



***HEALTHY, PROSPEROUS, UNITED:  
AN ACTIVE CANADA IS A BETTER CANADA.***

## **National Policy Considerations**

June 22, 2015

## INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPACTION

While the physical inactivity issue is well documented, we cannot lose sight of the progress we have made towards a healthier, more active country. Parents are getting the message that unstructured play is an effective way for their children to get active, people are starting to understand that sitting is bad for your health and that physical activity needs to be a priority—and not just a pastime.

The number of Canadian adults who are moderately active during leisure time has increased from 50.4 per cent in 2007 to 55.2 per cent in 2013.<sup>i</sup> And, notwithstanding their low overall physical activity levels, the number of youth who participate in sport has risen from 61 per cent in 2005 to 71 per cent in 2011 and in children 5-12, from 76 per cent in 2005 to 77 per cent in 2011.<sup>ii</sup>

Although our population is moving in the right direction, we are not there yet. And the need to enable Canadians to become more physically active is even greater now, given our aging population, our sedentary work lives and the intense lure of screen-based technologies for our children. The most important part of health care is prevention, including ensuring that Canadians stay fit and healthy. We cannot wait to increase our focus on prevention, or the physical inactivity issue of today will result in the critical health-care issue of tomorrow.

As Canadian voters get ready to go to the polls on October 19, 2015, they will have high expectations about plans to preserve and promote both our health-care system and our economy. As policy planners and thinkers develop ideas, ParticipACTION offers an informed perspective on how to enhance public health promotion within today's public policy environment to ensure a Canada that is *healthy, prosperous and united* through physical activity.

## HEALTH – PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN LIVES SAVED

Canadians of all ages are not moving their bodies enough to get the benefits of regular physical activity, which include reduced risk of diseases like type 2 diabetes and some cancers, better scores in reading and math, better fitness, more fun, healthy body weight, self-confidence, new skills and better mental health.<sup>iii</sup>

Only nine per cent of children and youth get the recommended 60 minutes of heart-pumping activity they need every day, and only 15% of adults get the recommended 150 minutes per week.<sup>iv</sup> When asked about the number one thing Canadians could do to improve their health, 80% say they should be more physically active.<sup>v</sup>

Plus, emerging research shows that sitting too much is bad for you, even if you're active enough the rest of the time. At ages 3-4 our kids spend half their waking hours sedentary; for 5-11-year-olds it's 57 per cent of the time, and for 12-17-year-olds it's 68 per cent. Perhaps this shouldn't come as much of a surprise, because parents are their children's most important lifestyle role models, and Canadian adults are sedentary for 9.5 hours a day.<sup>vi</sup>

Recent research from the Conference Board of Canada's *Moving Ahead* series shows that even a modest increase in Canadians' movement starting in 2015 would reduce the incidence of debilitating chronic diseases over the next 25 years, resulting in 222,000 fewer hypertension cases, 120,000 fewer diabetes cases, 170,000 fewer heart disease cases and 31,000 fewer cancer cases. Plus, premature mortality would be reduced by 2.4 per cent by 2020, representing more than 6,600 lives saved.<sup>vii</sup>

Even small increases in physical activity can produce measurable health benefits. It's never too early or too late to start, because a ***healthy Canada is a better Canada.***

## PROSPERITY – PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN DOLLARS SAVED

In addition to lives saved, the Conference Board of Canada's *Moving Ahead* series also indicates that if we got just 10 per cent of Canadian adults to sit less and move more starting in 2015, we would reduce Canada's health-care costs by \$2.6 billion and inject \$7.5 billion into the Canadian economy by the year 2040.<sup>viii</sup> Through reduced mortality and absenteeism in the workforce, modest, achievable changes in movement behaviours can produce substantial and significant productivity gains for the entire country.

The direct and indirect costs associated with physical inactivity already cost the Canadian taxpayer 3.7 per cent of health-care costs.<sup>ix</sup> Globally speaking, high-income countries like Canada are actually less active. According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of inactivity in high-income countries (33%) is actually double that in low-income countries (17%), which is partly due to insufficient participation in physical activity during leisure time and an increase in sedentary behaviour during occupational and domestic activities. Likewise, an increase in the use of "passive" modes of transport has also been associated with declining physical activity levels.<sup>x</sup>

Some may say that, rather than being a developed country, we are in danger of being considered "overdeveloped." Canada is among leading countries in our relatively sophisticated physical activity policies, facilities and programs, but this is not translating into enough physical activity each day. As a society, we have engineered opportunities for spontaneous movement, such as playing outdoors or getting places on foot, out of our daily lifestyles. We have to focus on enabling Canadians to sit less and move more in their daily lives.

