

Minister of Health



Ministre de la Santé

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

Mr. Ron McKinnon
Chair, Standing Committee on Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada, K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. McKinnon,

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the Report of the Standing Committee on Health (HESA), entitled *Get Canada's Youth Moving!*, presented in the House of Commons on June 17, 2019 and re-tabled on April 13, 2021.

The Government of Canada commends the members of the Committee, witnesses who have appeared before it and those who submitted written briefs. Their valuable perspectives and commitment to physical activity for children and youth are important for Canada.

In recognition of the importance of increasing physical activity across Canada, federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) governments, in 2018, developed Canada's first pan-Canadian policy framework focusing on increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living, *A Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada: Let's Get Moving* (Common Vision). The Common Vision serves to help leverage action to support Canadians and communities to move more and sit less, throughout the day.

The Government recognizes the importance of helping Canadians lead healthier lives and to become more physically active. The Government works with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous groups, and other non-governmental organizations to support all Canadians, including children and youth, to be physically active.

Budget 2021 recently announced several investments to address physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, as well as the other common risk factors that underlie chronic diseases. These include \$80 million over two years to remove barriers to participation in sports programming and to help community organizations kick-start local organized sports that are accessible to all; \$14.3 million over 5 years and \$2.9 million ongoing to ensure that

Canada

Indigenous women and girls have access to meaningful sports activities through the Sport for Social Development in Indigenous Communities Program; and \$35 million over five years to support diabetes prevention, research and surveillance, and the development of a national framework for diabetes.

The Government agrees with the Report finding that Canada's children and youth are spending too much time participating in sedentary activities. The Government, in collaboration with provinces and territories, as well as non-government organizations across various sectors, has put in place a comprehensive approach to promote physical activity among Canadians.

Numerous developments and events have taken place since the Committee last heard from witnesses for this study in May 2019, which may influence or address a number of the Committee's recommendations. In particular, since March 2020, COVID-19 has changed the environments that support children and youth – at home, at school, and in the community.

Additionally, new evidence indicates that patients with COVID-19 who have been consistently physically inactive have a significantly higher risk of severe outcomes than patients who were somewhat active or regularly met physical activity guidelines prior to the illness. Compared with those who consistently met activity guidelines, people who were consistently inactive were more than twice as likely to be hospitalized and to die from the virus.

The response addresses the Report recommendations through five thematic areas: policy initiatives; engaging and informing Canadians; FPT governments; non-governmental sectors; and research and surveillance.

Policy Initiatives

The Government of Canada, in collaboration with provinces and territories, as well as government and non-government organizations across various sectors, has put in place a comprehensive approach to promote healthy living and physical activity among Canadians. Evidence demonstrates that in addition to being physically active, eating healthier, not using tobacco and avoiding the problematic use of alcohol, can improve health and delay or prevent the onset of many chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some types of cancer.

I work with the Minister of Canadian Heritage to implement Government commitments and activities that aim to help youth increase physical activity and improve health outcomes, as also outlined under the *Physical Activity and Sport Act*.

As physical activity is a shared responsibility with other levels of government, the Government has developed policies in cooperation with provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for health, sport, physical activity and recreation, which are included in the FPT theme below.

Canada's efforts related to physical activity are aligned with current international policy

directions. Canada has ratified and takes action to implement the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, including article 31, the right to play and recreation, and article 24 on the right to the best health possible. In May 2018, during the World Health Organization's 71st World Health Assembly, Canada endorsed the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030. The Action Plan includes a target to reduce global physical inactivity by 30% by 2030. In September 2018, Canada's Minister of Health endorsed the political declaration at the third UN General Assembly high-level meeting on non-communicable diseases. The declaration is a blueprint for accelerating action on non-communicable disease prevention and control in order to achieve related commitments in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The declaration calls for action on non-communicable disease risk factors including physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use, air pollution and the harmful use of alcohol.

The Government is also working to achieve gender equality in sport at every level by 2035. The Gender Equity in Sport Strategy, announced in 2018, is aimed at developing innovative ways to increase the representation, participation and retention of women and girls in sport.

