English Bay and one on Trout Lake.



Biodiversity in Vancouver

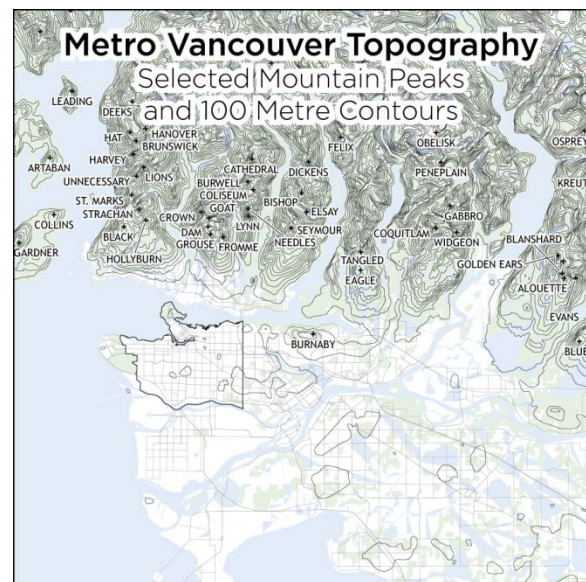
In summer 2014, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation passed *Rewilding Vancouver*, an environmental education and stewardship plan. The plan will protect special wild places; integrate nature into everyday life; and provide leadership for thriving natural spaces and people engaged with nature.

The map at right illustrates the 28 biodiversity “hotspots” identified in the plan. These spaces support noteworthy components of biodiversity in the city, and include representatives of rare or unique ecosystems that were once more widespread. Some of these spaces are located in parks or protected areas, but they are not necessarily protected for their biodiversity values. The *Rewilding Vancouver* plan draws attention to these spaces’ value and sensitivity for future planning.



Regional Setting

Access to nature does not end at the city boundary. Vancouver is defined by its natural setting: it is located in the valley where the Fraser River meets the ocean, and bordered by mountains and glacial fjords. The Vancouver region is the setting of a number of important ecosystems, and has many parks and conservation areas that provide residents and visitors with access to natural spaces.



Data Sources

Monitoring of Access to Nature targets is through the Greenest City Action Plan, vancouver.ca/greenestcity. Population data are adapted from Statistics Canada’s 2011 Census of Population.

Data and targets on tree canopy cover are extracted from the City’s Urban Forest Strategy, developed in April 2014: vancouver.ca/home-property-development/urban-forest-strategy.aspx.

Waterfront access statistics are from 2011: former.vancouver.ca/parks/environment/waterfront.htm.

Provincial park boundaries are obtained through the BC Government’s open data catalogue, data.gov.bc.ca. Maps presented contain information licensed under the Open Government License - British Columbia.

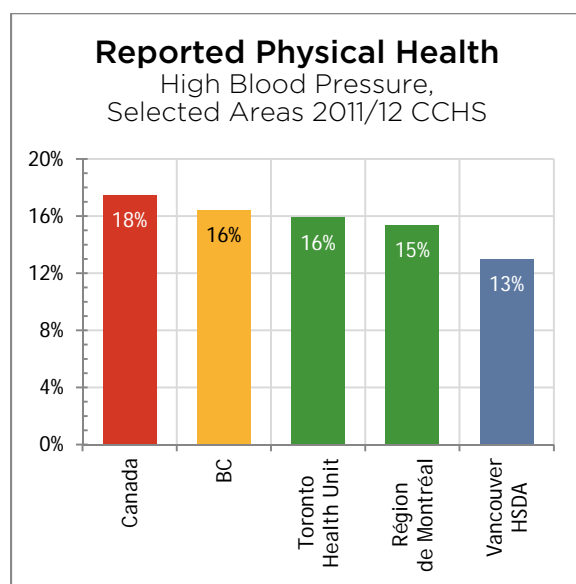
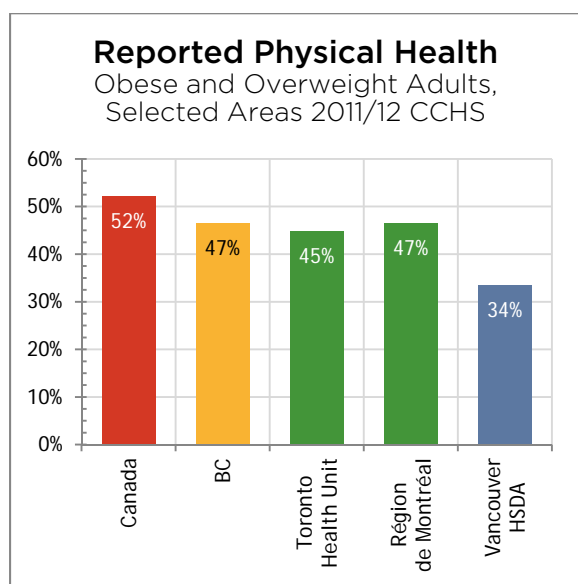
Topographic information is adapted from the National Topographic Database (NTDB), area 092G, obtained from Natural Resources Canada. Information is licensed under the Open Government License - Canada.

