



POLICY BRIEF 2022

The Adventure Gap:

Increasing Access to the Outdoors for Marginalized Communities

WY Emily Tsang

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the *xʷməθkʷəjəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵwx̱wú7mesh* (Squamish) & *səlilwətaɣ* (Tseil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

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About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL BIPOC Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the *həŋq 'əmin 'əŋ*-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tseil-Waututh peoples, and of the *sníchim*-speaking *Sḵwx̱wú7mesh* (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

Biography

WY Emily Tsang



WY 他们 (they/she) dreamed of climbing mountains and sailing across the oceans ever since she was a fun(ner)-sized human being. In the present day, they are an avid road cyclist, bouldering beginner, and occasional mountain biker. Being a settler on stolen Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh homelands and part of the East-Asian Diaspora, WY has always found herself navigating spaces of beauty, discomfort, adventure, and yearning. She is on a pursuit of a meaningful and respectful relationship with the beautiful, unceded land where she spends time experimenting recreationally as an uninvited guest.

She is a graduate of the Global Resource Systems program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Among their many hats, WY is a freelance filmmaker, photographer, podcast producer, and community builder. Her passion lies in all aspects of food—be it growing her own vegetables, attempting new recipes, or ensuring her community has access to fresh and culturally familiar produce. WY strongly believes in the power of sharing resources and building on existing community assets to support folks in reaching their fullest potential.

Executive Summary

When the pandemic began in 2020, people flocked to the mountains, beaches, and forests to seek adventures.

Tents, bikes, and stand-up paddleboards flew off the shelves and quickly became hard-to-find commodities. The BC Parks campsite reservation system crashed on the day it opened and over 35,000 bookings were made in just 5 hours. Day-use hiking passes for British Columbia's most popular provincial parks were introduced to control the number of visitors each day. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, regular physical activity can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, type-2 diabetes and it has immense benefits for mental well-being as well.

The outdoors is often painted as free and accessible. This is, unfortunately, not the case. This policy report highlights the barriers that people face, which impact diversity on the trails. While it is impossible to list all of the barriers that each individual faces within all of the different sports, the factors are typically social, financial, historical, and cultural. For example, more intense, equipment-centric sports such as mountain biking and skiing have high costs of entry due to the expensive gear, apparel, and lessons. Furthermore, it can be time-consuming to travel to the venue, which may not be accessible by public transportation and requires a personal vehicle.

While researching for this policy brief, it became obvious that there is a severe insufficiency of available data that tracks the demographics of the people who are partic-

ipating in outdoor recreation in Canada. The lack of data hinders the possibility for programs that aim to increase diversity and inclusion in the outdoors by reducing barriers and increasing access to people with disabilities and people who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, women, and LGBTQIA2S+.

This policy brief aims to lobby the BC Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport, the BC Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, as well as organizations and businesses in the outdoor industry, to consider implementing the following recommendations into policy:

1. **Implement an Outdoor Equity Grant Program** that partners with private businesses to provide funding for marginalized communities.
2. **Implement a Government-Backed Equipment Loan Assistance program** that offers payment plans for people wishing to purchase gear in installments.
3. **Provide specialty outdoor programming to Grades 1–12 at underserved schools.**



The outdoors is often painted as free and accessible. This is, unfortunately, not the case. This policy report highlights the barriers that people face, which impact diversity on the trails.

4. Advocate for BC Parks and outdoor industry to collect demographic-based data in Canada to better inform policies and design programs for marginalized communities.

In order for the outdoors to become truly accessible, it is imperative that First Nations communities play a key role in the decision-making process. Indigenous people have stewarded the lands since time immemorial, and the “public” land that is now used for recreational purposes was once used for ceremony, harvesting, hunting, and other activities. Ultimately, to exist on stolen ancestral lands is a privilege that should not be taken lightly.

In a world and time where everyone is encouraged to spend time outside, it is important to pay attention to who is on the trail, and who is not, and to reflect on the conditions that have led to this discrepancy.

