

City of Toronto Curling Strategy **Taking Stock: Phase 1 Findings**

August 2020



The Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (2019 – 2038) is a 20-year plan approved by Council in 2017 for new and enhanced recreation facilities to meet the needs of our changing city.

The Plan measured service levels by calculating the provision of recreation assets on a per capita basis.

Analysis found that **the per capita supply of City-owned curling sheets in Toronto is in line with or exceeds the benchmark for large GTA and Canadian cities**, and this supply is augmented by privately owned facilities.

Based on this analysis, no new curling facilities were recommended.

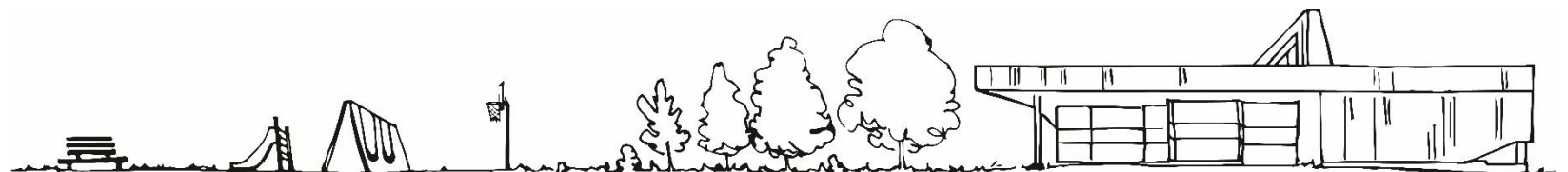
Council Direction

Since the Facilities Master Plan was approved, closures of three privately owned curling facilities, including two in Toronto's west end, have altered the context of curling in the city.

In October 2019, as part of approval of the Facilities Master Plan Implementation Strategy, City Council directed staff to assess trends and participation in curling.

City Council directed staff to:

"Monitor and assess trends and participation in curling including considering the capacity of existing private and public curling facilities, opportunities to make interest in curling broader and more inclusive and to consult with relevant stakeholders on potential opportunities and report back in the fourth quarter of 2020."



Project Timeline and Phases of Work

Phase 1:

Taking Stock

Assess supply of and demand for curling ice in Toronto.

Identify gaps and opportunities.

Q1_Q2 2020

Phase 2:

Identifying Opportunities

Review existing City ice facilities, provision models for curling ice, and sport development opportunities.

Develop cost estimates and funding options.

Q2_Q3 2020

Reporting out

Final recommendations relating to facilities, financial models and programming.

**Staff Report to Council
Q4 TBC**

Information to inform Phase 1 analysis was gathered in several ways:

- We conducted **interviews with representatives from Toronto curling facilities** based on a standard questionnaire about facility use and condition, ice utilization and sport development.
- We undertook **additional interviews** with representatives from recently-closed curling facilities, facilities outside Toronto, high school curling coaches, and programming and facility experts.
- We **analyzed data from sources including Toronto curling facilities, CurlON and Curling Canada** to explore questions such as how many people curl and how curling facilities are used and accessed.
- We **reviewed comments provided by Torontonians** through the dedicated [project website](#).
- We **tested our findings with a Stakeholder Reference Group** including Curling Canada, CurlON, the Toronto Curling Association, the West End Curling Committee and experts in sport development, accessibility and inclusion.