Additionally, the Government is working in partnership with Indigenous leaders to realize the Calls to Action (CTA) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (2015) to increase physical activity among Indigenous communities, including children and youth. Meetings between Sport Canada, other federal departments and the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) reiterated the need for collaborative action to address the CTAs. Regarding CTA 89 ongoing work in other areas related to Indigenous sport development will lay the foundation for the potential future amendment of the *Physical Activity and Sport Act*. The Government of Canada recognizes that ongoing engagement with Indigenous Peoples is an important component of this process. Further, Sport Canada's Indigenous Youth and Sport Initiative addresses CTA 88 and provides funding to the Aboriginal Sport Circle to support its leadership role, via P/T bilateral agreements to the P/T Aboriginal Sport Bodies (PTASBs) for culturally relevant sport programming and North American Indigenous Games team preparation and travel, and to National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Multisport Service Organizations (MSOs), to ensure long-term Indigenous athlete development and growth.

Engaging and Informing Canadians

Physical activity is essential to a healthy lifestyle. Raising awareness of the importance of daily physical activity, as well as engaging Canadians to act will help children and youth develop healthier habits for life.

The Government has implemented a range of programs that aim to support public education and awareness activities related to increasing physical activity for all Canadians, including children and youth. Budget 2018 announced \$25 million over five years for the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to support ParticipACTION to implement a national public education campaign and increase daily physical activity among Canadians through the *Let's Get Moving* initiative. The investment aims to change social norms and normalize daily physical activity

through long-term multi-sectoral partnerships and coordinated public education and engagement. For example, the project is mobilizing Canadians to be active through a national multimedia campaign and a physical activity digital platform.

In addition, PHAC is supporting community-based initiatives to improve health behaviours and address health inequalities among priority populations at greater risk of developing chronic disease. In particular, PHAC's Healthy Canadians and Communities Fund (HCCF), formerly known as the Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention – Multi-sectoral Partnerships program, invests approximately \$20 million annually and leverages additional funding from partners to support projects that focus on the behavioural risk factors, including physical inactivity, unhealthy eating and tobacco use, associated with the major chronic diseases of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Funded projects focus on supporting health behaviour changes and creating physical and social environments that are known to enable better health.

Projects funded under the HCCF involve educating Canadians about the importance of physical activity, developing physical literacy, increasing physical activity levels, and measuring physiological and psychological outcomes in interventions to look at changes in health status. As one example, the Build Our Kids' Success (BOKS) project delivered by Reebok Canada is a before-school physical activity program for elementary school children to boost their physical, nutritional and mental health, as well as their confidence and well-being.

The HCCF also supports projects to improve physical and social environments that encourage healthy and active lifestyles. For example, the Uplift project delivered by Dalhousie University is creating healthier school environments and enabling younger students to become more physically active, less sedentary and to adopt healthier eating behaviours.

The Government also recognizes the need for culturally relevant and community-driven approaches to support physical activity and sport participation among Indigenous populations. Budget 2017 announced \$18.9 million over five years, starting in 2017-18, to support Indigenous Youth and Sport. Of this, \$7.6 million was allocated toward the Provincial/Territorial Bilateral Agreements on Sport Participation for the Indigenous initiatives, which seek to strengthen Indigenous leadership and capacity of provincial/territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies; and support culturally relevant programming for Indigenous youth and children at the community level, including preparation for and travel to the North American Indigenous Games.

The Government has also invested in expanding sport and physical activity programming in Indigenous Communities through a Budget 2018 commitment of \$47.5 million over five years, and \$9.5 million per year ongoing, targeting more than 300 Indigenous communities through the Sport for Social Development in Indigenous Communities Initiative of Canadian Heritage.