AUTHOR POSITIONALITY

I am a temporarily abled cis Woman of Colour who has benefited from low-barrier and subsidized Outdoor Recreation programs. My privilege of access to a tertiary education, stable job opportunities, and a personal vehicle has allowed me to have the means, freedom, and time to partake in recreational activities. I do not speak to the experiences of all people from marginalized communities accessing outdoor recreation, especially those of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) communities.

As an uninvited guest on the stolen, ancestral homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səl ilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, I benefit directly from systems of oppression and settler colonialism.

I ask my readers to think about their relationship and connection to the lands that they reside and play on, and how they benefit from accessing these lands. Ultimately, to simply exist on stolen ancestral lands is a privilege that should not be taken lightly.

LIMITATIONS

The adventure gap is not just about access to the outdoors but also the gap in the available data. During the research phase, I learned that there is very limited public data about the people who are participating in outdoor recreation in BC and Canada.

The statistics that have been included in this policy report are outdated by nearly a decade and/or from American sources. It is likely that the data is still useful, as recreational spaces have not changed drastically in the past few years, but there is clearly a need for representative and accurate data to design better programs that more effectively meet the needs of the communities.

REFLECTIONS OF THE LAND

This policy report addresses the lower rates of outdoor recreation participation in marginalized communities. The natural spaces that are used for outdoor recreational purposes are often called “public” land governed by agencies in the colonial government, or owned by private businesses. It would be an extreme oversight in this discussion to omit Indigenous perspectives and to ignore the fact that the



In order for the outdoors to become truly accessible, it is imperative that First Nations communities play a key role in the decision-making process.



mentioned outdoor recreational activities take place on traditional, unceded, Indigenous territories.

In an attempt to erase traditional knowledge, culture, and language in order to force assimilation into Mainstream Canada, Indigenous Nations across Turtle Island were banned from practicing religious ceremonies and various cultural gatherings, as well as having restricted mobility off-reserve. First Nations people

continue to face systemic discrimination and other systems of oppression. So for settlers to use the land that has been traditionally used for ceremony, harvesting, and hunting since time immemorial for recreational purposes is an immense privilege.

In order for the outdoors to be truly accessible, it is imperative that First Nations Communities play a key role in the decision-making process in how land should be used.

E. C. Manning Provincial Park, British Columbia, Canada. Photo by Charly Caproff on UnSplash.



Indigenous people have stewarded the lands since time immemorial, and the “public” land that is now used for recreational purposes was once used for ceremony, harvesting, hunting, and other activities. Ultimately, to exist on stolen ancestral lands is a privilege that should not be taken lightly.

Background

When the pandemic began in 2020, people picked up new hobbies like baking sourdough bread, video games, and DIY projects. Travel restrictions cancelled people’s international plans so they flocked to the mountains, beaches, and forests to seek adventure.

On the day that BC Parks opened its reservation system for camping for the summer in May 2020, the website crashed because over 50,000 people attempted to book their campsites in the first few hours. 35,000 reservations were made in just over five hours.² The demand for outdoor equipment also saw an increase as people looked for things to do while there were COVID-19 restrictions in place. Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) saw a 10%–20% increase in its sales of tents, stand-up paddleboards, and bikes in 2020.³

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends adults between the ages of 18–64 years old to be active for at least 2.5 hours per week to achieve health benefits. Moderate to vigorous aerobic activities and exercises that target muscles and bones are also recommended multiple times a week. Regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and type-2 diabetes. Aside from the physical benefits, exercise also helps improve the overall sense of well-being by reducing the effects of stress, increasing

energy levels, and contributing to a more positive mindset.⁴

Although the many physical and mental benefits of physical activity and outdoor recreation are known and the outdoors are often painted as free and accessible, people from marginalized communities may not have the same level of access to the outdoors as their non-marginalized peers. While data specific to BC and Canada could not be found, data from the National Park Service (NPS) in the United States found that 95% of National Park visitors identified as white.⁵

RACE	VISITORS %
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2
Asian	2
Black or African American	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	<1
White	95

There are several factors that account for the lack of diversity in outdoor recreational spaces. In this report, there will be a focus on camping, hiking, mountain biking, skiing, and snowboarding but these barriers are not limited to these activities. While it is impossible to list all of the barriers that each individual faces within all of the different sports, the factors are typically social, financial, and cultural.

