

**Active Cities:  
An Opportunity for Leadership  
By the Big City Mayors Caucus**

**Prepared for the Chairperson of the Big City Mayors Caucus:  
Mayor of Regina, Mr. Pat Fiacco**

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## **Summary of Motions**

Motion 1: Endorse the recent decision of the Conference of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation identifying sport and recreation infrastructure as their number one priority.

Motion 2: Direct selected municipal staff and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to draft a comprehensive civic sport, recreation, and physical activity policy, in close collaboration with key representatives of sport, recreation, physical activity, and healthy living organizations, for consideration at a future meeting of the Big City Mayors' Caucus.

## **A Window for Leadership**

For the first time in Canadian history, the lifespan of the current group of 9-14 year-olds will be less than their parents. Some describe this as an obesity crisis, others an inactivity crisis and still others attribute the crisis point to the way that urban spaces have evolved and infrastructure deficits grown. Perhaps the root causes matter less than the collective response and leadership that is required to reverse the trend.

The purpose of this brief is to showcase the window for leadership that exists for the Big City Mayors Caucus (BCMC.) The BCMC can make the connection between the imbalance in investment and renewal of city infrastructure, the rise in youth obesity and inactivity rates, and the primacy of a local response through sport, recreation, physical activity, and active transportation.

The brief makes the case that an integrated and strategic approach to civic policy making on sport, recreation, physical activity, and active transportation is the response that is required. City-based, pan-Canadian leadership is necessary to ensure that we respond to the active city infrastructure deficit and imbalance, and that we meet the youth crisis point head-on with tangible solutions.

In many respects, only a civic leader knows firsthand of the young people that cycle to school on the local bike path. Only the civic leader knows how the community recreation centre and sport arenas - one stop shops for quality of life - open their doors every day to the many forms of participation and community involvement. Only a civic leader can know how a sport institute that hosts and showcases sporting excellence benefits a community directly. As a result, it is the mobilization of the collective knowledge of civic leaders in Canada that is required today, as young people reach a crisis point in our communities.

## **Convergence: The Infrastructure Deficit and A Crisis Point**

### **Inactivity and Obesity: A Crisis Point**

Recent research has identified obesity as one of the greatest threats to public health in Canada. Canada ranks 11th of 29 OECD countries for our population obesity rates, and the obesity epidemic is growing. Almost half of Canadian adults are overweight or obese and 1 in 10 Canadian children are overweight, prompting the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada to call fat “the new tobacco.” Insufficient physical activity is a prime cause of obesity and associated health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. Almost 60% of adult Canadians (age 20+) are inactive: -

- A majority (56%) of Canadian youth aged 12-19 are physically inactive; as many as 82% may not be active enough for optimal growth and development.
- Almost 60% of adult Canadians (age 20+) are inactive.

- The number of deaths caused by diseases associated with excess weight almost doubled over the past 15 years, from 2,500 deaths in 1985 to 4,300 in 2000.
- If obesity rates continue to rise, today's children may be the first generation with a lower life expectancy than their parents.
- Physical inactivity results in 21,000 premature deaths per year.
- Physical inactivity costs the health care system between \$2.1 and \$5.3 billion per year, representing as much as 5% of annual health care spending. A 10% increase in physical activity would save \$150 million/year in direct health care costs.
- Half of the decline in functioning that people experience between the ages of 30 and 70 is directly related to a lack of physical activity, not aging itself.
- Seventy percent of Canadians aged 45 and older suffer from one or more chronic conditions directly related to physical inactivity.

### **Infrastructure Deficit**

As with roads, water systems, and sewers, there is a substantial deficit in sport and recreation facilities and infrastructure which remove barriers to physical activity. Without significant, long-term, strategic investments in this area, provincial/territorial governments will not be able to meet their commitment to increasing the number of active Canadians by 10% by 2012. However, while the federal and provincial/territorial governments share responsibility for health, the municipal governments have to date borne most of the costs of providing the facilities and infrastructure necessary to enable Canadians to be physically active and participate in sport.