Indicator: Physical Health and Activity

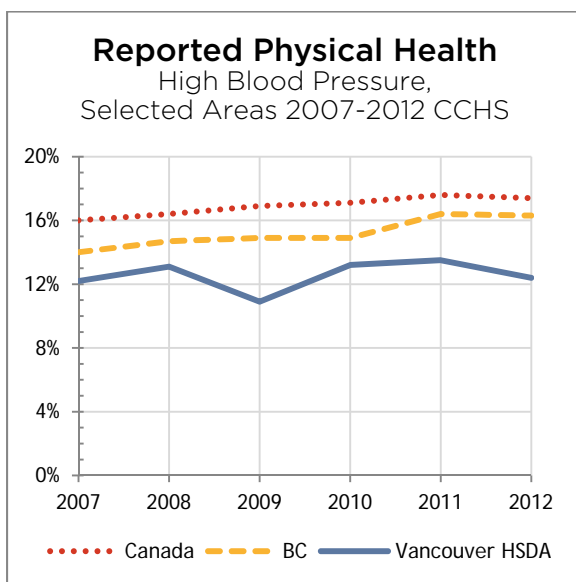
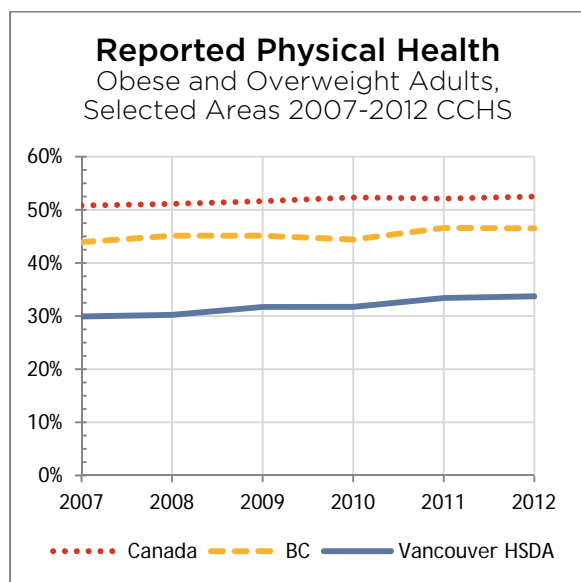
Increasingly sedentary employment demands and lifestyle choices have limited the physical activity of many Canadians and are major contributing risk factors to the increase in obesity, cardio-vascular disease, heart attack, stroke, hypertension and certain types of cancer. These health issues have personal, social and economic costs for both the individuals with these conditions and for the community as a whole.

Baseline data for the City of Vancouver is currently being collected and analyzed through the *My Health My Community* survey undertaken by local health authorities, the University of British Columbia and other partners. Until this information becomes available, the graphs below make use of data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) conducted by Statistics Canada.

In the 2011/12 CCHS, respondents in the Vancouver Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA) had low rates of self-reported overweight, obesity and high blood pressure compared to Canada, BC and peer health regions in Toronto and Montréal. Among respondents in the Vancouver HSDA, 34 per cent reported being overweight or obese, and 13 per cent reported high blood pressure.