Context for Curling

Curling in Toronto by the Numbers

8/51

curling
facilities/sheets in
Toronto

6,000

estimated members
in curling clubs and
leagues

7 to 100

age range of
participants

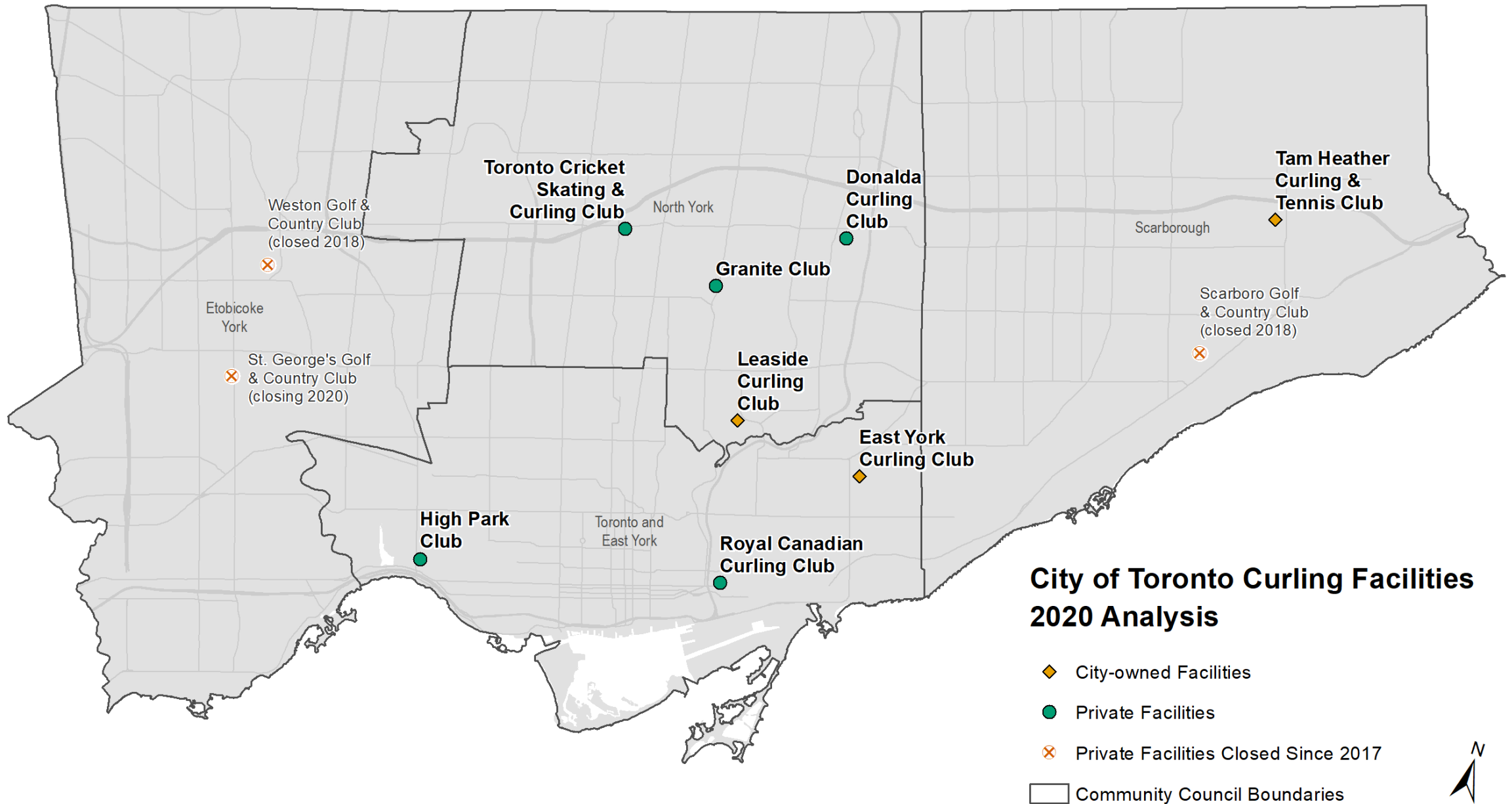
128

high school
curling teams

\$25

typical cost to try
curling one time

Curling Facilities in Toronto



Types of Toronto Curling Facilities

Curling-Focused (33 sheets)

- 8 Tam Heather Curling & Tennis Club**
(City-owned, run by community group)
- 8 Leaside Curling Club**
(City-owned, run by community group)
- 6 East York Curling Club**
(City-owned, run by City staff + community group)
- 6 Royal Canadian Curling Club**
- 5 High Park Club**

Operating model focuses on maximizing ice use (main revenue stream). All facilities operate at/over capacity.