2. Alex Migdal, “B.C. Parks Reservation Site Crashes after 50,000 People Try to Book at Once | CBC News,” *CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, May 25, 2020)*, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-parks-website-reservations-1.5583232>.

3. Falice Chin, “Outdoor Gear Is Selling out as Canadians Stock up for Pandemic Staycations | CBC Radio,” *CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, August 30, 2020)*, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/costofliving/staycation-sales-outdoor-gear-1.5700644>.

4. Public Health Agency of Canada, “Physical Activity Tips for Adults (18-64 Years),” *Canada.ca (Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada, October 1, 2018)*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/physical-activity-tips-adults-18-64-years.html>

5. “Linking the 2010 Census to National Park Visitors,” *National Park Service, accessed August 2, 2022*, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/495294>

FINANCIAL FACTORS

The biggest barrier of entry is often cost. It is no surprise that outdoor recreation is expensive. In addition to equipment cost, there are fees associated with travel, lessons, memberships, apparel, gear, maintenance, and more.

This is the approximate cost breakdown of the first year of mountain biking:

ITEM	COST
Mountain Bike (Entry Level)	\$2500
Bike Rack for Car	\$800
Lessons (4 pack)	\$250
Bike Park Pass (10 day access)	\$610
Apparel (shoes, shorts, jersey)	\$400
Safety Equipment	\$320
Bike Service (annual)	\$150
Bike Tools	\$100
Total	\$5130

The largest investment in this sport is the actual mountain bike, and if someone chooses to rent their bike, it would be approximately \$100 per day. The costs of the rental can quickly add up if the rider wishes to ride often. The upfront cost of a mountain bike purchase could potentially be a barrier, while dividing it into smaller payments over time could be more manageable.

In a sport that is restricted by location like mountain biking, travelling to the trails is another barrier. Access to reliable equipment-friendly transportation is an essential part of the sport; this typically means having access to a vehicle with a bike rack to transport the bike. Not all trails are accessible by bus and some bikes may not fit the bus’s bike rack due to size or weight.

But financial barriers are more than just money. It is also about the luxury of time.

For example, BC Parks introduced a free-of-cost Day-Use Pass program for the most popular provincial parks in British Columbia in 2020. The day passes would become available at 6am for same-day park visits. For people who work irregular hours or require advanced planning because of caretaking responsibilities, these same-day passes may be a barrier because they may not be available to book the pass or afford to take time off under uncertain circumstances. Other accessibility barriers include not having access to the Internet or a computer to make a booking.⁶

Growing unaffordable costs of living means that many people have had to move away from a traditional work arrangement (i.e. 40 hour work week, 9am–5pm working hours). People who are working at jobs that pay a low-hourly wage may need to secure additional work

6. BC Parks has amended the Day-Use Pass program for 2022. Passes can now be booked 2 days in advance for 3 provincial parks.



The biggest barrier of entry is often cost. [...] But financial barriers are more than just money. It is also about the luxury of time.

on the weekend to make ends meet. This is a common experience for immigrant settlers who moved to Canada without accredited education experience to secure higher paying jobs, and they resort to working multiple jobs to support their family. Furthermore, people may have commitments such as caretaking responsibilities or other forms of unpaid labour that take up hours outside of their professional life. In these cases, even if they are accepted into subsidized programs, they may not be available to participate because it doesn't match with their schedule.

CULTURAL/ SOCIAL FACTORS

One of the key components and benefits of many activities is the social aspect. This is common in both team sports as well as individual activities. The social aspect is especially true in outdoor recreational activities that require fundamental skill building. Oftentimes, a person's introduction to a sport is through a friend or a romantic partner who is already involved in that community. This can reduce the barrier of entry because they may be able to try out the activity by borrowing someone's gear, or they may be able to access second-hand equipment at a reduced cost. Having someone to participate in the activity with may not only prolong a person's interest in the sport, but is a safety component as they become more comfortable and familiar with the activity. It could potentially be dangerous to mountain bike or snowboard alone if the activity is new to a person because the trail may not be often frequented in the case an injury happens. Furthermore, learning a new recreational activity can be an overwhelming experience because it can be difficult to figure out where to start.