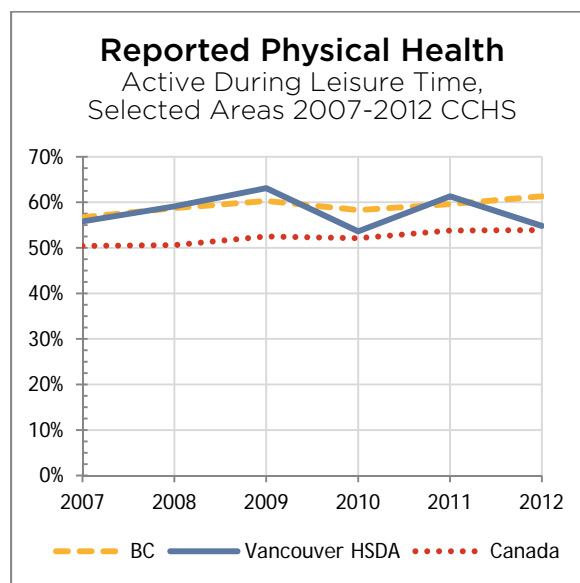
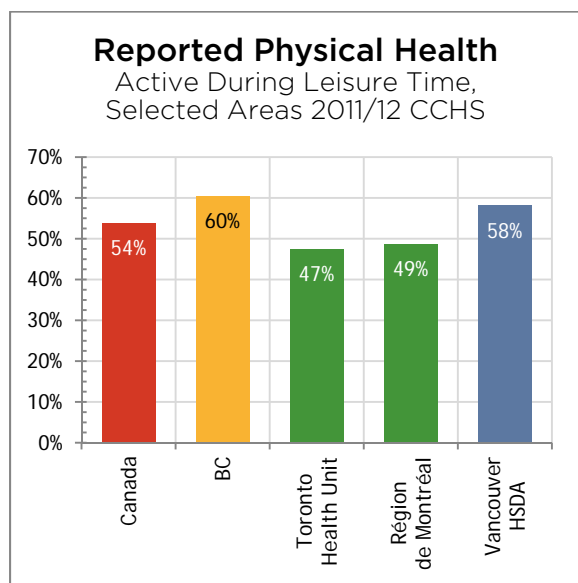


The proportion of adults in the Vancouver HSDA who self-reported being obese or overweight increased slightly between 2003 and 2012. The proportion of individuals self-reporting high blood pressure did not see a net change between 2003 and 2012 in Vancouver.



Social Indicators and Trends 2014: Active Living and Getting Outside

Physical activity can take many forms: purposeful exercise, recreational sports, active housework or gardening, walking or cycling to your destination, or a physically demanding job. In 2011/12, 58 per cent of residents in the Vancouver Health Service Delivery Area were moderately active or active during leisure time. Over time, Vancouver residents have generally reported being more active than Canadians overall, but similar or less active than British Columbians overall.



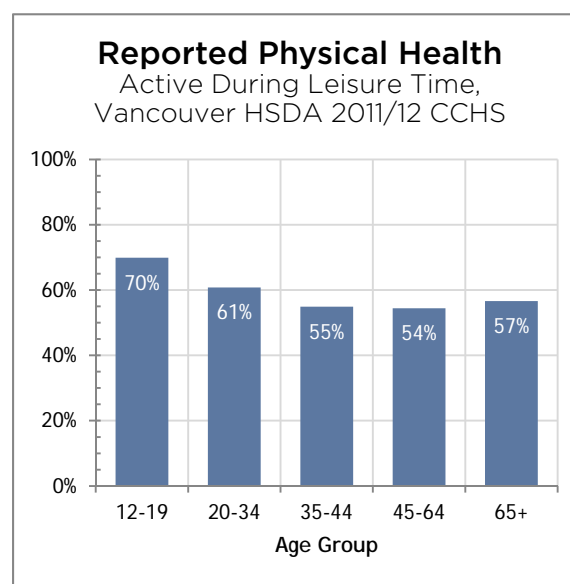
From 2006 to 2011, the Park Board conducted the Vancouver Recreation and Physical Fitness Survey, which provided annual estimates of the physical activity levels of Vancouver residents. Surveys between 2006 and 2011 found that 68 to 70 per cent of Vancouver residents were physically active more than half an hour, three or more times each week.