Ice is primarily used by members and seasonal or occasional rentals. Typical member cost is \$400-\$600 to curl one night per week, less for youth and seniors/daytime leagues. Some community use, e.g. school curling.

Full-Service Athletic Clubs (18 sheets)

- 8 Granite Club**
- 6 Toronto Cricket, Skating & Curling Club**
- 4 Donalda Club**

Operating model focuses on availability of ice for member use. Ice is not generally available to the public.

Significant initiation fees and/or waiting lists are typical. Some community ice use (e.g. school curling) when not in use by members.

Recently Closed Facilities

The three recently-closed curling facilities in Toronto operated within Golf and Country Clubs.

- **St George's Golf & Country Club** (6 sheets) closed in spring 2020.
- **Weston Golf & Country Club** (6 sheets) and **Scarboro Golf & Country Club** (6 sheets) closed in 2018.

Although the specific circumstances differ, each closure related to a decision to prioritize golf-related activities.

The principle reason behind the closures was not lack of demand or potential revenue related to curling.

Golf & Country Club Model for Curling Facilities

- Popular model across Canada
- Year-round facilities shared by golfers, curlers and social members, often with limited overlap
- Golfers typically pay higher fees and have a greater role in governance
- Cost of curling is typically higher than at a curling-focused facility
- In addition to use by members, ice may be available for rental by outside groups, schools, etc.

How do people participate in curling in Toronto?

As members of curling clubs that operate at curling facilities.

Roughly 4200 people are members at Toronto curling clubs.

As part of leagues or groups that rent ice from curling facilities.

Roughly 1800 people are members of seasonal leagues (20+ weeks). Participation fees range from \$300-\$400.

Others curl through organized for-profit sports organizations at a cost of roughly \$25/person for 2 hours. Individuals or teams can sign up for fall or winter sessions (roughly 10 weeks).

At school.

Toronto has roughly 128 high school curling teams plus elementary school, college and university programs. Most curling facilities offer ice to school and university/college teams for practice and competition at low or no cost.

Through sport development programs.

Many Toronto curling facilities offer Try Curling events, Learn to Curl courses and other programs for new curlers. Costs are often subsidized and in some cases participants can apply fees to the cost of becoming a club member.

Through family, social and corporate events (one-time or occasional participation).

It costs roughly \$200 (\$25/person) to rent a sheet of ice for 2 hours with an instructor.

What are Torontonians saying about curling?

"Curling is a core Canadian sport, healthy for all ages, and a good winter activity"

"As a senior curler for only 3 years, I find it healthy, competitive and fun for those long winter months"

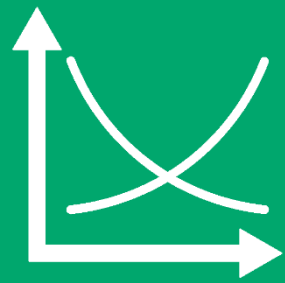
"Participants can be almost any age, costs are minimal and it is very social"

"We have produced many elite Olympic athletes from our Toronto clubs"

"I'm perplexed that finding a place to participate in this Canadian sport would be so difficult"

"Our students took Toronto pins to give away at the OFSAA high school curling championship in Fort Frances. The kids felt great about representing Toronto. Sometimes curling is not considered as big a thing in Toronto as in other places, but we are here to represent the city and show how friendly Torontonians can be."