The emerging crisis of the infrastructure deficit is compounded by the aging of existing facilities and infrastructure. Many facilities were constructed in the 1960's and 1970's and are now in various states of disrepair. As well, many communities miss out on the opportunity to strengthen social cohesion through accessible recreation and active transportation mediums. Further, the economic benefits from hosting sport events are often bypassed because of insufficient facilities or facilities that do not meet domestic and international standards.

### **Leadership Needed**

Municipal governments have shown tremendous leadership in reducing tobacco use by implementing municipal smoking bans in public places and workplaces. Civic leaders need to show the same leadership in the face of the obesity crisis, due in large part to the insufficient activity levels of Canadians of all ages.

This brief makes the case for an Active Cities agenda, for civic leaders from Canadian cities to adopt a strategic and integrated approach to sport, recreation, and physical activity.

This approach could expand upon, as but a few examples, the kind of work that InMotion is pioneering in Regina and Saskatoon, the effort in Edmonton to foster the True Sport movement, the integrated response in Toronto to gun crime through youth leadership, sport and recreation, and the opportunity in Vancouver to ensure the 2010 legacy is beyond bricks and mortar.

## **Active Cities: The Opportunity**

Municipal leaders have an opportunity to establish a pan-Canadian civic policy as its primary response to the crisis point facing Canadian children and adults through the creation of a comprehensive civic agenda for sport, recreation, and physical activity.

An Active Cities agenda means:

- Getting young people and adults off the obesity track through increased engagement in physical activity.
- Enhancing the development of our children and youth.
- Reducing youth crime by increasing youth involvement in community based activities.
- Building active communities through improved infrastructure.
- Integrating active transportation planning into sustainable and clean transportation system developments.
- Building safe and vibrant communities through volunteerism and citizen engagement.
- Increasing the sense of belonging and community felt by new Canadians, by accessing the potential of sport and recreation to reduce ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural barriers.
- Fostering private-public partnerships that benefit both sport organizations and business.
- Developing the potential of our cities to attract sport tourism.
- Promoting a values-driven sport system in which fairness, inclusion, excellence, and participation co-exist.

## Active Cities: Recommendations

### Step One: Move Forward Now on the Infrastructure Crisis

*Endorse the recent decision of the Conference of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation identifying sport and recreation infrastructure as their number one priority, in recognition of the fact that “improved infrastructure will advance sport and physical activity in communities across the country while addressing critical health challenges and strengthening Canadian communities.”*

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has likewise identified community and children’s infrastructure for sport and recreation as priorities, calling infrastructure “the platform upon which Canada’s quality of life and international competitiveness depends.”

The decisions taken by the Federal and Provincial/Territorial governments related to priorities and funding levels for sport and recreation infrastructure will have an undeniable effect on our communities, since most sport and recreation takes place at the community level. The availability and accessibility of sport and recreation facilities and infrastructure will have a significant impact on our ability to address the obesity crisis. Will the decisions rectify the existing infrastructure imbalance, whereby the combined federal and provincial/territorial investment in sport and recreation infrastructure is a fraction of the municipal investment?<sup>1</sup>

#### MOTION (1)

***Endorse the recent decision of the Conference of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation identifying sport and recreation infrastructure as their number one priority.***

*Support the guidelines for a comprehensive infrastructure program endorsed by national organizations with significant pan-Canadian representation, including the Sport Matters Group, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, and the Coalition for Active Living.*

- Recognize the important role played by municipalities and local governments in the provision and operation of sport and recreation facilities and the fact that municipalities are coping with competing capital priorities and are constrained by limited capital funds. To this end;
  - Consider the cost of land and facility operations as part of the contribution by municipal government to the Program;

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the total federal investment in the 3 years between 2001 and 2004 on sport facilities totaled **only** \$371m spread over 185 projects. (Source: Sport Canada)