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week for adults 18 to 64 years old in bouts of 10 minutes or more; this is about 20 minutes per day. CCHS data are not identical to this measure; the survey calculates activity based on a rate of energy expenditure per day, adjusted for respondents' weight.

Activity and Equity

Some groups are more likely to report high levels of physical activity than others. People aged 12 to 19 years report the highest levels of physical activity of any age group. Most age groups in the Vancouver HSDA reported similar patterns of activity in 2011/12 as did respondents across the country, with one exception: people aged 65 years and over were considerably more likely to report being active in the Vancouver HSDA.

Women are often reported to have lower rates of physical activity and participation in sports than men. However, a 2009 Statistics Canada study found that when leisure time was held constant, meaning that individuals' differing amounts of time available for leisure activities were taken into account, females were found to spend more of their leisure time engaged in physical activity.

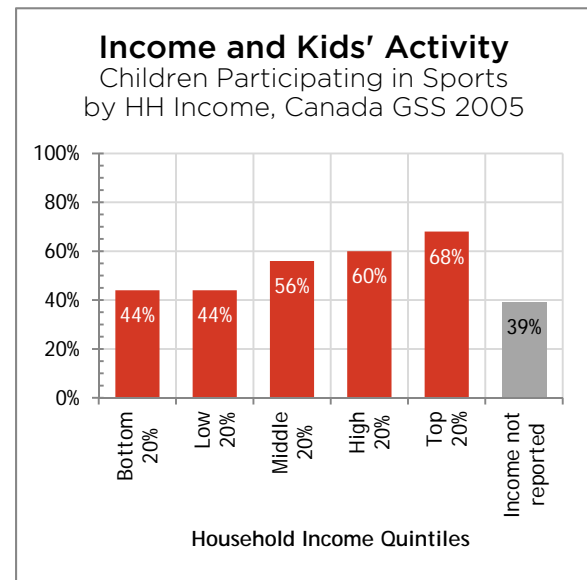


Social Indicators and Trends 2014: Active Living and Getting Outside

Access to recreational facilities and opportunities that support physical activity is not the same for all residents. Much of the available health and recreational programming is focused on those who are relatively young and already fit. There are few programs targeting sport or recreation participation for older citizens, people with different abilities and/or marginalized groups. The Park Board's Leisure Access Program provides subsidized recreation opportunities to people considered low income, but not all low income residents make use of this program. In 2013, approximately 8.5 per cent of low income Vancouverites used the Leisure Access Program.

Children in families with lower household incomes tend to have lower levels of participation in sports. A Statistics Canada survey using 2005 General Social Survey (GSS) data revealed that 68 per cent of children

in the highest household income quintile regularly participated in sports, compared to 44 per cent of children in the lowest income quintile. Boys tended to participate in sports more often than girls (56 per cent of boys compared to 45 per cent of girls in 2005); however, in higher income households the gap between male and female participation diminished.



Data Sources

Statistics Canada tracks activity levels through the General Social Survey, Canadian Healthy Measures Survey and Canadian Community Health Survey. Reports and datasets reviewed for this section include:

- Statistics Canada CANSIM table 105-0501 and 105-0502. CANSIM tables available at www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim.
- Statistics Canada. Are Suburban Residents Really Less Physically Active? April 2, 2009.
- Statistics Canada. Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents: Results from the 2009 to 2011 Canadian Health Measures Survey. August, 2012.
- Statistics Canada. Kids' Sports. June 3, 2008.
- Statistics Canada. Who Participates in Active Leisure? February 17, 2009.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has information about physical activity guidelines available at phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php. The guidelines were developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP).

Promoting Physical Activity in Everyday Life

Numerous research projects have demonstrated the relationship between built environments and positive health outcomes. Research reviewed by the City of Toronto¹ has identified that activity incorporated into daily lifestyles, rather than at recreation facilities, is more likely to lead to lifelong physical activity and better health outcomes. It can be more effective to encourage people to use active transportation modes, for instance, rather than to encourage them to go the gym.