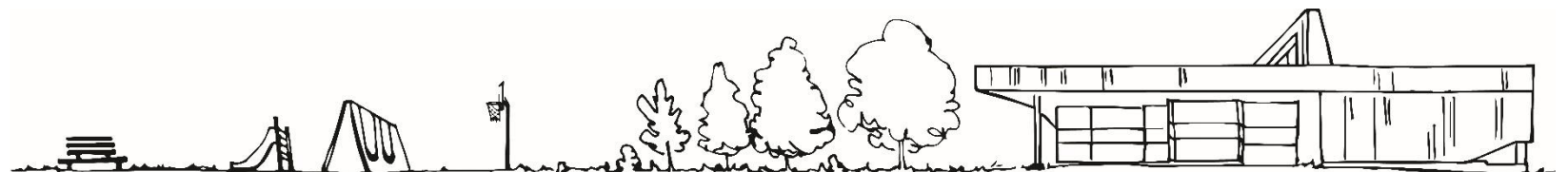
"My son's high school will no longer be able to have a curling program because there is no available ice"



Supply of Curling Ice

Toronto has 51 sheets of curling ice in eight facilities. **The supply of curling ice differs across the city.**

- With the closure of curling facilities at St George's in 2020 and Weston in 2018, **there is no curling ice available in Etobicoke York.**
- North York's supply is the highest in the city with 26 sheets, however 18 sheets are within full-service athletic clubs and are not generally accessible to the public.
- Overall, Toronto and East York has the highest supply of publicly accessible curling ice, with 17 sheets available in curling-focused facilities including one city-owned facility.
- The closure of curling operations at Scarboro Golf & Country Club in 2018 reduced Scarborough's supply of curling ice to 8 sheets.



Per Capita Supply of Curling Ice

With the recent closure of 3 privately owned curling facilities, 2 in the west end, the amount of curling ice per person has decreased since 2017. The supply of City-owned curling ice remains unchanged.

	Facilities Master Plan Provision Analysis (2016/17)				Updated Provision Analysis (2020)				Notes on Variance (2017 to 2020)
	City-owned	Privately owned	Total	Per Capita Provision*	City-owned	Privately owned	Total	Per Capita Provision*	
Etobicoke York	0	12	12	55,820	0	0	0	0	Closure of Weston (2018) & St George's (2020)
North York	8	18	26	27,309	8	18	26	27,309	No change
Scarborough	8	6	14	46,601	8	0	8	81,552	Closure of Scarboro (2018)
Toronto and East York	6	11	17	49,194	6	11	17	49,194	No change
Total	22	47	69	41,574	22	29	51	56,247	

*Per capita provision expresses population per sheet of curling ice. Rates were calculated using estimated population data (2.87M) from the approved Facilities Master Plan.

How Much is Curling Ice Used in Toronto?

How is ice utilization calculated?

A typical measure of ice utilization is **members per sheet**. The benchmark for good ice utilization is 100 to 125 members per sheet. This does not account for use by non-members which is significant at some facilities.

To account for non-member use, City staff estimated **weekly ice bookings per sheet** base on information from curling facilities. This includes member use and seasonal/occasional rentals.

Full-Service Athletic Clubs

- Fewer than 65 members per sheet
- Operating model focuses on availability of ice for members rather than high utilization
- Includes:
 - Granite Club
 - Toronto Cricket, Skating & Curling Club
 - Donalda Club

Curling-Focused Facilities

Operating At Capacity

- Between 65 and 125 members per sheet
- More than 23 bookings per sheet per week
- Waiting lists for most leagues
- Includes:
 - Royal Canadian Curling Club
 - Tam Heather Curling & Tennis Club
 - East York Curling Club

Operating Over Capacity

- More than 125 members per sheet
- More than 27 bookings per sheet per week
- All leagues are full
- Includes:
 - Leaside Curling Club
 - High Park Club

Accessibility of Curling Ice



Toronto curling facilities support participants with a wide range of physical abilities:

- Most facilities have either full or partial accessibility for wheelchair curlers through a combination of elevator, ramp and lift installations. Toronto facilities also host competitive wheelchair curling teams and competitions.
- Equipment such as sticks, stabilizers to improve balance, and lighter rocks for children is available to adapt curling for a broader range of participants.