Collective efforts to support physical activity are informed by the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines (Guidelines) for the Early Years and for Children and Youth, developed by the

Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP), ParticipACTION, the Conference Board of Canada, and other stakeholders, with funding from PHAC. The Guidelines are being used to inform healthy active living policy at the local, provincial and national levels. Through the Guidelines, CSEP is providing parents, caregivers, teachers and health professionals with guidance for the whole 24-hour day to help children and youth grow up healthier. CSEP also developed the Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines for adults and older adults, in collaboration with experts, research groups and other stakeholders. These guidelines, the world's first 24-hour movement guidelines for these age groups, were launched in October 2020 to help promote healthy active lifestyles and improve sleep habits among Canadian adults, who are important role models within families.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Governments

FPT governments are working collaboratively to support families in helping children and youth become physically active. FPT governments are advancing and implementing *A Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada: Let's Get Moving* (Common Vision) through the Conference of FPT Ministers Responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation (SPAR). As the federal co-chair with responsibility for physical activity, I am committed to providing progress updates on the implementation of the Common Vision to demonstrate action and results.

Since the release of the Common Vision, funding from PHAC's HCCF has been awarded to Common Vision Champions to advance the areas of focus within this policy framework, to collectively address a range of target audiences, including children and youth, through partnership with parents, communities, schools and school-based programs.

In addition, in 2010, FPT Ministers of Health adopted *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights* (Framework). The Framework identified physical activity as an important health behaviour to help reduce the risk of obesity later in life. The Framework also encourages parents, schools, community organizations, governments, Indigenous organizations and other stakeholders to collaborate on strategies to reduce the amount of time children spend being inactive, as well as to encourage indoor and outdoor active play.

The Government advances work on the Framework and other initiatives through the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium of School Health, which is a partnership between the federal government and 25 provincial and territorial departments of health and education. This consortium works to promote student wellness and achievement for all children and youth using a comprehensive school health approach. It recognizes that healthier students learn better and achieve more, and develop the skills they need to be physically and emotionally healthy for life.

To support active transportation, Infrastructure Canada launched the Public Transit Infrastructure Fund in April 2016 as a two-year, \$3.4 billion fund to accelerate municipal

investments for the rehabilitation of transit systems, new capital projects, and planning for future transit expansion. Agreements with provinces and territories, in collaboration with municipalities, were put in place to deliver the program and ensure all levels of government were aware of the funding program.

Building on this, the Investing-in-Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) delivers \$33 billion through integrated bilateral agreements with provinces and territories to provide investments across four streams: public transit; green infrastructure; community, culture and recreation infrastructure; and, rural and northern communities' infrastructure. Active transportation projects are eligible for funding under all four streams. The ICIP was designed following extensive consultations with provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous organizations to ensure that provinces and territories have the flexibility to prioritize infrastructure projects that accommodate varying local needs.

A further \$400 million in dedicated funding for active transportation and the launch of public engagement for the first-ever National Active Transportation Strategy was announced on March 12, 2021. This is the first federal fund dedicated to building active transportation through Canada. It will support communities as they build vibrant neighborhoods where people can safely live, work and play.

Infrastructure Canada is also funding municipal infrastructure projects that encourage active transportation through the federal Gas Tax Fund. Funded projects include cycling lanes and paths, sidewalks and hiking and walking trails. Additionally, active transportation infrastructure is eligible under the \$31 million Canada Healthy Communities Initiative announced on August 13, 2020, to support community-led solutions that respond to needs arising from COVID-19 over the next two years.

Non-governmental Sectors

In Canada, many types of organizations and sectors play an important role in addressing physical activity among youth in a variety of ways. I would like to highlight several physical activity organizations, national in scope, that play key roles in helping Canadians, including youth, to be more active, many of which PHAC has funded through the HCCF.

ParticipACTION is an organization with a mandate to increase the number of Canadians who engage in physical activity across Canada, and ensure that the information it shares is informed by national advisory groups with members from government, non-government organizations and academic and research institutions.

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, ParticipACTION, and the Conference Board of Canada, in collaboration with PHAC and other stakeholders, led the development of the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for all age groups. The Guidelines show the interrelationship between physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep.

Physical and Health Education Canada works with national and provincial organizations from both the public and private sectors, including corporations, not-for-profit organizations, foundations, and government departments, to promote and advance quality health and physical education opportunities and healthy learning environments across Canada.

