

Survey - Recreation Nova Scotia - Progressive Conservative Party Response

1. What is your Party's vision for ensuring the provincial government continues to provide its leadership role? Will you continue to appoint a Senior Minister who will have responsibility for making this happen? How will you involve those who directly support the delivery of recreation services?

The Department of Health's Office of Health Promotion was introduced by our government in December of 2002 to focus on developing a healthier Nova Scotia. This Office, under the leadership of Minister Rodney MacDonald, is responsible for the Sport and Recreation Commission, the mission of which is to:

- enhance the quality of life of Nova Scotians through the development, encouragement, establishment, co-ordination, implementation and promotion of sport and recreation programs and services; and
- develop excellence in programs and services which preserves and develops the traditional values, quality of life and environment of Nova Scotians.

Some of the responsibilities of the Sport and Recreation Commission are to develop and support recreation and sport organizations, public agencies and communities. These Nova Scotians not only participate in recreational activities, they support active, healthy lives for the people of this province. The delivery of recreation services can be found in every corner of Nova Scotia, from the community baseball field to publicly funded youth centres, to privately-owned businesses. The groups involved in delivering recreational services are to be commended on making our province a healthier, more active place in which to live.

Our extensive, four-year plan, John Hamm's Blueprint for a Better Nova Scotia, includes a key commitment, that is: to double the budget for the office for health promotion. This means that over the next four years, a PC Government will increase its budget to a total of \$15 million.

Our health system focuses on hospitals and treatment, but a true government focus on health emphasizes the prevention of illnesses. A PC Government recognizes and has devoted considerable commitment in our blueprint to promote the idea that healthy lives are developed through a proactive approach and we have outlined many steps to address a healthier Nova Scotia, something the Sport and Recreation Commission will play an important role in moving forward.

2. What will be your and your Party's level of commitment to increasing physical activity across Nova Scotia and ensuring adequate funds are provided to the Active Kids - Healthy Kids Strategy, i.e.: how much funding over what period of time?

Healthy kids make healthy adults. By targeting the habits of our young people, we can enhance the current health of our entire province and significantly alter the statistics we currently face. The Active Kids, Healthy Kids initiative has had positive results and the reaction from schools has been a supportive one. From 2002 to 2005, \$2.4 million will be invested to increase the physical activity of youth through this project.

Active school community pilot programs going on province-wide explore ways that teachers, administrators, staff and parents can encourage students to become more active. In school and after school programs and ways to increase recreational time in class are some issues being pursued.

As noted above, the PC Party's Blueprint for Better Nova Scotia promises to double the funding allocated to the Office of Health Promotion. Our Blueprint details the commitment of our party to continue its support of the Active Kids, Healthy Kids program and complete the next steps in the strategy, as was previously outlined, to work towards reaching the ultimate goal of a healthier province.

It is also important that each and every child has the opportunity to participate in sport and recreational activities. Some families have a great deal of difficulty providing these opportunities for their children. Outlined in the Progressive Conservatives' four year plan is the implementation of an allowable tax expense, starting at \$150 per child, to help offset the cost of registering children and youth in activities that offer potential health dividends.

KidSport, a fund-raising program offered through the support of the provincial and federal governments and the private sector, will also help to make sure that children in low income families have the chance to participate in organized sport and recreational activities.

In addition, more resources will be dedicated to the Esteem Team program. The Esteem Team is made up of Nova Scotia athletes that travel to schools and community groups province-wide to communicate the value and benefits of sport and of healthy living. It is in this way that many inactive children may decide to try more healthy activities.

We also recognize it is children and adults who work together to develop the future health of Nova Scotia. That is why in the Blueprint, our party promises to create Nova Scotia's first School and Workplace Health Champions Award. Winning strategies for promoting good health will be featured in a provincial media campaign and given a monetary reward to support on-going healthy school and workplace initiatives. We will also work with organizations outside of government to find new ways to encourage healthy habits in individual workplace environments and dedicate resources from the

Office of Health Promotion and the Youth and Senior Citizens' Secretariats to implement community based approaches to encouraging healthy living among people of all ages.

3. How will you and your Party commit to support recreation opportunities - helping ensure our young people stay out of trouble?

Involvement in sport and recreation can provide countless benefits to not only youth, but to their whole communities as well. Studies show that children who participate in organized sport or recreational activities are less likely to participate in other more destructive activities, like suicide, smoking, unprotected sex, or drug use or other criminal behavior. Positive physical activities can help children to feel good about themselves and their achievements, and make them more goal-oriented for future endeavors.

