

Driving Canada's National Play Movement: IPA Canada's Development of a National Play Charter



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Rationale: Why do we need a National Play Charter?

The International Play Association (IPA) is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1961 with the purpose to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental human right as enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). IPA World has member chapters in close to 50 countries, including Canada.

While IPA Canada has been promoting the child's right to play for over 40 years, the value of play (for its own sake) has only recently registered on the radar of many recreation and health service providers, local and regional governments, community organizations, and even caregivers. Despite growing interest and awareness in Canada, a clear and consistent understanding, across all sectors, of what is meant by 'play' is still missing. Approaches, resources and tools to support the promotion and provision of high quality play opportunities that reflect the unique Canadian context and culture(s) are also in short supply.

Canada is also not doing enough to honour its commitment to the UNCRC, and the child's right to play is too often compromised in legislation and policy, if it is considered at all (IPA Canada, 2010). Play is also often clustered together with or re-labelled as 'recreation', 'sport', or 'physical activity', meaning few financial or institutional resources are directed towards the promotion and provision of genuine play activities and opportunities. Canada as a nation has a responsibility to provide leadership with regard to implementation of Article 31, and to ensure that all Canadian children have the time, freedom and space to play.

The impetus for a national play movement in Canada has already begun, and IPA Canada feels that it is ideally positioned to continue its role as a national leader and promoter around children's play. As a strategic step in driving the burgeoning play movement, we are initiating the development of a Canadian National Play Charter.



What Can a Play Charter Do?



A Play Charter can be an effective document for both initiating a national play initiative or campaign, and articulating the values and objectives of an organization. It establishes a clear mandate and a roadmap for next steps, including perhaps the development of a long-term National Play Strategy by the Canadian government.

It is expected that a Canadian National Play Charter can:

- help to raise awareness about children's right to play
- promote the value of free play for child health and development
- develop a common understanding of play across Canada
- address play and play needs in the unique Canadian context
- increase the equitable provision of high quality play opportunities for all Canadian children
- help to build a national network of play advocates and providers who are committed to supporting children's right to play
- provide clear principles and supportive resources to support play advocacy and provision across the country

How Will the Play Charter be Developed?

1. Development of a draft of Play Charter statements and principles

While the final version of the objectives and statements of the Play Charter should be developed after an appropriate consultation process, having a clear list of proposed charter statements can help to focus consultative discussions. IPA Canada has therefore drafted an initial set of statements to be considered (see last page).



2. Consultative process to refine the Play Charter and its priority issues

IPA will undertake a broad, national consultative process to refine and solidify all Charter statements, identify key messages and resources for mobilization of the Charter, and set out action points for various stakeholders to help support the principles of the Charter.

This work will help to identify priority issues for play across the country, as well as identify current gaps in play awareness, policies and provisions. It is also expected that these discussions will guide the development of documents specifically tailored to support the mobilization of the Play Charter by various stakeholder groups (e.g. children & youth, parents, play providers, municipalities).

The consultative process will include the following steps:

1. Initial consultations at the IPA 2017 World Conference: IPAC introduced the Charter to their membership and other Canadian supporters at the IPA World conference held in Calgary in September 2017. Discussions generated valuable feedback which will help to inform next steps.

2. National consultative process: IPA Canada is now looking to undertake a broader, multi-pronged consultative process to refine the Play Charter including engaging Canadians via:

- i. Development of an Advisory Group*
- ii. Regional Focus Groups / Workshops*
- iii. Targeted Online Survey*
- iv. Presentations at National / Regional Conferences*



Mobilization of the Play Charter

In addition to seeking official support for the Play Charter at national and provincial levels, IPA Canada will work to mobilize the Play Charter in three significant ways:

1. Supportive documents, tools and resources: such as a 'Making It Happen' tool-kit, promotional materials and a child/youth version

2. Play Champions program: Any Canadian individual or organization will be able to adopt the Play Charter and become a 'Play Champion'

3. Play Partners program: To recognize organizations, facilities or campaigns pledging a more substantial commitment to the Play Charter

Canadian Play Charter: Draft of Proposed Statements

1. Every child has the right to play

Play is vital to the health and development of all children; All children have the right to play, regardless of age, ability, gender identity, culture, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, or economic circumstance.

2. All children need time and space for free play, every day

Play is recognized as a freely chosen, child-led activity; children need the time, freedom and appropriate spaces, both indoors and outdoors, to engage in their chosen play activities everyday.

3. Children should be able to play in their own way, alone or with peers, without adult intervention

Play activities should be freely chosen by children, without undue direction or intervention by adults. Adults should respect and value the child's right to play by providing time and opportunities for independent play on their own or with friends.

4. Children have the right to a choice of stimulating, high-quality public play opportunities near to where they live

Children should have access to a diverse range of high-quality play opportunities, both indoors and outdoors, and at no cost, in their local community. Ideally children will have a choice of stimulating play activities and spaces appropriate to their age and interest, including the opportunity to experience nature, within walking distance from where they live.

5. All children have the right to play opportunities and spaces that are inclusive, accessible and welcoming

Every child has the right and need to have play experiences that are welcoming of children of all abilities, ages and backgrounds. All children should have access to play opportunities and spaces where they feel comfortable, can explore and play freely and safely, without barriers or discrimination.

6. All public spaces should be child & play friendly

Children have the right to use and enjoy public spaces as much as any other citizen. All public spaces, both indoor and outdoors, should allow children to play freely, safely and without segregation.

7. Play opportunities should include challenges that support children's development

Play that provides opportunities for children to challenge themselves is critical to children's healthy development and well-being. Play spaces and activities should offer children a range of challenges, appropriate to their age and ability, that allows them to test and refine their skills and identity. Challenging play opportunities should not expose children to hazards or unacceptable levels of risk.

8. Time and space for play is especially important for children living in challenging, crisis or controlled environments

The opportunity for safe and accessible free play every day is especially critical for children who face challenging conditions on a daily basis, such as poverty, geographic isolation, marginalization, or conflict. Children who live in or have extended exposure to controlled environments, such as hospitals, residential care facilities, immigration or refugee centres, or detention facilities, should also have daily access to safe and stimulating play opportunities.

9. Children should have access to a choice of staffed play opportunities which prioritize children's play rights and needs

Staffed play opportunities, such as after-school play clubs, outdoor play camps and adventure playgrounds, where skilled adult facilitators put children's play needs at the centre of activities and decision-making, can enhance the range and quality of play experiences available to children.

10. Children have the right to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of play services & spaces, in meaningful and consistent ways

Children are experts on their own play interests and experiences, and their participation in planning, development and evaluation of the play opportunities in their communities, should be valued and respected. Meaningful, consistent and sustainable mechanisms for children's participation should be embedded in these processes. Children have the right to see tangible evidence of their contributions.