BC Parks sign found on the Dock on Twin Islands. Photo by WY Tsang.

For example, when a person starts mountain biking, they need to learn about the trail grading system, which trails are beginner friendly, knowledge about mountain bikes in order to choose one of the appropriate size and type that suits their needs and basic mechanical skills to maintain the bike just to name a few. Having someone to not only ride with, but also to share their knowledge, can make a world of a difference to whether someone continues with an activity.



Learning a new recreational activity can be an overwhelming experience because it can be difficult to figure out where to start.



The largest investment in this sport is the actual mountain bike. Photo by Tom Conway on Unsplash.

In speaking with a representative from the Tri-cities Off Road Cycling Association (TORCA), they mentioned the challenges of addressing the gender imbalance in mountain biking because of a lack of community and social support:

“Attracting and retaining young female riders seems almost impossible. A lot of girls end up not finding riding partners in their friend group and therefore quit the sport. This is one of the reasons why we partnered with a local world cup racer, in running 'Girls Ride Club.' It helps them build confidence and find friends to ride with.”

—TRI-CITIES OFF ROAD CYCLING ASSOCIATION (TORCA)

Another social/cultural factor that influences outdoor recreational participation is whether a person grew up in an active household or community, or if they had opportunities during their childhood to develop a relationship with nature and physical activities. If the adults in the household already participate in outdoor recreation, they will most likely introduce the activity to, and invest in equipment for, their children. Multiple generations of knowledge can further enhance and strengthen a person's relationship with the outdoors.⁷

Early childhood experiences of engaging in the outdoors can strongly shape a person's view of self-confidence and enjoyment of nature well into adulthood.⁸ And they would likely be more open to exploring the natural world as well as outdoor recreation.

7. Ash Kelly, “The Adventure Gap: Why Minorities Are Less Likely to Pursue Outdoor Recreation | CBC News,” CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, June 30, 2018), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/the-adventure-gap-why-minorities-are-less-likely-to-pursue-outdoor-recreation-1.4726872>.

8. Reyna Askew and Magaret A. Walls, “Diversity in the Great Outdoors: Is Everyone Welcome in America's Parks and Public Lands?,” Resources for the Future, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.resources.org/common-resources/diversity-in-the-great-outdoors-is-everyone-welcome-in-americas-parks-and-public-lands/>.

Policy Recommendations

1 Implement a “Outdoor Equity Grant Program” that provides different forms of financial support to marginalized communities seeking Outdoor Recreation.

This program would include 4 branches that would extend to different underserved communities.

- Outdoor Equity Grant Program.** This grant, in partnership with private businesses, is designed to offset the high costs of outdoor recreation for marginalized communities, it would cover equipment costs, entrance fees, and travel costs.
- Government-Guaranteed Equipment Loan Assistance.** This loan assistance program would work with outdoor equipment retailers to set up interest-free payment plans for equipment purchases that are 90% guaranteed by the provincial government.
- Adaptive Recreational Equipment Grant.** This grant is designed to offset the high costs of adaptive recreational equipment for people with disabilities.
- Indigenous Recreation Grants.** This grant would provide financial support to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people to participate in outdoor recreational activities, to offset the costs of equipment, entrance fees and travel costs. This grant is in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, action numbers 89 and 90:⁹

“89. We call upon the federal government to amend the Physical Activity and Sport Act to support reconciliation by ensuring that policies to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being, reduce barriers to sports participation, increase the pursuit of excellence in sport, and build capacity in the Canadian sport system, are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples.