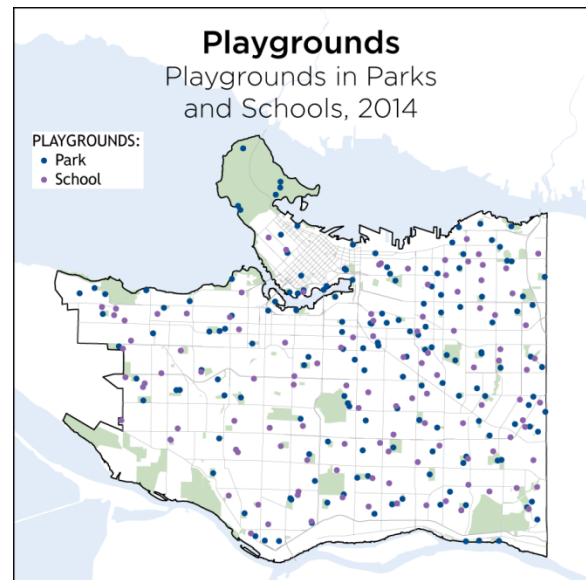
The Healthy City Strategy recognizes the interconnection between transportation and land-use choices, social equity and health and fitness. The goal of increasing physical activity is inseparable from building more walkable communities or from moving more people by walking, cycling or transit. Addressing poverty and other social inequities is inseparable from positive health outcomes. Integration is the challenge, and one local governments are uniquely able to take action toward.

¹ Toronto Public Health, "Road to Health: Improving Walking and Cycling in Toronto." April 2012. toronto.ca/health

Playgrounds

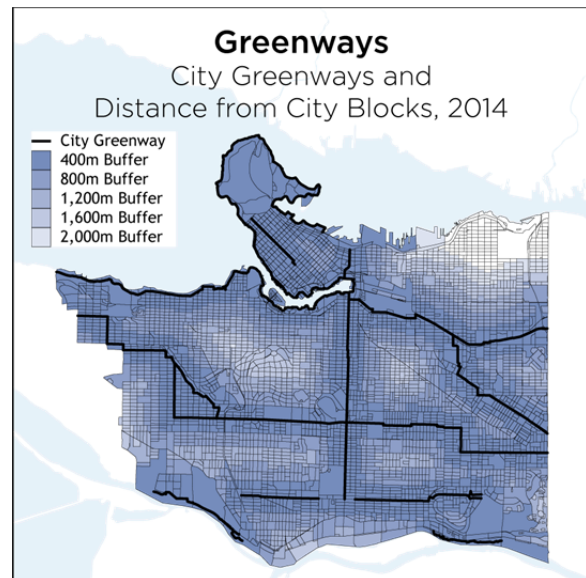
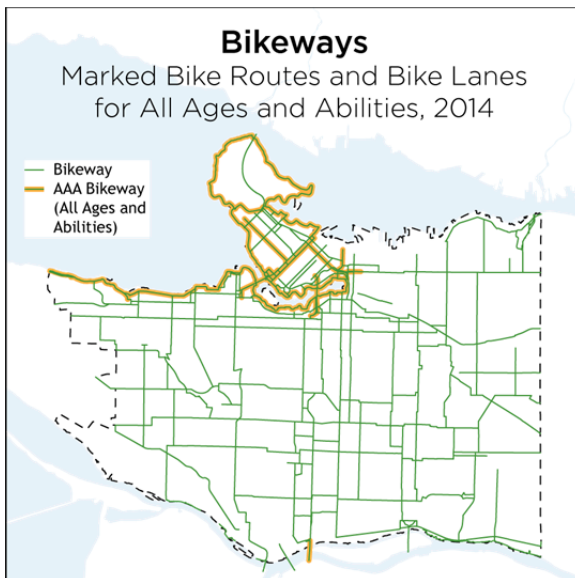
As it does for adults, regular physical activity has important physical, mental and social health benefits for children, including supporting healthy physical growth and development, strengthening motor skills and coordination, and providing a foundation for an active and healthy lifestyle in adulthood. Unstructured outdoor play is an important component of this as it allows children to build social skills and exercise their imaginations while engaging in physical activity.

