



# TAKE ACTION



A guide for those working towards getting children and youth more physically active.

## QUICK REFERENCE

*This Plan for Action covers:*

1. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT PARTICIPATION
2. SCHOOL
3. FAMILY AND PEERS
4. BUILT ENVIRONMENT

## FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

Each year, the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card examines physical activity opportunities for kids all across Canada. The role of the Report Card is to consolidate research knowledge to drive social action for policy change, by informing messaging, policies, programs and research initiatives that can increase physical activity opportunities for children and youth.

ParticipACTION works with Active Healthy Kids Canada to deliver the Report Card—and share it with Canadians. As the national voice of physical activity and sport participation, we are committed to bringing people together around the issue.

While you may be familiar with the Report Card as a resource, this guide is intended to help you take the Report Card recommendations further and turn the research into action. This **Plan for Action** is for all of us who are working towards getting children and youth more physically active—from NGOs to public health to sport organizations and municipal recreation departments.

We looked at the main findings in this year's Report Card, and then collaborated with national and provincial/territorial partners to unearth practical ways to put the learning into practice. This year, the grade for children and youth physical activity levels was, unfortunately, an F. Together with our partners, we offer suggestions on what each of us can do to collectively improve the grade. We have tried to be specific and inclusive so that this guide is useful, interesting and helpful to you in your own work.

*ON OUR MARKS  
GET SET  
TAKE ACTION!*

## SECTION 1

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT PARTICIPATION

The Report Card recommends that we ensure variety in the sport and physical activity programming that is offered to children and youth. Plus, we need to make both competitive and recreational options available. How do we get set to do this?

### ON OUR MARKS

On physical activity and sport participation levels, the Report Card has okay news and bad news. The okay news is that over half of children and youth are participating in organized sport, which contributes to their overall activity levels. Despite this—and here's the bad news—only 13% of our young people are meeting daily physical activity guidelines, and sport participation continues to decline. Further, girls are less active than boys, and children in low socio-economic circumstances or with a disability are less active than their peers.

### GET SET

The Report Card recommends that we ensure variety in the sport and physical activity programming that is offered to children and youth. Plus, we need to make both competitive and recreational options available. How do we get set to do this?

ParticipACTION and True Sport believe that every child—regardless of his or her ability, interests,

gender and circumstances—has the right to be physically active. While we all know this, many of those in a position to offer physical activity and sport opportunities often feel unable to act. The reasons for this vary: limited resources, lack of expertise in addressing unique needs like female-only, new immigrant programs or ability-appropriate activity variations, institutional rules, liability issues, lack of facilities or the fear of making precedent-setting decisions. Many busy parents have little time to be active with their children, and don't send their kids out to play due to safety concerns.

Physical literacy—the development of fundamental movement and sport skills—gives children a foundation for life-long sport and physical activity participation. Without physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from physical activity and sport and turn to more inactive leisure-time pursuits. All activity providers can help with developing physical literacy through structured and unstructured opportunities.



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**EDUCATION DECISION MAKERS** can ensure that schools offer quality school physical education and other physical activity opportunities in addition to ABCs. Effective ideas include: supporting kids who use alternative forms of active transportation; advocating for free use of the school's gym after school hours; painting the playground with hopscotch and foursquare markings; getting student leaders involved in delivering fun, active programs; making balls and equipment available outside of class; developing active ways of teaching subjects; providing a variety of activities during physical education (P.E.); offering classroom physical activity; providing intramurals that appeal to interests of both girls and boys; hiring qualified educational assistants for children with disabilities; offering opportunities for participation and competition for **all** ability levels; and time for unstructured play. Opportunities for sport and physical activity professional development will mean better quality programs with more teacher support.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH PROMOTION PROFESSIONALS** can work with decision makers to find and enact solutions to issues related to safety, liability and other constraints faced by organizations and institutions to increase physical activity and sport opportunities. They are well positioned to work with municipal councilors, politicians and school trustees directly and through physical activity strategies to push for change; for example, some cities have had success in getting the city to agree to bike lanes on city bridges or no-idling zones in front of schools.

**HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** (physicians, nurses, physical therapists (PTs)...) can educate parents and their young patients about the importance of physical activity and sport by providing literature on the topic; asking them how much physical activity they get,

including active play time; becoming knowledgeable about available opportunities in their communities; encouraging families to be active together and providing physical activity “prescriptions” to treat certain health concerns. They can also educate parents on safety and good methods of introducing sport and physical activity to avoid risks such as the improper use of equipment or overtraining. Further, they can join or contribute to community committees addressing the issue of physical activity and sport.

**RECREATION** (includes municipal recreation, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs...) can partner with other organizations to expand their physical activity and sport programs by accessing other facility space, such as religious institutions, seniors residences, workplaces and day care facilities, or getting help to cover program costs. Communities can look at underused facilities at which to offer programs with health, rather than revenue generation, being the end result.

**SPORT ORGANIZATIONS** (leagues, clubs, teams...) can offer a variety of sport opportunities, such as “multi-sport programs,” that meet the needs of children and youth with varying abilities, interests and skill sets. Offering “Fun Days” and “Try It Out” sessions will encourage greater participation in sport and physical activity offerings.

**ALL OF US WHO OFFER SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES** should ensure programs are conducted in a positive and intentional way—a way that is inclusive, fair, fun and fosters genuine excellence. Plus, youth-led programs, like Sogo Active at [www.sogoactive.com](http://www.sogoactive.com), can increase participation and benefits by drawing on the power of peer influence to encourage inclusion and relevance.

## SECTION 2

# SCHOOL



The Report Card recommends that we develop and implement more P.E. policies like those in Manitoba and New Brunswick —in New Brunswick, policy requires the hiring of a Health and P.E. specialist in every school, and in Manitoba, Health and P.E. are mandatory school subjects right through to grade 12. How do we get set to do this?

### ON OUR MARKS

The Report Card tells us that many schools are choosing to reduce physical education and recess time. We need a time out on this approach! Research indicates that parents, educators and policy-makers who are concerned that Physical Education (P.E.) decreases study time should actually welcome it. Evidence says that academic performance is actually improved by regular physical activity.

Unfortunately, a 2006 study by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) shows that few schools have qualified teachers delivering physical education (less than half) and only 35% of schools provide daily physical education programs.

### GET SET

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ParticipACTION and Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) recommend that we advocate for policies to ensure that Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) is in place in schools across Canada. QDPE calls for compulsory physical education provided for a minimum of 30 minutes each day to all students. It includes well-planned lessons, taught by qualified professionals, and offers a variety of creative, enjoyable learning opportunities throughout the year. Key benefits of quality physical education for students are:

- Acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable successful participation in a variety of physical activities
- Enhanced academic performance
- Habits that will likely lead to life-long participation in health-enhancing activities

Schools play a critical role in the healthy development of children and youth—no other social institution has the opportunity to reach every child in Canada, to build them a foundation to be active now, and for life.

SCHOOL

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**EDUCATION DECISION MAKERS** can ensure that QDPE is included as a core subject in school curricula—this includes adequate time in the school schedule, qualified and enthusiastic teachers, sufficient resources and equipment, appropriate adapted physical education options, and full delivery of the provincial/territorial physical education curriculum. QDPE is best supported by a school environment that reinforces and provides the opportunity for physical activity outside of class, integrates school-community partnerships, involves and supports families and fosters an overall culture of physical activity. Investment in professional development in physical activity and health is essential.

**NGOs** can support advocacy efforts on the importance of quality P.E. for every child. They can develop resources and programs that complement school curricula, and help create that culture of physical activity by partnering with schools, sharing health information and supporting families.

**HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** (physicians, nurses, physical therapists (PTs)...) can stress the importance of quality physical education to parents and decision makers and help them understand the power of their voice in influencing the school system to put these important programs in place. They can also encourage parents to get involved in the school and volunteer with clubs, teams and programs.

**RECREATION** (municipal recreation, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs...) can reinforce the important message of quality physical education to the children and parents they serve. They can foster partnerships with schools to offer trips to local recreation centres that offer different activities, such as skating or climbing. They can work with the schools and families to offer after-school physical activity programming on school property.