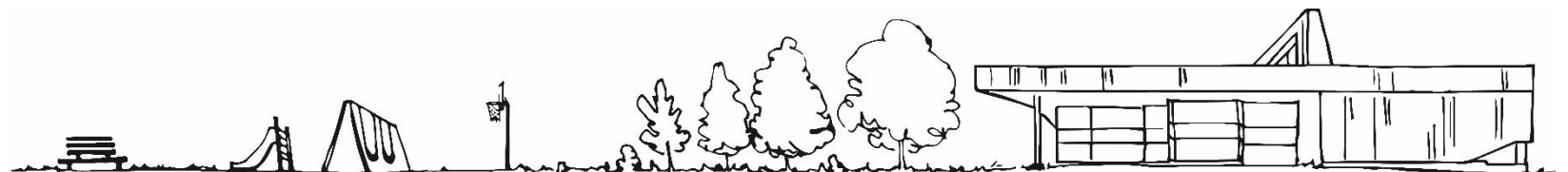
Transit accessibility has been identified as an important factor for participation for many, including blind curlers, Special Olympics athletes, youth, and individuals with lower income.

- No curling facilities are within a 5-min walk of a TTC subway stop,
- 5 curling facilities are located within a 5-min walking distance of a key TTC streetcar or bus route (High Park Club, Tam Heather Curling & Tennis Club, Royal Canadian Curling Club, Donalda Club, Toronto Cricket Skating & Curling Club).



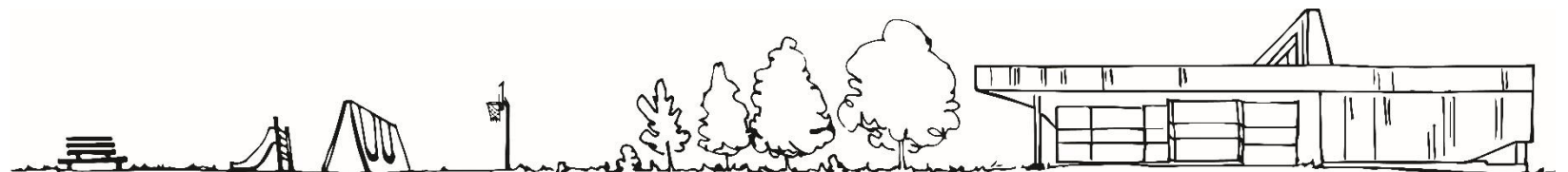
Anecdotal evidence suggests that most participants drive to curling facilities.

- Based on a subset of curling facilities, most members (63%) live within a 15-min drive of the facility.



A number of privately owned curling facilities located outside the city serve Toronto residents.

- Almost 40 per cent of the roughly 700 members at **Dixie Curling Club** (Mississauga) are Toronto residents. Up to 100 of these members came from Weston when it closed in 2018. Dixie is operating close to full capacity.
- Significant numbers of Toronto curlers use facilities located just north of the City: **Bayview Golf & Country Club** (Steeles Ave E and Leslie St) and **The Thornhill Club** (Yonge St and Centre St).
- In the past, Scarborough was served by the Annandale Golf & Curling Club in Ajax, which closed curling operations in spring 2020.



Longevity of Curling Facilities

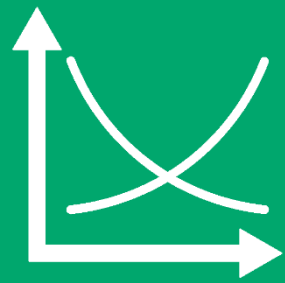
Curling operations in Toronto are generally healthy.

The financial state of curling facilities was described by facility representatives as "fair" to "good", and "the same" or "better than" five years ago. Membership and revenue are stable or growing.

Broadly speaking, facilities are aging.