As of 2014, the Park Board manages 160 outdoor playground facilities across the city. Playgrounds range in size and type, and many locations include wading pools or water park features. 114 additional playgrounds are located on school grounds. Additional playgrounds not shown may be located on private property or in other facilities, such as childcare centres.



Active Transportation

Access to opportunities to walk and cycle for transportation and recreation are important for active living and accessing nature. The City is developing bikeways suitable for all ages and abilities (AAA), such as separated bike lanes, and expanding the network of greenways, which are intended to be walking and cycling connections to key destinations throughout the city. The City has a target that all residents live within about 2,000 metres of a greenway, and the map below right illustrates progress toward this goal.



Data Sources

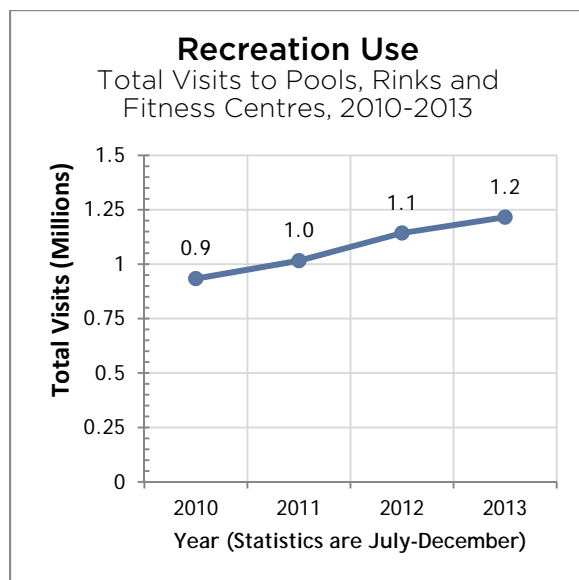
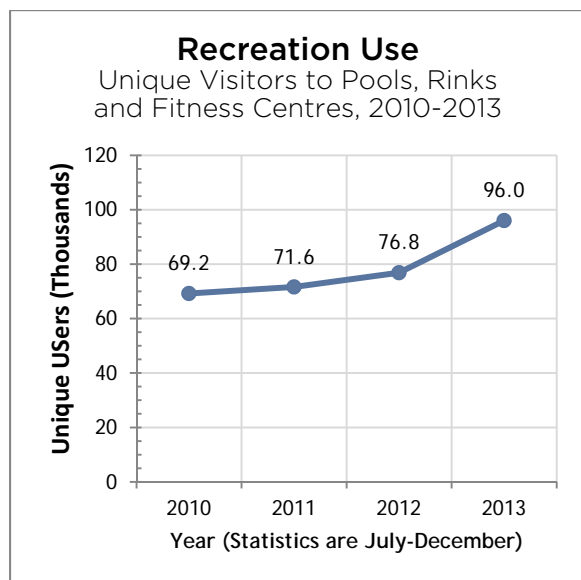
The locations of Vancouver parks and other Park Board facilities can be downloaded using the Park Board's ParkFinder app at cfapp.vancouver.ca/parkfinder_wa.

The City maintains extensive web pages outlining current and planned improvements to its bikeway (vancouver.ca/bikevancouver) and greenway (vancouver.ca/greenways) networks. Data on City facilities and infrastructure are also available in the City's open data catalogue at data.vancouver.ca.