90. We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing:

- In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples.”*

9. “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action,” Truth and reconciliation commission of canada: Calls to action, accessed August 7, 2022, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

2 Implement Educational and Social Outdoor Recreation Programs.

- Provide specialty outdoor programming to Grades 1–12 at underserved schools.**
- The physical education curriculum would be redesigned to incorporate specialty outdoor programming** including, but not limited to:

- Hiking
- Camping
- Rock climbing
- Mountain biking
- Snowboarding
- Skiing
- Kayaking
- Paddleboarding
- Wilderness First Aid/ Safety Courses

The curriculum would include skill-building aspects like trail building and modules on relationship building with the land and Indigenous Nations.

- Build Community Adventure Centres for Outdoor Sports.** The objective of Community Adventure Centres is to create a place for people to access outdoor sports programming. This centre would provide low-cost lessons, coaching and equipment rental for sports such as skiing, snowboarding, kayaking, mountain biking, and other activities. There would be additional supportive programs for populations who have historically been excluded from outdoor recreation or face additional barriers in participation.
- Implement Mandatory Course on Respectful Use of the Land.** This course is intended for people interested in participating in outdoor activities before going outdoors. The curriculum will be created in collaboration with Indigenous communities and will provide opportunities for ongoing care of the land.

3 Advocate for BC Parks and outdoor industry to collect demographic-based data in Canada.

Demographic-based data will better inform policies and design stronger programs for marginalized communities. Continual collection of data will allow more effective evaluation of new and existing programs to observe demographic changes in various sports.

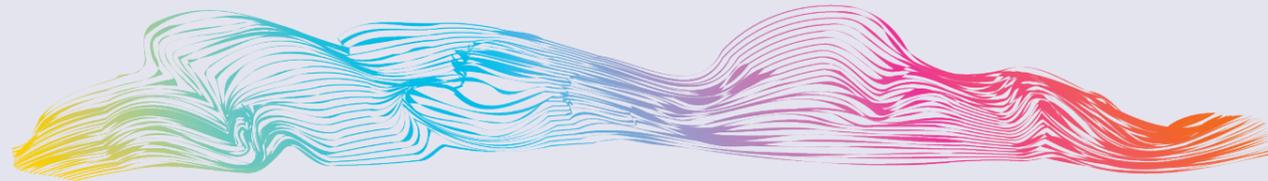
4 Improve public transportation options to trailheads.

The public transportation routes that have stops at trailheads also need to have amenities on the bus, such as bike and ski racks during the appropriate season.

5 Implement Guaranteed Minimum Income Program.

The Guaranteed Minimum Income Program would provide beyond-basic necessities for survival for the needs of an individual to thrive, such as recreation and self-care. This policy would ensure that people would be able to take care of their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Conclusion



In conclusion, the outdoors should be a safe place to exist and to play. In a country that is known for its natural beauty, and that offers some of the best outdoor recreation amenities in the world, it is important that it is not an exclusive luxury for certain communities, rather it should be accessible by all communities, as currently portrayed.

This is especially important as the world moves past the COVID-19 pandemic. The desire to be outside and to participate in outdoor recreation have skyrocketed while the disparity due to equipment shortages and rising costs have broadened. The only way to reduce the adventure gap is to reduce barriers of entry and provide opportunities to people from different backgrounds so they are able to participate in outdoor recreation.

The only way forward is to involve First Nations communities to be key decision-makers in how land is to be used, as they continue to steward the land.

In a country that is known for its natural beauty, and that offers some of the best outdoor recreation amenities in the world, it is important that it is not an exclusive luxury for certain communities, rather it should be accessible by all communities, as currently portrayed.