- Recognize that most communities require assistance with both the development of new and the rehabilitation of existing indoor and outdoor recreation and sport facilities;
  - Require a locally initiated life cycle maintenance system in order to ensure that new or renovated facilities and parks/trails are adequately maintained.
- Be inclusive. Cover facilities in which traditional sports and physical activities occur (arenas, community centres, pools, etc.), outdoor environments that are increasingly popular (trails, bike paths, parks, sport fields, open spaces, etc.), and non-physical recreation venues such as youth centres and multi-purpose facilities that provide recreation opportunities for older adults.
  - Include a balance of facilities that accommodate sport, recreation, active transportation and healthy living activities.
  - Seek input from the sport, recreation, and active living communities.
  - Complements existing federal, provincial/territorial, and local sport, physical activity, and recreation initiatives. Wherever possible, connect to related initiatives, such as active transportation.
  - Be a multi-year policy framework.
  - Encourage the use of new planning approaches, creative design features, and up-to-date construction techniques to enhance participation and improve accessibility.

### **Step Two: Establish an Active Cities Pan Canadian Policy Framework**

*Develop a pan-Canadian civic sport, recreation, and physical activity policy, consistent with the Canadian Sport Policy, the Pan-Canadian Physical Activity Strategy, and the National Policy on Access to Recreation.*

A pan-Canadian civic sport, recreation, and physical activity policy would enable – for the first time - an integrated approach to the crisis point and to quality of life in our communities. It would build on the important contribution that amateur and professional sports makes to community and economic development and the value of participation in sport, physical activity, and recreation to the health and well-being of our citizens, especially our youth. A sound integrated policy framework which supports decision-making, innovative partnerships and coherent investments in this sphere needs to be established re:

- Infrastructure development
- Human capital and productivity
- Program funding
- Promotion of sport tourism
- Major games hosting
- Active transportation planning

The policy would also provide for investment in, and where absent, the creation of community councils to support decision-making related sport, recreation, and physical activity. These councils would seek broad-based contributions and input from all stakeholder groups, providing an unprecedented level of interaction between sport, recreation, health, youth development, education, small business, justice, and civic security.

**MOTION (2)**

***Direct selected municipal staff and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to draft a comprehensive civic sport, recreation, and physical activity policy, in close collaboration with key representatives of sport, recreation, physical activity, and healthy living organizations, for consideration at a future meeting of the Big City Mayors Caucus.***

*Worthy of consideration within the strategy are the following opportunities:*

- *Advocacy for increased federal investment in sport, physical activity, and recreation*
  - Eliminate the infrastructure deficit.
  - Double the investment in sport and physical activity programs (from \$145m to \$290m).
  - Integrate active transportation policy into the infrastructure program through a 7% allocation policy in support of walking, cycling, and other modes of active transportation.
  
- *Strategic approaches and dissemination of best practices through civic and community networks*
  - Promote social cohesion, inclusion, and accessibility by reducing barriers for children to participate in recreation and sport.
  - Transfer our international *development through sport and recreation* success to Canada's inner cities through innovative youth employment and education strategies.
  - Implement a Canadian sport institute strategy that advances international sporting excellence and opportunities in our major cities.
  - Partner with sport community leadership to showcase the sport we want in our communities, a kind of true sport built on the values of fairness, inclusion, excellence, and participation.
  - Implement active transportation plans through municipal networks by allocating a fair share of transportation and infrastructure spending in support of physically active lifestyles.
  - Strengthen civic support for sport tourism initiatives and capitalize on a \$2 billion segment of the tourism industry.

## **Conclusion**

The infrastructure deficit and crisis point of inactivity and obesity are worth the collective attention of all public leaders. It is argued here that civic leaders and the BCMC are well positioned to advance an Active Cities agenda through two specific actions:

- the endorsement of the recent decision of the Conference of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation,
- the development of a comprehensive civic sport, recreation, and physical activity policy, in collaboration with key representatives of sport, recreation, physical activity, and healthy living organizations.