Canada must invest in prevention to save money on health-care costs in the longer term. In 2012, Canada's total health-care expenditure amounted to 10.93 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>xi</sup> Strategic investments in physical activity support Canadian families by helping them to sustain a higher quality of life, and support our economy by helping our country to sustain a more affordable, high-quality health-care system. Every dollar spent to promote healthy eating and physical activity saves \$6 in the cost of caring for people with chronic diseases.<sup>xii</sup>

85% of Canadians agree that federal and provincial/territorial governments should devote a greater percentage of the health-care budget to preventive measures.<sup>xiii</sup> ***A prosperous Canada is a better Canada.***

## UNITY – PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE SOCIAL FABRIC

Canadians strongly value (77%) physical activity and sport for their roles in strengthening communities by reducing crime, supporting newcomers, bringing people together and bolstering the economy. And when it comes to children and youth, 83 per cent of Canadians believe community sport can instill character in young people by teaching them pro-social values and positive life lessons.<sup>xiv</sup>

From our local playgrounds to our inspiring high-performance athletes, sport and physical activity are vital to the cultural fabric of our nation, and it is essential that our children and youth are exposed to positive physical activity role models and experiences in order to be healthy and active as they grow.

Sport and physical activity can be used to address a range of community priorities, including health promotion, Aboriginal youth engagement, economic revitalization, newcomer settlement, citizen participation and conflict resolution. The Institute for Canadian Citizenship indicates that sports can be effective in integrating new citizens into Canadian life. New citizens indicate that sports are a natural and universal connection point, and help them learn the social landscape and soft cultural skills, while offering access to informal, but vital, social networks.<sup>xv</sup>

Physical activity, playground to podium, unites our country in ways almost nothing but an overtime goal can, forges national spirit and instills pride in what it means to be Canadian. ***A united Canada is a better Canada.***

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPACTION:**

ParticipACTION has three recommendations to address the critical health and economic impacts of physical inactivity in Canada. We advise all parties to consider these recommendations in their 2015 election platforms:

### **1. A national physical activity plan.**

The World Health Organization's member states' voluntary global target for noncommunicable diseases is a reduction of 10% in physical inactivity by 2025, to be achieved through population-based, multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary and culturally relevant policies. The federal government should work more proactively with provincial/territorial governments and the physical activity sector in Canada to implement and fund a comprehensive national physical activity plan similar in nature and scope to the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy. The national physical activity plan must establish measurable goals for the nation—clear 5-year, 10-year targets and outcomes, identify actions based on evidence, focus on key priority actions, build on current strengths, identify strategies to address gaps and provide focus and opportunity for coordinated action and evaluation. As is outlined in *Active Canada 20/20: A Physical Activity Strategy & Change Agenda for Canada*, and was acknowledged by federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation on February 13, 2015, the complex challenge of increasing physical activity for all Canadians defies single-solution approaches—partnerships and collaboration across all sectors of society are needed to get more Canadians moving.

### **2. A mechanism to integrate sport, physical activity and wellness.**

Despite the fact that Canada has examples of programs, research, community interventions and education campaigns that are respected world-wide, and despite some strong provincial, territorial, and municipal/local efforts to encourage people to be more active, Canada's approach to increasing physical activity has been fragmented. At the federal level, responsibility for physical activity promotion resides within both Sport Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. In fact, physical activity includes sport and recreation (structured and unstructured), gardening, housework, school activities, active transport (walking to the store, cycling to work or school) and manual labour, and crosses the mandates of several federal government departments. A mechanism, which could take the form of an interdepartmental council, a new ministry or a public-private-nonprofit body, to integrate sport, physical activity and wellness is required to connect efforts across education, transportation, human resources, infrastructure, environment, heritage and tourism, veterans' affairs, citizenship, the private sector and other non-governmental stakeholders. An integrated mechanism would accurately reflect the fact that physical activity is effective in improving health, strengthening our economy and uniting people—bringing the country together and ensuring that physical activity is part of who we are as a nation.

### **3. Priority investment in physical activity.**

An increased range of funding and investment is required to support active healthy living, recreation and sport infrastructure, including physical activity promotion and entry-level sport participation to reflect the realities of cost savings to come as a result of a more physically active population. With a national physical activity plan and a new mechanism to integrate sport, physical activity and wellness, we would

be better able to leverage resources, make more efficient use of existing funds, more strategic plans, have greater impacts and better be able to identify gaps in funding. If we want to turn the tide on health, invest to save and unite the country through physical activity and sport, we need increased investment across the broader sector, including multi-year financial commitments providing sustained funding to organizations and programs providing physical activity leadership.

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