Indicator: Vancouver Community Centre and Recreation Use

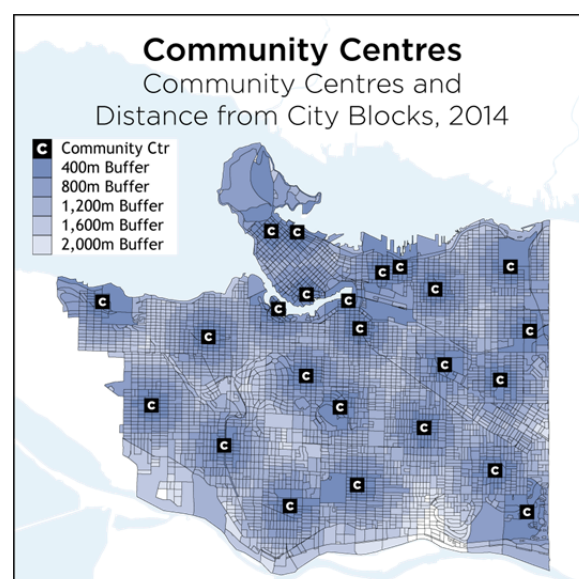
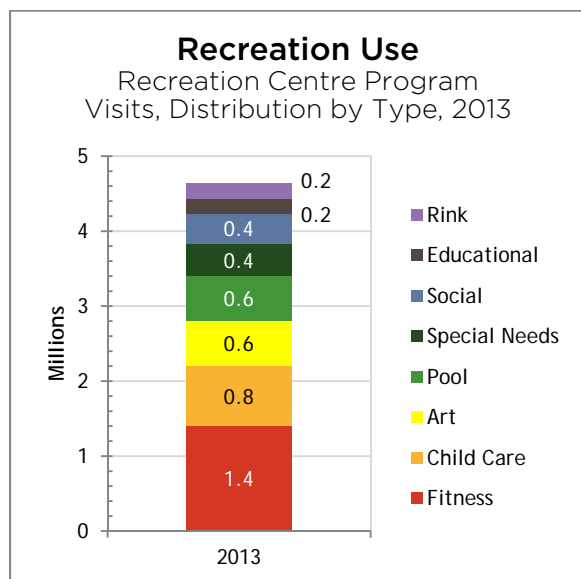
Facility Use and Access

The OneCard provides access to Park Board pools, ice rinks, fitness centres and participating community centres across Vancouver. Since its implementation in July 2013, over 115,000 OneCards have been issued as of April 2014. The number of users of Park Board pools, rinks and fitness centres increased 25 per cent between the second half of 2012 and the second half of 2013, while the total number of visits in this period increased by six per cent.



In 2013, over 30 per cent of Vancouverites used a Park Board facility or program. The chart below left illustrates the total number of program session visits by type of program.

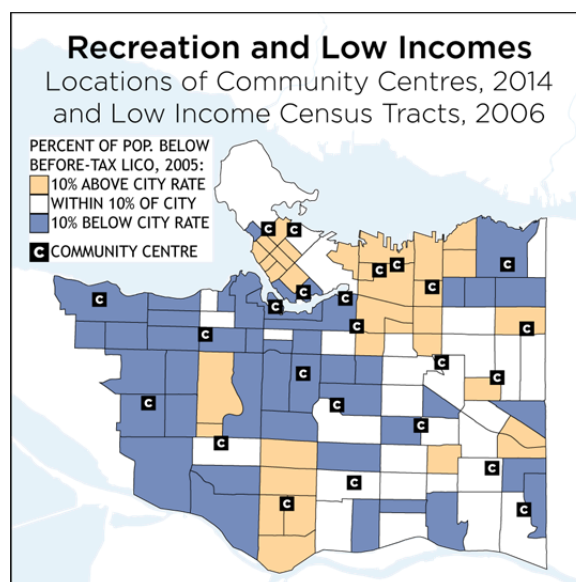
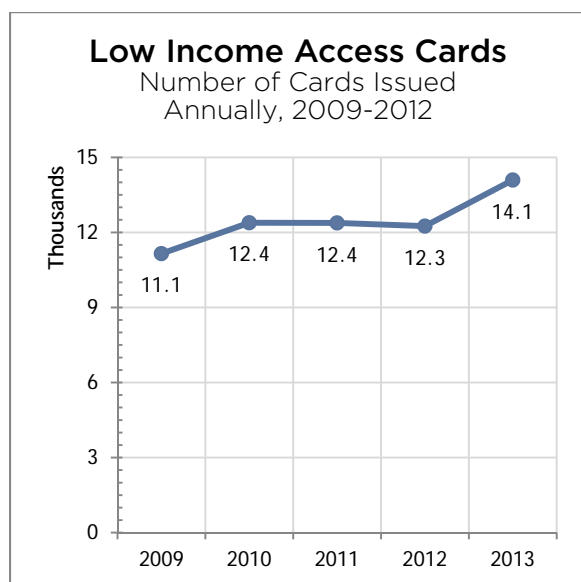
There are 24 community centres in the Park Board's system, most operated jointly with a non-profit community association. Facility size, building condition and program offerings vary between centres and depend in part on local capacity, population characteristics and need. Some centres are primarily for local use while others are destination centres, with the physical locations of centres reflecting their diverse histories. The map below right illustrates selected buffers from community centres, showing the spatial distribution of facilities across the city.



