Considerations for Municipalities on maintaining or expanding open spaces

December, 2020

Alberta Health Services (AHS) –Healthy Communities By Design Collaborative encourages communities to maintain or expand open space initiatives over this winter to support physical, mental and social health while preventing transmission of COVID-19. Local community planning and design directly affect health and well-being. Communities can support the prevention and management of chronic health conditions by creating healthier places for people to live, work, learn and play.

Healthy community design can create stronger social connections that support positive mental health; prevent injuries, chronic diseases and cancer; and make communities safer and more resilient. Prioritizing neighbourhood design, transportation networks, natural environments, food systems, and housing can help make communities and residents healthier especially during this pandemic. Here are a few key takeaways and references that may assist municipalities and community agencies in creating and maintaining outdoor open spaces over the winter.

Key Takeaways

- Access to outdoor recreation spaces can vary widely, and can result in health inequities between different subpopulations. Equitable access to outdoor open spaces is an important consideration for physical activity and population health.

- Increasing open space available helps to encourage dispersion and non-collective activities for individuals or cohort groups.

- Streets support more than just movement. Streets are needed to access food and essential services. Streets where one can walk safely to such services are needed for those who are unable to drive there.

- Streets are places for essential outdoor respite, especially for people without yards or balconies. They create space for exercise and play, as well as socialization, while complying with physical distancing guidelines.

- Emerging street design and transportation practices are essential to preventing future outbreaks, and a part of a total public health response.

- Shifting how space is used and shared, and which uses are prioritized is a tool to mitigate COVID-19's health, economic and social impacts.

- Street design and recovery strategies can be used to address existing inequalities.

- Not all strategies will work for all communities, in all seasons. Communities should consider the local context and trajectory of the pandemic for response and implementation strategies.

References

Winter City Design Guidelines: Written by and for the City of Edmonton, the design guidelines include strategies other communities can also adopt to make public spaces more accessible, safe, and enjoyable, year round.

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[Risk mitigation tool for outdoor recreation spaces and activities operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](): Tool to assist in considering risks associated with outdoor spaces during the pandemic, including strategies to reduce potential risks.

[Streets for Pandemic Response & Recovery](): Compilation of emerging practices and strategies from around the world, including implementation resources on streets and transportation.

[Active Cities: A Guide for City Leaders](). Provides municipal leaders with the evidence on the multiple co-benefits that can be achieved from making cities more active, as well as guidance on processes to assist such efforts, and lessons from case studies from around the world.

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