Sport for Life, a not-for-profit organization of sport and physical literacy experts, partners with all levels of government, health practitioners, educators, recreation programmers, facility administrators, board members, coaches, officials, athletes and parents to provide Canadians with access to quality sport and physical literacy opportunities.

Along with all levels of government, physical activity stakeholders play a key role in the implementation of the Common Vision. For example, as mentioned above, non-governmental organizations are working to advance the Common Vision over the next two years with specific actions on different areas of focus.

Finally, PHAC's HCCF recognizes that through active engagement and partnerships with the private sector, not-for-profit sector, organizations within and outside the health sector, and other levels of government, progress can be made to support and sustain behaviour changes, including increasing physical activity, to improve health. This funding program leverages private and not-for-profit sectors, and other funding to encourage Canadians to move more and sit less.

Research and Surveillance

The Government invests extensively in research and surveillance through PHAC, Statistics Canada, Sport Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). These departments are working collaboratively to help advance research and report on progress to inform policy and program directions aimed at increasing levels of physical activity for children and youth.

PHAC is a recognized international leader in the surveillance of physical activity. Starting in 2014, PHAC's surveillance work expanded beyond tracking levels of physical activity among Canadians to include sedentary behaviour and sleep, as important movement behaviours.

Through PHAC's leadership, the Government has developed the Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep Indicators, and an online data tool, with indicators for children and youth, as well as for adults. This information is used to support policy development, including the most recent 2019 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults. PHAC has also partnered with FPT departments of sport, physical activity and recreation to provide measurement support of physical activity for policy needs, including the Common Vision.

The bi-annual ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth synthesizes data from multiple sources to produce a comprehensive annual assessment of

physical activity for children and youth in Canada. It includes indicators (e.g., overall level of physical activity, sedentary behaviour), an overall physical activity grade, key research findings, gaps in the research, and recommendations to improve the overall assigned grade.

The Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting (HIR) Initiative, led by PHAC in collaboration with the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network, Statistics Canada, the First Nations Information Governance Centre and CIHR, aims to strengthen the measurement, monitoring and reporting of health inequalities in Canada through improved access to data and knowledge translation products. The HIR Initiative is filling a critical data gap for informing programs and policies that target priority population groups, supporting PHAC and Government of Canada commitments for monitoring progress in reducing health inequities.

The 2017 FPT government e-Report on Healthy Weights is the third report on progress to advance *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A FPT Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights* (Framework). The 2017 e-Report provides a snapshot of how children and youth are doing in Canada with regard to healthy living and healthy weights. It builds on the first two progress reports (2013 and 2015) and highlights recent data and trends on indicators for healthy weights. The 2017 e-Report includes indicators of the current status on related issues, including physical activity, while exploring possible trends since 2010.

The Government continues to look at testing new funding models and innovations that increase the focus on results and impact of projects in order to improve health outcomes for Canadians. For example, PHAC is pilot testing a funding model that provides a financial mechanism to directly link performance and premium payments to measureable changes in health outcomes for project participants. This approach is being utilized to support projects, whereby premium payments are focused on statistically and clinically significant changes in the health of participating children and youth, such as cardiorespiratory fitness and quality of life.

Finally, PHAC supports the Canadian component of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children, a World Health Organization collaborative, cross-national study of young people aged 11-15 years. The study aims to gain insight into young people's well-being, health behaviours and their social contexts. Canada has participated in the HBSC since 1989-90, which enables international comparisons of physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep with over 40 participating countries, as well as trends over time, to inform policies and practice.

Conclusion

I would like to thank HESA for their work on this important health issue. As expressed above, addressing physical inactivity requires efforts across a wide range of sectors and partners. The Government has a comprehensive suite of investments and activities to help children and youth be more physically active.

COVID-19 has significantly affected the way Canadians live, learn, work and play, and many children and youth may be struggling with how daily routines have changed. It is more

important than ever for children and youth to stay physically active, given the potential benefits for overall health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government is working toward adapting its policies and programs to reflect this new challenge.

The Government trusts that this response demonstrates its commitment to helping all Canadians live healthier lives by providing the tools and resources to promote physical activity and prevent chronic disease.



Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health