Leisure Access

The Leisure Access Program offers subsidized access to low income residents, including free admission to pools and rinks; a 50 per cent discount on fitness centre admission and on most programs at participating community centres; and discounted admission to a number of cultural institutions and museums. By the end of 2013, over 14,000 Vancouverites had enrolled in the Leisure Access Program, representing an increase of 15 per cent over 2012.

Eligibility is based on household incomes falling below Statistics Canada's before-tax Low Income Cut-off (LICO). Based on the 2006 Census of Population, some 150,000 people in Vancouver of all ages (or 27 per cent of the total population) were in households estimated to fall into this category, and the figure is likely to be similar today. The map below right illustrates areas of the city with relatively high concentrations of people falling below this cut-off. Facilitating greater use of this program by low income residents in Vancouver could be an important step in promoting active living for all.



Data Sources

Recent statistics on facility and OneCard use are extracted from a presentation given to the Park Board on May 26, 2014: vancouver.ca/your-government/regular-park-board-meetings.aspx.

The Leisure Access Program currently uses Statistics Canada's Before Tax Low Income Cut-Off as its threshold for eligibility. The most recent city and neighbourhood-level data are from the 2006 Census of Population, which is based on incomes in 2005.

Toward a Healthy City for All

The Healthy City Strategy sets a target of ensuring that all Vancouver residents have access to parks or green space and that the proportion of Vancouverites who are active increases. Turning these targets into actions is a complex challenge, requiring partnerships between the City of Vancouver, other levels of government, service providers and the private sector.

The City's Role

Key areas in which the City can show leadership include:

- Partnering with the Park Board and Vancouver Board of Education, among others, to increase access to recreation, particularly for children and youth.
- Implementing policy and actions to improve access to, and the quality of, the **natural environment**. Existing strategies include the Urban Forest Strategy; Rewilding Vancouver, an Environmental Education and Stewardship Action Plan; Green Operations Plan; Local Food Action Plan; and the Greenest City Action Plan. Upcoming strategies include the Biodiversity Strategy and the Vancouver Bird Strategy.
- Implementing policy aimed at **increasing physical activity** among residents. Such policy documents include the Vancouver Sport Strategy, and the Parks, Recreation Strategic Plan and Transportation 2040.

In January 2014 Council declared the first Saturday in June as National Health and Fitness Day. This declaration is intended to increase awareness about physical activity and encourage Vancouverites to participate in sports and fitness.

Priority Actions

Some specific actions the City may undertake include enhancing access to nature by:

- identifying overlaps between social vulnerability and gaps in access to nature;
- encouraging and supporting tree planting on both public and private property;
- improving natural play areas for children in parks;
- exploring the feasibility of an outdoor environment-focused school;
- bringing nature into peoples' everyday lives;
- facilitating the development flexible outdoor spaces, such as parklets; and
- encouraging active transportation to and from school.

The City can promote active living by:

- increasing access to recreation via the OneCard, Vancouver's universal passport to recreation;
- promoting the Park Board's Leisure Access program;
- continuing to implement actions from the Vancouver Sport Strategy; and
- developing programs focused on physical literacy development and active for life strategies.

These can be achieved by completing recreation and parks services **master plans**, identifying gaps in services and facilities, in order to provide strategic focus for parks and recreation activities.

Your Turn

Achieving a healthy city for all will require ideas and action on the part of governments, agencies, organizations and the private sector. It will also require all Vancouverites to take part. **Active Living and Getting Outside** is a collective goal for all of us. How can we work to make Vancouver genuinely and equitably live up to its setting and reputation as an active city? What would a city with incomparable access to nature feel like, and how would it be different from our city today? Learn more and get involved at vancouver.ca/healthcity4all.