

Physical Activity in Canada:
Why Knowing What Matters Is Not What's the Matter¹

August 13, 2009

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Pre-budget Consultations for Budget 2010

Prepared by the Physical Activity Policy Collective

Summary of Recommendations

1. Assign a budget line to Physical Activity within the Public Health Agency of Canada and allocate a minimum additional investment of \$20m in bridge funding in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

2. At maturity, this budget allocation should exceed \$100m to ensure the achievement of the public benefits of physical activity related to health outcomes, economic impact, and environmental sustainability.

3. Meet the current government's commitment to spend the equivalent of 1% of health funding on physical activity and amateur sport.

Introduction

For the past number of years, policy analysts, academics, and community sector leaders have articulated the merits of a physical activity policy for Canada as well as associated strategies and budget provisions that would put this policy into action.

The evidence is clear-cut and the arguments can be compiled from any number of perspectives.

- Do you want to increase productivity in the workplace? Increase physical activity within the Canadian work force².
- Do you want to enhance learning and skill development? Increase physical activity in home and school environments³.
- Do you want to promote healthy living and decrease costs to the health care system? Increase physical activity across the Canadian population^{4,5}.
- Do you want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote environmental sustainability? Increase physical activity amongst Canadian commuters⁶.
- Do you want to create vibrant communities, neighbourhoods, and families? Invest in community infrastructure that promotes physical activity⁷.

Canada is fortunate to have such knowledge at our fingertips, formed within our research community and disseminated amongst our community leaders. In fact, we are admired around the globe for our collective understanding of the challenge in front of us: **to reduce sedentary behaviours and to increase physical activity, by making the healthy choice the easy choice.**

We have even articulated a set of goals and found a way to have them adopted by all 14 federal, provincial, and territorial governments. F-P/T Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation have agreed on Canada's first ever Pan-Canadian physical activity targets for children and youth:

- By the year 2010, to increase by two (2) percentage points – from 10% to 12% -- the proportion of children and youth (between the ages of 5 to 19) who add 90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.
- By the year 2015, increase by five (5) percentage points – from 12% to 17% -- the proportion of children and youth (between the ages of 5 to 19) who add 90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.

- By the year 2010, increase from 11,500 to 12,500 the mean number of steps taken daily by children and youth (between the ages of 5 to 19). This represents an increase in daily physical activity of 10 minutes/day in Canadian children and youth.
- By the year 2015, increase from 12,500 to 14,500 the mean number of steps taken daily by children and youth (between the ages of 5 to 19). This represents a combined increase in daily physical activity of 30 minutes/day in Canadian children and youth.

Annually, Canadian scientists report on our progress, or lack thereof, and remind us of what we know. The Active Healthy Kids Canada *Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* tells us what we need to know - year-in, year-out.

Better yet, leadership groups like ParticipACTION and the True Sport Foundation, plus provincial networks like Saskatchewan *in motion* and the Alberta Centre for Active living, to name just two, disseminate this message extremely well. If you ask a Canadian about the merits of physical activity, it's likely that they get it, relate to it, and know it.

But physical activity rates aren't getting much better – **we are failing to act on activity** - and the gap in federal government policy and budget allocations remains constant. In our view, and as framed by Yale's Dr. Jeffrey Katz, **this is "why knowing what matters is not what's the matter."**

Recommendations:

With this in mind, then, the submission of the Physical Activity Policy Collective recommends to the Standing Committee on Finance that **it's time to act on what matters** – to make real progress for Canadians through strategic investments.

In our view, acting on what matters involves three straightforward steps, each of which falls directly within the responsibility of the Government of Canada:

1. Assign a budget line to physical activity and allocate a minimum additional investment of \$20m in bridge funding in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

The Canadian government has yet to assign itself a suitable budget for physical activity strategies and the associated staff to direct its strategic application. It's time to take this decision and create a financial bridge to the policies, programs, and resources that will guide a Canadian physical activity strategy for the coming decade.

Start by investing in the government's own capability to act.

2. At maturity, this budget allocation should exceed \$100m to secure the achievement of physical activity related public benefits in health outcomes, economic impact, and environmental sustainability.

By any standard, a Canadian strategy to act will include a series of interconnected activities, including:

- Public engagement and education
- Workplace and school environment strategy
- Built environment initiative
- Partnership initiative, including intra-government coordination re: infrastructure stimulus
- Fiscal policy review, including extension of tax credits to be fully refundable
- Community investment fund
- Communications
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Public policy and strategy development

There is no lack of planning to draw from in developing the most effective approach. We are not starting with a blank page and it would be a mistake to adopt this path. The Integrated Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy provides a comprehensive framework, and Canada's Coalition for Active Living documented a Business Case and plan for excellence in physical activity advancement in recent years. Provincial governments have also acted in their own jurisdictions, creating joint planning opportunities that build on such innovations as *ActNow* in British Columbia, Saskatchewan *in motion* and *Active Kids, Healthy Kids* Nova Scotia.

3. Meet the current government's commitment to spend the equivalent of 1% of health funding on physical activity and amateur sport.

In the 2006 federal election, the Conservative Party identified physical activity as a priority in its campaign platform:

"Commit to spending at least one percent of total federal health funding annually on physical activity, including amateur sport and programs for school age children." (Stand Up for Canada, Conservative Party of Canada)

By the time of the 2008 election, this thinking had been adopted across the spectrum of political parties, a kind of non-partisan consensus that reflects the merit of investing in physical activity policy and its benefits to Canadians.

