

Recreation Therapy Month Highlights Critical Role of Therapeutic Recreation in Health Care and the Community



Across Canada, Recreation Therapists celebrate the talent and value our professionals and assistants bring in supporting Canadians and Albertans in their health care journey.

Therapeutic Recreation plays a vital role in health care and communities by providing opportunities for people to move beyond their illness and flourish.

Recreation therapists are allied health professionals working in various settings and across all ages; with youth and children to seniors in the community, rehabilitation and education settings, long term care, with those working through physical and mental health and addictions challenges. We use the therapeutic process involving leisure, recreation and play as treatment modalities to support purposeful and meaningful interventions based on individual strengths and values. These are critical tools to help Albertans achieve and sustain their highest level of independence, wellness and quality of life.

Research has shown that engaging in meaningful leisure is beneficial for holistic health, including intellectual, emotional, environmental, physical, spiritual, and social wellbeing. This is something I would suggest so many of us can better appreciate after living through a global pandemic - the importance of recreation to keep us healthy physically and mentally and overall, enhance life.

Recreation therapists are at work all over our province. In my role as a Recreation Therapist, I work with clients in a long-term care setting. I assist my clients to achieve a high quality of life in their residential care setting. This person-centred approach to care is based on who the person is and their interests and abilities to ensure successful outcomes.

I take pride in the value therapeutic recreation offers our clients. It has a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing in that it provides activities and interactions to look forward to. I do my best to improve the wellness of the individuals I serve by making the client experience fun and enjoyable, so they see the value and want to return.

The work I do is in long term care, where the therapeutic interventions I offer my clients include exercise, expressive arts, a virtual program for young adults, community outings, sensory stimulation visits, music, physical exercise, pet therapy, legacy work, and reminisce activities. Our recreation therapists help residents forget about the pain and struggles they are experiencing and provide an expressive outlet in a typically mundane clinical environment.

I see this in the cancer patient who reduces pain medication usage when participating in art class. A man with dementia who has had demonstrated reduction in depression as assessed on the geriatric depression scale following wheelchair biking introduced to his routine. The patients with Multiple Sclerosis who are physically limited but enjoy a weekly Stay Sharp program that challenges their math, language and decision-making capacity.



Since 1985, the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) has represented recreation therapists across the province. ATRA is a member-driven association representing over 700 professionals. ATRA supports our members through professional development opportunities and consistent therapeutic recreation across the province.

As therapeutic recreation grows as a critical component of health care in the province, ATRA continues to drive professional development and is looking to advance recreation therapy by seeking improved oversight through regulation. Government regulation of recreation therapy is in the best interest of public safety as it will enhance public protection, improve consistency, accountability, public safety, and trust in caring for vulnerable Albertans.

To learn more about the important work of the profession, please visit our website Alberta-tr.ca where you can learn about the work of recreation therapists and ATRA.

Kerry Appleton, President
Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association