By adding more funding to health promotion, and implementing tax credits for low income families, as well as family recreation grants through programs like KidSport, we are helping kids become healthier and happier individuals. Exercise can help young people relieve some of the stress in their lives, as well as interact with others who share common interests. Kids who participate in these activities are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue their ultimate goals, keeping them off the streets and out of court and the correctional system.

4. How is your Party going to ensure that appropriate and equitable levels of funding is provided to recreation and sport facility development?

In just the last four years, the PC Government has provided approximately 300 Recreational Funding Development grants through the Sport and Recreation Commission, not to mention the countless other investments made in sport and recreational facilities through other Departments such as Tourism and Culture. These investments promote the growth of the provincial economy and help communities thrive. By promoting sport and recreation in our own communities, we build a strong foundation for our citizens - both young and old - and give them a place to enjoy our great recreational activities, without the need to travel a long distance.

As detailed in the Blueprint, our team plans to urge the federal government to create a partnership with the province and municipalities to create a new multi-year infrastructure plan that focuses on recreational facilities like green ways, hiking and biking trails.

In addition, to promote recreational activities and the facilities that provide them, our PC Government has committed to requiring that each municipality that receives recreation facility funding in the future, give back to their community by providing established free family recreation time.

5. How is your Party going to ensure that funding for minor facility development (ball fields, playgrounds, etc.) is available to meet the need and demand?

Facilities like these ones are at the heart of our communities, as they provide activities for both young and old, while making memories that last a lifetime. Community recreation facilities are eligible to apply for various government grants that can help provide funding for renovations and operational costs.

The Recreation Facility Development Grant program helps municipalities and community groups plan, construct, renovate, conserve or acquire facilities for public recreation purposes. Projects eligible for assistance include community centres, pools, sport facilities, parks, playgrounds, trails and other outdoor recreation facilities. Grants are provided based on basic criteria, such as community need and benefits, the level of planning and preparation, stability and past success of the organization, and resourcefulness and partnerships resulting in other funding commitments. A PC Government will continue this vital support.

6. What is your position on introducing quality daily physical activity in Nova Scotia's schools?

The fact is that children spend a large portion of their day in school. The habits that they pick up amongst their peers, as well as teachers, staff and administration, can echo throughout their whole lives. If physical activity is promoted in a school setting on a regular basis, then youth can profit from its physical and social benefits. Through the Active Kids, Healthy Kids program, implemented by the PC Government, we are working with teachers, staff administrators and parents to find new ways to promote healthy activity during school time, as well as after school.

As outlined in the Blueprint, the Progressive Conservative Party is also developing a plan to ensure that public schools are made available for children to participate in free after school recreational activities.

Healthy eating is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle. The Hamm Team has committed to working with school boards to implement healthy eating policies as part of a comprehensive strategy for the entire province and introduce an initiative called Our Healthy School in all elementary schools by year four.

7. We want to know what your plan is for supporting voluntarism and the voluntary sector, and what investment is your Party prepared to make to this sector?

Without the hard work of our province's volunteers, many of Nova Scotia's projects and programs would not exist. Volunteering gives us a chance to exhibit our generous Maritime spirit, by giving of what is most valuable- our time and abilities. By helping out in our communities, we can change lives forever. Each of us can remember as a child that special person who took the time to teach us how to throw that great curve ball or swim underwater, or score our first goal.

The value of Nova Scotia's approximately 285,000 volunteers has been estimated to be worth about \$2 billion. It's a well known fact that Nova Scotians volunteer far more than other Canadians. However, it's impossible to accurately quantify the huge, positive difference volunteers make in the lives of the people they help.

The Blueprint describes the Hamm Team's appreciation for the hard work that volunteers contribute in various sectors. The truth is that sometimes volunteers do not receive the protection they need and deserve. That is why the Progressive Conservatives have promised to pass a volunteer protection act, to give greater legal protection to not-for-profit charitable organizations.

8. What is your Party prepared to do to ensure these volunteer community groups are able to continue to offer recreational opportunities?

It is difficult to keep community groups in operation without a certain amount of financial help. There is a multitude of opportunities for volunteer groups across the province to apply for grants from the Nova Scotia Government that can help with development, operational and equipment costs. The Office of Health Promotion's Sport and Recreation Commission provides Recreational Funding Development Grants annually.

This year alone, over 80 organizations were able to benefit from Recreation Facility Development Grants.

Sincerely,

John F. Hamm
Premier of Nova Scotia
Leader, PC Party of Nova Scotia