

Supporting the Urgent Social and Economic Recovery from COVID-19

Investing in Ontario's After-School Program to support vulnerable children and communities



Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada
Repaires jeunesse du Canada

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Ontario's Boys and Girls Clubs: Proven, Cost-Effective and Affordable

As Canada's largest child- and youth-serving organization, Boys and Girls Clubs provide vital programs and services to over 200,000 young people in 745 communities across Canada. Over the past 100 years and during these last eleven difficult months, our Clubs have been there for vulnerable children, youth, and families. Today, Clubs are providing food for families, partnering with their local food banks. We provided childcare and programs for children and youth of essential workers and now for more families as we start down the road to recovery. We are helping to share trusted information on COVID safety and vaccines with our members, have gotten technology into the hands of low-income families to support connectivity, and are running high-quality virtual programming when kids can't be in Clubs.

Ontario's 23 community Boys and Girls Clubs provide childcare and out-of-school programming for more than 135,000 children, youth and families annually, at more than 319 locations across the province. Boys and Girls Clubs across Ontario have a proven track record. Many of Ontario's Boys and Girls Clubs were founded by police officers and veterans, who recognized the importance of giving at-risk children and youth the opportunities they need to grow into responsible and self-sustaining adults.

By delivering effective and tailored recreation-based programs, Clubs keep at-risk children and youth on the right path. They provide young people with the opportunity to explore their interests, develop their strengths, and realize positive outcomes in academics, physical activity, self-expression, healthy living, mental health and more. Our trained staff and volunteers help young people build the confidence and sense of belonging they need to overcome barriers and form positive relationships.

Our high-quality, cost-effective programs are available at no or low cost, keeping more money in the pockets of hard-working families. These affordable after-school programs also help reduce unemployment, as we know parents can choose from a wider range of employment opportunities when they have increased flexibility in their schedules.

The Government of Ontario has recently recognized the value of Club programming by proposing regulatory changes that will allow us to open up more safe and high-quality childcare spaces across Ontario and provide before AND after-school programming for school-aged children. However, none of this will be possible without the critical support of the Ontario Government through the Ontario After-School Program (OASP).

Building on What Works

Ontario's Boys and Girls Clubs are supporting communities through this pandemic and helping many of Ontario's at-risk children and youth with the challenges of getting better grades, finding a job, supporting mental health and getting enough physical activity. Our after-school recreation programs are a proven and affordable choice for parents in vulnerable communities across Ontario. Our record of success and the strength of our community relationships is how we've earned the confidence and trust of families, community members, and law enforcement alike.

Our partnership with the Ontario Government is a key part of this success. Through a modest annual investment of \$13.5 million in the **Ontario After-School Program (OASP)**, the province delivers a major impact. The OASP provides life-changing after-school recreation programs for more than 21,000 children and youth, including 4,500 at-risk children and youth enrolled in OASP-supported after-school programs run by local Boys and Girls Clubs.

We recommend in this upcoming budget that the Ontario Government, for the first time since the program's inception more than a decade ago, invest new money in the Ontario After-School Program.

In 2021 with declining charitable revenues from sources such as United Way, there will be a significant decline in the number of children and youth that Boys and Girls Clubs across the province may be able to support. At the current level of provincial funding, \$25/child/week, the provincial government is supplying only 25% of the real cost of the program. Clubs need to add approximately \$75/child/week to have this program break even. This was difficult during a normal year and will simply not be possible during the 2021/2022 academic year.

Now is the time to support vulnerable children, youth and families. The OASP is one of the most efficient routes Government has to support restarting our economy and recent discussions with the Chair of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity have reinforced the need for these supports in communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Options

Boys and Girls Clubs appreciates that it will be difficult to plan a budget this year given the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore outlined several options to support vulnerable children and youth through the OASP.

Sustainability

Option 1: Sustaining the After-School Program

Increase the OASP funding formula from \$1,000/child/year to \$1,250/child/year through an investment of \$3.375M annually. Under this scenario, the majority of the OASP would survive, with some spaces likely to be lost across the province.

Option 2: Enhancing the Ontario After School Program

Increase the funding formula from \$1,000/child/year to \$2,000/child/year through an additional investment of \$13.5M annually. This would ensure the 13,500 children currently supporting these children can survive.

Option 3: A Thriving Ontario After-School Program

Increase the funding formula from \$1,000/child/year to \$4,000/child/year, the full cost of the program, costing an additional \$40.5M annually. This would ensure sustainable high-quality and free after school programming for 13,500 children currently support by this program and strong Ontario After-School program implementation partners able to respond and engage with community needs.

Summer Expansion: In addition to the above three options, a fourth option that could be layered onto any of the above would be to expand this impactful program by making it available year-round, instead of just during the school year. The policy problem that necessitates the Ontario After-School Program is even more apparent when children are not in school, and having low-cost free programming for children in vulnerable communities in the summer would support post-pandemic recovery as well as drive at rooting out the systemic inequities that the pandemic has exposed. The cost of this program would range from \$7 - \$10 M annually.

Expansion

Boys and Girls Clubs have significant waiting lists at the majority of our program sites in priority neighbourhoods. These waiting lists have expanded during the pandemic. These new spaces could be quickly added at 66% of the cost to Government compared to municipally run locations, while keeping money in the pockets of hard-working families.

Option 1: Targeted Ontario After-School Expansion

Invest \$300,000 annually directly into Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario to permanently add 100 before and after-school spaces at existing Club locations across the province

Option 2: Targeted Ontario After-School Expansion

Invest \$725,000 annually directly into Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario to permanently add 250 before and after-school spaces at existing Club locations across the province

Option 3: Targeted Ontario After-School Expansion

Invest \$1.4M annually directly into Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario to permanently add 500 before and after-school spaces at existing Club locations across the province.

Geographic Expansion

There are significant gaps in before and after-school delivery across the province with many communities simply not having the spaces needed to ensure optimum child development and the economic activity that we know is strongly associated with accessible and affordable before and after school programming, especially in rural areas of the province. Based on our local knowledge and in consultation with stakeholder and governments, we would value the opportunity to expand Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario's footprint to close these gaps with high-quality programs at low costs to Government. As Federal infrastructure and other organizational investments are currently being made, the timing of these discussions is quite unique and holds significant opportunities to support the social and economic recovery of Ontario.

Working Together

By considering an investment in the Ontario After-School Program and directly in Boys and Girls Clubs across Ontario, the Ontario government would:

1. Deliver impact directly to vulnerable communities that have been hit hardest by COVID-19.
2. Support economic recovery through the creation of childcare and before and after-school spaces across Ontario
3. Efficiently utilize taxpayer money as Clubs can leverage existing infrastructure, diverse funding bases, and proven programs and services.

We look forward to continuing and growing our long-standing partnership with the Ontario Government to ensure that we can deliver our life-changing programs to children and youth across the province.