

**Policy Brief:** Expanding the Canada Strong Pass to Include Social Prescriptions

**Prepared for:** Canadian Policymakers & Government Stakeholders

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**Submitted by:** Solidarity In Numbers Cooperative

**Stakeholders:** [The Co-operators Group](#), [Gigpass](#), [Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing \(CISP\)](#), [Centre for Social Innovation](#), [OnTaskBehaviour](#)

## **Executive Summary**

The Canada Strong Pass, currently offering discounts on parks, museums, and rail travel, presents a unique opportunity to evolve into a national well-being initiative by integrating social prescriptions. This expansion would:

- ☐ Improve public health by connecting Canadians to community-based activities that combat loneliness, promote physical activity, and enhance mental well-being.
- ☐ Strengthen domestic tourism and local economies by increasing participation in cultural, recreational, and social events.
- ☐ Reduce long-term healthcare costs by addressing non-medical determinants of health through preventative, community-driven solutions.

We propose a two-year pilot program, leveraging existing partnerships with healthcare providers, insurers, and social enterprises, to test and scale this model.

## **Background & Rationale**

### **The Need for Social Prescribing in Canada**

- ☐ **Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention:** Investing more in public health now—such as preventive and social care programs—can reduce future spending on curative care (hospitals, doctors, and drugs) while improving population health. These initiatives are cost-effective long-term investments because they tackle the root causes of health disparities ([Increasing Canada's health budget for preventive and social care makes sense fiscally and medically | Queen's Gazette](#)).
- ☐ **Non-Medical Health Drivers:** Up to 80% of health outcomes are influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors (WHO).
- ☐ **Social ROI:** For every £1 invested in social prescribing, there is a social and economic return ranging from £2.14 to £8.56 ([New report shows impact of social prescribing on health service use and costs - latest news from NASP](#)).
- ☐ **Success Abroad:** The UK's National Health Service (NHS) has saved £6 for every £1 invested in social prescribing by reducing hospital visits (NHS England, 2022).

### **Why the Canada Strong Pass?**

**The pass already provides:**

1. Free/discounted access to national parks, museums, and rail travel—key assets for social

prescribing.

2. A ready-made digital/physical infrastructure for nationwide rollout.
3. Cross-sector appeal, aligning with tourism, health, and economic development goals.

## **Proposed Expansion: Key Features**

### **A. Integrate Social Prescriptions into the Pass**

- Allow healthcare providers to "prescribe" free/discounted access to:
  - ☐ **Cultural events and programs** (guided tours of museums and galleries, therapeutic arts programs, cultural forging and nutrition classes)
  - ☐ **Nature-based programs** (guided hikes, camping, conservation volunteering)
  - ☐ **Community events** (skill-sharing and training workshops, social clubs, language exchange)
- Partner with Gigpass (subscription-based event access) to test scalable models.

### **B. Targeted Benefits for Vulnerable Groups**

Group	Benefits
Youth (17 & under)	Free museum entry, rail travel with adults
Early Career (18-30)	25% off cultural events, 15% off rail passes
Mid Career (30-65)	Access to digital nomad and settlement programs
Seniors & Isolated Individuals	Priority access to social assistance and personalized wellbeing programs
Low-Income Families	Subsidized memberships for local activities

### **C. Measure Impact Across 7 Health Dimensions**

Working with CISP and UHN, we will train and organize partner organizations to track outcomes in:

- ☐ **Social** (reduced isolation)
- ☐ **Physical** (increased activity)
- ☐ **Emotional** (improved mood)
- ☐ **Career/Occupational** (skill-building)
- ☐ **Intellectual** (cognitive engagement)
- ☐ **Environmental** (nature exposure)
- ☐ **Spiritual** (sense of purpose)

## **Expected Benefits**

### **1. For Public Health:**

- Reduced reliance on medical interventions for preventable conditions.
- Lower rates of depression and anxiety through structured social engagement.

### **2. For the Economy:**

- Increased domestic tourism and local business revenue.
- Job creation in community health and recreation sectors.

### **3. For Government:**

- A low-cost, high-impact preventative health strategy.
- Alignment with Canada's Healthy Communities Initiative and Mental Health Strategy.

## **Implementation Plan**

### **Phase 1: Pilot (2025-2026)**

- ☐ Partner with 5-10 communities to test social prescription integration.
- ☐ Use Gigpass's digital platform for tracking participation.
- ☐ Collect data via CISP and UHN to refine the model.

### **Phase 2: National Expansion (2026+)**

- ☐ Expand to all provinces, integrating with healthcare referral systems.
- ☐ Secure long-term funding through public-private partnerships.

## **Call to Action**

### **We urge the Canadian government to:**

1. Form an interdepartmental task force (Health, Heritage, Tourism, ESDC) to oversee expansion.
2. Allocate \$5M in pilot funding to test social prescribing via the Canada Strong Pass.
3. Establish partnerships with insurers (e.g., Desjardins, The Co-operators) to co-fund wellness incentives.

## **Conclusion**

By transforming the Canada Strong Pass into a well-being access tool, Canada can lead in innovative, community-driven healthcare. This initiative aligns with federal priorities in mental health, economic recovery, and social cohesion—ensuring a stronger, healthier future for all Canadians.

## **Next Steps**

- ☐ Roundtable discussion with stakeholders.
- ☐ Formal proposal submission to Heritage Canada & Health Canada.
- ☐ Case studies (UK social prescribing, Gigpass pilot data).
- ☐ Letters of support from CISP, UHN, and The Co-operators.

## **References**

- [Canada Strong Pass expanding to include more museums and galleries | Globalnews.ca](#)
- [Scientists know exercise helps fight depression. Now, new programs aim to put that knowledge to use - The Globe and Mail](#)
- [RxFood Co. and GreenShield partner to improve health outcomes for Canadians through personalized, AI-powered nutrition support](#)
- [Doctors are prescribing nature – but we don't know how it works - The Globe and Mail](#)

## Contact

Chloe Brown

[brwc0299@gmail.com](mailto:brwc0299@gmail.com)

647-703-6237