Such a consensus lends itself to endorsement and advocacy within the House of Commons and amongst its Committees, including the Standing Committee on Finance. Acting on what matters, in our view, includes articulating these recommendations in your report for Budget 2010 and in your correspondence with fellow members in the House and officials at Finance Canada.

Acting on What Matters: the case

By acting on what matters, the Government of Canada can assist in achieving a series of important public benefits through strengthened physical activity policy and budgetary provisions.

Physical activity impacts on economic productivity, workforce skill development, and learning

- Physical activity levels have important implications for economic productivity. Employers are increasingly turning to physical activity as a means to improve productivity in their workplaces. A 1981 study examining the impact of workplace fitness program on absenteeism in a Toronto insurance firm revealed that the program reduced hiring and training costs by \$273,000 and sick day costs by \$80,000, for a total savings of \$267 per employee. The study concluded that the company could save as much as 1 percent of total payroll cost annually, on the basis of a 20 percent participation rate in the program⁸.
- Physical activity has positive influences on concentration, memory, and classroom behavior contributing to improved academic performance⁹.

Physical activity promotes healthy living and decreases costs in the health care system

- Physical activity appears to reduce the risk of over 25 chronic conditions, in particular coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, breast cancer, colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, and osteoporosis¹⁰.
- Current literature suggests that if the entire Canadian population followed current physical activity guidelines approximately one third of deaths related to coronary heart disease, one quarter of deaths related to stroke and osteoporosis, 20% of deaths related to colon cancer, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes, and 14% of deaths related to breast cancer could be prevented¹¹.

- In Canada, in 2001, the economic burden of physical inactivity was \$5.3 billion (\$1.6 billion in direct costs and \$3.7 billion in indirect costs). The total economic costs of physical inactivity represented 2.6% of total health care costs in Canada¹².
- A 10% reduction in physical inactivity could reduce direct health-care costs in Canada by \$150 million a year¹³.

Physical activity reduces greenhouse gas emissions and promotes environmental sustainability

- Transport Canada identified that urban passenger travel creates almost half of the greenhouse gas emissions of Canada's transportation sector, which in turn produces about ¼ of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing the number of vehicle miles travelled through supporting alternative, non-polluting means (including active transportation) will reduce harmful emissions, exposure to pollutants and reduce traffic volume¹⁴.
- Many investments in community sport are, in fact, investments in additional green space that improve the environment and quality of life in Canadians communities. Parks, playgrounds, playing fields, trails, beaches, and other outdoor facilities provide Canadians with access to nature, improved air quality, and the space to pursue outdoor physical activity in clean and enjoyable surroundings¹⁵.

Physical activity friendly communities create healthy neighbourhoods and support active families

- Sport and physical activity play a major role in strengthening communities by bringing people together, building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of marginalized or excluded groups. A report by the Conference Board of Canada found that over 85 percent of Canadians contribute to their quality of life in the following ways:
 - Provide a place for people to meet and interact
 - Encourage people from different backgrounds to work and play together
 - Provide community volunteer opportunities
 - Teach people responsibility and respect for other people and property
 - Get people of all ages actively involved in their communities
 - Give people a sense of purpose
 - Provide families with opportunities to know each other better; and help prevent youth crime¹⁶.

Conclusion

We look forward to discussing the merits of our submission and the benefit of acting on what matters. The benefits of physical activity policy and investment are clear and compelling. The Physical Activity Policy Collective looks forward to working with the Committee to see these recommendations adopted.

About the Physical Activity Policy Collective

The Physical Activity Policy Collective is a voluntary group of leaders and not-for-profit organizations involved in the promotion and advancement of physical activity policy in Canada. Organizations include: Coalition for Active Living (a national action group of more than 100 organizations); ParticipACTION; Physical and Health Education Canada; Sport Matters; Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute; Children's Hospital for Eastern Ontario Research Institute – Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group; Alberta Centre for Active living; Active Healthy Kids Canada; and many more.

References

1. David L. Katz, MD, MPH. Adapted from "Life and Death, Knowledge and Power: Why Knowing What Matters Is Not What's the Matter," a commentary published in *Health Care Reform*.
2. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (1995). Productivity and Physical Activity: The Research File N0.95-06. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. Ottawa, ON
3. Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2009). Active kids are fit to learn: The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Active Healthy Kids Canada, Toronto, ON
4. Warburton, D. E. R., Katzmarzyk, P. T., Rhodes, R. E., & Shephard, R. J. (2007). Evidence-informed physical activity guidelines for Canadian adults. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* 32(S2E) S16-S68.)
5. Katzmarzyk, P. T., & Janssen. (2004). The economic costs associated with physical inactivity and obesity in Canada: An update. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* 29(1) 90-115
6. Bergeron, K. & Cragg, S. (2009). Making the Case for Active Transportation: Bulletin #4 – Environmental Benefits. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Ottawa, ON
7. Bloom, M. Grant, M. & Watt, W. (2005). Strengthening Canada: The Socio-economic Benefits of Sport Participation in Canada. Conference Board of Canada, Ottawa, ON
8. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (1995).
9. Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2009).
10. Warburton, D. E. R., Katzmarzyk, P. T., Rhodes, R. E., & Shephard, R. J. (2007).
11. Ibid.
12. Katzmarzyk, P. T., & Janssen. (2004).
13. Ibid.
14. Bergeron, K. & Cragg, S. (2009).
15. True Sport. (2008). What Sport Can Do: The True Sport Report. True Sport, Ottawa, ON
16. Bloom, M. Grant, M. & Watt, W. (2005).