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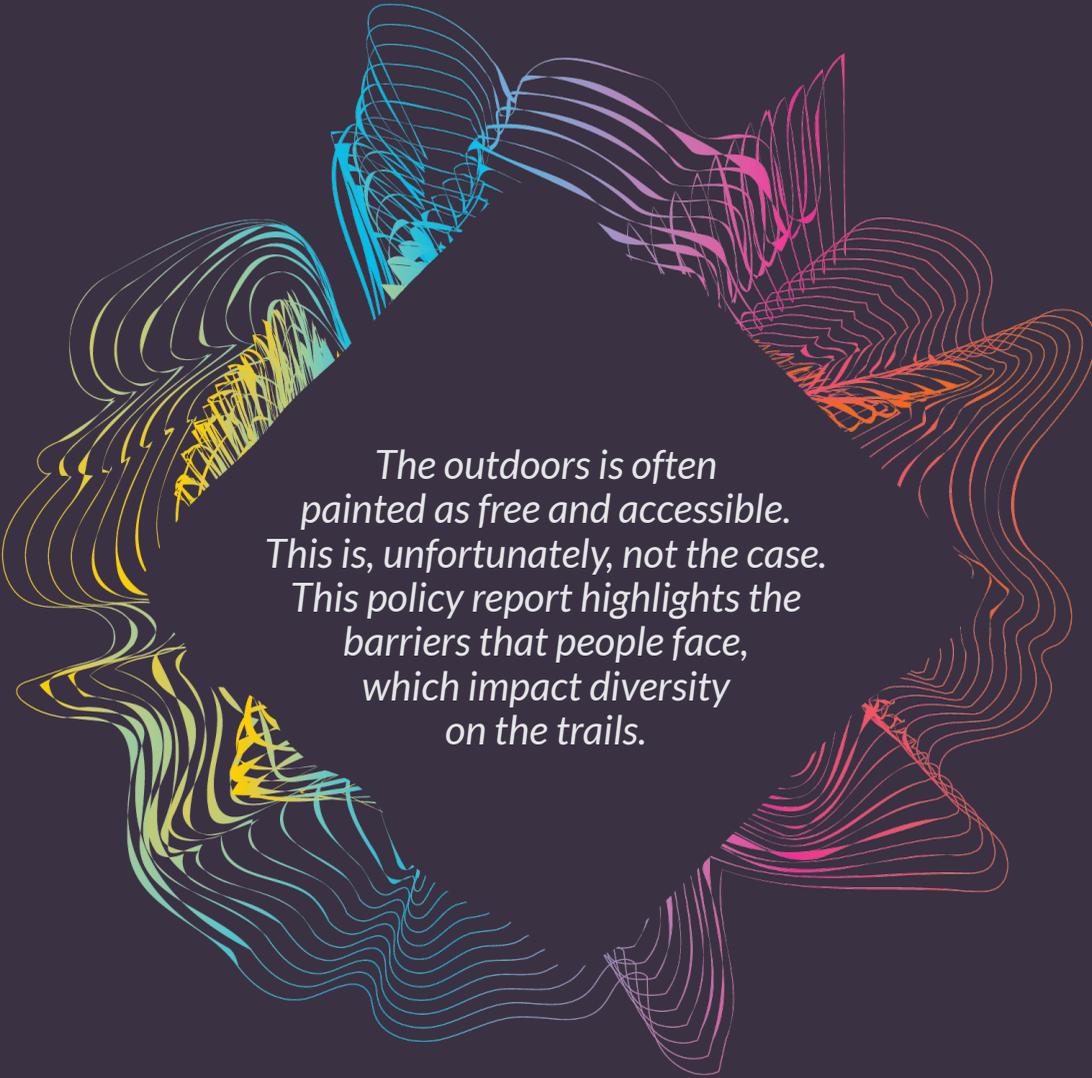
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This policy brief would truly not exist without the ancestral and occupied territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliilwətaʔ/ (Tseil-Waututh) peoples where I have had the privilege of working, learning, playing and most importantly, finding my voice and purpose in the world. I will forever be grateful to the Nations who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

The sincerest thank yous to Colour the Trails for the opportunities to play freely; to Essential Cycles for the constant support and always making sure our communities have bikes to ride, and to TORCA and NSMBA for ensuring the trails are safe to ride.

I am grateful for the 2022 Vancouver Foundation LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) and all of the incredible mentors and participants involved who created a safe space to learn together. Special shoutout to Amora and Paul for your guidance, support and patience throughout this process.

Lastly, big thank you to my family and my partner for making sure my bottles have water and always rooting for me at the finish line.



*The outdoors is often
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This policy report highlights the
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Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

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