Across Ontario and Canada many facilities have experienced catastrophic equipment failure that has temporarily or permanently shut down curling operations. Repairs to ice plants can cost \$250,000 or more. In some cases, the age and condition of curling facilities makes it difficult to access financing.

The risks associated with potential equipment failure vary depending on the facility and its operating model.



Curling Participation and Demand

National Curling Trends

The Facilities Master Plan found that overall **the demand for curling is stable** following significant declines in recent years.

Over the past 5 years there was a **31% increase in participation Canada-wide** including increases at all levels of participation.

The top age groups for curling are 35-49 (24%) and 50-64 (24%).

The Facilities Master Plan found that **87% of curlers identify their ethnicity as white**. Curling Canada reports that 79% were born in Canada and 72% speak English most often at home.

Roughly 57% of curlers are male, down from 64% in 2015.

Curlers have **slightly above average income and education**.

5-year trends in Curling Participation (Canada-wide)

	2015	2019	Percent Change
Light Participation (1 or 2 times per year)	928,000	1,109,000	↑ 20%
Medium Participation (3 to 9 times per year)	226,000	324,000	↑ 43%
Heavy Participation (10 or more times per year)	358,000	553,000	↑ 54%
Total	1,512,000	1,986,000	↑ 31%

Based on data from Curling Canada, "Profile of the Canadian Curler", 2015 and 2019. Prepared by Luke R. Potwarka, Ph.D. Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies, and Austin W. Wilson, Ph.D, Department of Kinesiology, University of Waterloo.

Toronto Curling Trends

- An estimated **37,000 Torontonians curled at least once last year** based on Curling Canada's general participation rates for large urban centres across Canada.
- Membership at curling facilities is stable or growing. For example, **membership across Toronto's three City-owned facilities has grown roughly 12% over five years.**
- The **ratio of male to female curlers ranges from 60-40 to 50-50.** This is slightly more equal than the national result (roughly 57% male).
- Programs for **Little Rocks (under 12) and Juniors are growing** and participation is often capped based on available ice time and volunteers.
- The **most popular and fastest-growing curling leagues are mixed or open leagues** (combination of male and female curlers).
- Many respondents noted the **important social role of curling**, especially for seniors and others who may be isolated during winter months.

Participation by Equity-Seeking Groups

The City of Toronto defines equity-seeking groups as:

- Aboriginal Peoples
- Women
- Racialized Group(s)
- LGBTQ2S Communities
- Persons with Disabilities
- Youth
- Immigrants & Refugees
- Persons with Low Income
- Undocumented Individuals
- Other vulnerable groups

There are many examples of curling programs for members of equity-seeking groups in Toronto, and there is demand for more:

- The Toronto Blind Curling Club has over 25 members, including low vision, blind and blind-deaf players plus coaches and volunteers, and wishes to expand.
- The Riverdale and Rotators Leagues are the largest and oldest LGBTQ2S curling leagues in Canada with over 400 members.
- Recent growth in “stick curling”, an adaptation to avoid bending, has broadened participation by seniors and those with physical limitations.
- Several Toronto curling facilities have wheelchair participants.
- Over 165 children aged 7-12 participated in Little Rocks curling programs. The Toronto Curling Association Juniors Interclub program has over 30 teams.
- Approximately 500 students from over 40 schools participate in high school curling through Toronto’s Public, Catholic, and Independent school leagues.
- A Special Olympics curling program with 35 participants ended due to lack of ice. Demand is growing and it is estimated that Toronto could support two Special Olympics programs.

Participation by Equity-Seeking Groups

Consistent with national data, Toronto curling facilities report that the ethnicity of most members is white.

Outside member-based curling clubs and leagues in Toronto, for example among high school curlers and Try Curling programs, there is evidence of more diverse participation.

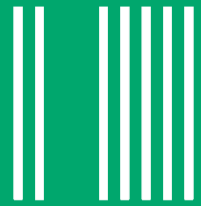
Increasing participation by racialized groups is an area of focus for national and provincial curling organizations.

Demand Arising from Recent Facility Closures

A conservative estimate of the demand arising from the recent closure of curling facilities in Toronto is 625 curlers (550 in the west end).*

The recent closure of two curling facilities in Etobicoke York caused a number of programming gaps:

- **Six high school curling programs (approximately 100 students)** have lost access to curling ice. St George's was a major centre for high school curling, providing free ice and low-cost instruction to students and also frequently hosting tournaments for schools in Etobicoke York and across the city.
- The **University of Toronto program** lost practice ice due to the closure of St George's.
- **A Special Olympics curling program** serving 35 participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their helpers ended due to the closure of Weston. Roughly 20 of these athlete are no longer curling.



Gap Analysis

Gap Analysis 1

1

The recent closure of 3 privately owned curling facilities decreased Toronto's supply of curling ice and created a geographic gap in provision in Etobicoke York.

- Two of the three privately owned curling facilities that recently closed in Toronto were in the west end.
- The estimated demand arising from these closures is 625 curlers in Toronto, 550 of which are in Etobicoke York.
- There is no curling ice in Etobicoke York. The closest facilities are High Park Club and Dixie Curling Club (Mississauga), both of which are operating at or over capacity with little ability to serve this demand.
- Publicly accessible curling facilities across Toronto are operating at or near capacity. Curling ice in full-member athletic clubs is less busy but is not generally available to the public.
- The supply of City-owned curling ice has not changed and remains consistent with benchmarks from other jurisdictions.

2

Curling serves a wide range of ages and abilities. There is additional demand for specialized, adapted and subsidized programming.

- Curlers in Toronto range in age from 7 to over 100.
- Specialized and adapted programming offered in Toronto includes children's and youth curling, a curling league, LGBTQ2S curling leagues, and stick and wheelchair curling. There is additional demand for these programs but availability is limited by ice access.
- Some programs for equity-seeking groups, for example several high school and university programs and a Special Olympics program, have ended or are at risk of ending due to recent facility closures.
- Transit accessibility and wheelchair accessibility are important factors for participation.

3

The delivery model for curling in Toronto presents a barrier to broader participation.

- Toronto's curling ice is mostly used by members of clubs and leagues, making it harder to access by casual curlers or those new to the sport.
- There is opportunity for more diverse participation. Most members of curling facilities identify their ethnicity as white.
- All of Toronto's curling facilities offer programs for new curlers. These programs are popular and successful, but are limited by the high demand for ice. Participants often have trouble finding a place to curl following completion of programs.
- The high demand for curling ice means there is little need for curling facilities to invest in marketing and outreach, which may contribute to less awareness of the sport among residents, especially newcomers.
- When these barriers are removed, there is evidence of interest in curling among new curlers and a more diverse group of participants.

Summary of Phase 1 Findings

1. There is unmet demand for curling ice in Toronto, especially in the west end.

- Toronto's supply of City-owned curling ice has not changed and is in line with other jurisdictions.
- The recent closure of 3 privately owned curling facilities, 2 in the west end, decreased the overall supply of curling ice. Demand is stable or growing.
- There is no curling ice in Etobicoke York, demonstrated demand, and little or no capacity at nearby facilities to meet this demand.

2. Curling serves a wide range of ages and abilities.

- Curlers in Toronto range in age from 7 to over 100.
- Specialized programs include youth curling, a blind curling league, LGBTQ2S curling leagues and wheelchair and stick curling.
- Programming is limited by a available ice, especially transit and wheelchair accessible ice.
- Recent facility closures have caused some programs such as Special Olympics curling and high school teams to end.

3. The delivery model for curling in Toronto presents a barrier to broader participation.

- Most curling ice is used by members of clubs and established leagues.
- Many curling facilities offer programs for new curlers but these are limited by the high demand for ice.
- When these barriers are removed, there is evidence of interest among new participants and a more diverse group of participants.