**SPORT ORGANIZATIONS** can work with schools to create support resources and tools that assist with the development of fundamental movement skills and sport participation opportunities for children.

## SECTION 3

# FAMILY AND PEERS



The Report Card recommends that we promote active time as quality family time to help combat the barrier of lack of time. How do we get set to do this?

### ON OUR MARKS

The Report Card underlines the key role that family and peers play in influencing children and youth activity levels. Parent role modeling, friend support and attitudes have measurable impact on kids. An important message is that many parents perceive their kids as active, when they are actually not active enough—one study said 88% of parents think their kids get plenty of exercise, but we know that only 13% of kids are meeting Canada’s physical activity guidelines.

As you might expect, parents who are active have more active children. What you may not expect, is that parents say they have less time to be active with their kids—but also report spending over 15 hours a week in front of the TV! Perhaps parents don’t realize their own physical activity and sport participation habits influence their kids’ activity levels. As for peers ... active friends and active leisure time have a big impact—especially for girls.

### GET SET

The Report Card recommends that we promote active time as quality family time to help combat the barrier of lack of time. How do we get set to do this?

ParticipACTION believes that the family is critical in promoting and supporting physical activity and sport participation behaviours and choices in kids. Playing together, being active as a family, reducing sedentary time and making physical activity part of your “together time” send a powerful message. Parents must set a good example and make active choices for their young children; as kids reach their teenage years, parents should also encourage and support their child to be active with their friends. Peer engagement positively impacts physical activity levels, enjoyment and participation.

Parents need to make a “physical activity-friendly” home for the sake of their kids—and also themselves! Turning off the screens and getting active are the right things to do as role models, and will also help parents achieve a healthy balance and meet the demands of parenting.

FAMILY AND PEERS

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**PARENTS** can model active behaviour, be active with kids and support their kids' physical activity by walking or wheeling with them to school, investing in equipment, taking them to clubs or programs, reducing pressure to win, letting them try new things...and watching them play!

**EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL COUNCILS** can support families by adding a physical activity component to school events, like carnivals and meet-the-teacher nights. Teachers can assign physical activity homework that requires parent or family participation. And schools can offer Active and Safe Routes to School programs, as well as policies that encourage parents to park and walk a few blocks to the front door, or trade off with each other to park and walk together as a group.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH PROMOTION PROFESSIONALS** can work with schools to develop a comprehensive school health approach, where a key component is family involvement and peer support—for example, a parents' walking club that meets after dropping their children off at school in the morning. They can influence decision makers and elected officials to help increase physical activity for families, educate families, promote alternatives to TV and screens and connect community partners and create a coordinated community plan that includes family-friendly physical activity opportunities and policies.

**HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** (physicians, nurses...) can educate new parents about the importance of physical activity from birth, and the role that they play in getting their children active. At each visit, the family doctor can ask young patients and caregivers about their physical activity, offer tips for getting active and tell them where to seek information. They should reinforce Canadian Paediatric Society screen time guidelines of no more than two hours per day for children and youth, and less than one hour for preschoolers.

**RECREATION** (municipal recreation, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs...) can ensure they offer peer-led and family-oriented opportunities such as drop-in family gym time, cultural games and programs that suit all ages, genders and ability levels, and offer active daycare for 0-5-year-olds during adult programs. Facilities can consider flat family membership fees. Dance studios and other sport providers can offer simultaneous classes for parents. They can also work with diverse community partners to offer culturally-appropriate programs and promote activities in various languages.

**SPORT ORGANIZATIONS** can get families involved by having team games or special sport days where all members of the family can learn a sport. Individualized training plans can recommend activities that include parents and other family members. Multi-sport programs build sport fundamentals in a non-competitive environment, so kids have the skills to later move into sport-specific programs. A variety of competitive, non-competitive, structured and unstructured programs for all ages will keep kids involved.



## SECTION 4

# BUILT ENVIRONMENT



The Report Card recommends that we educate municipal decision makers (urban design/planning, transportation, public health, recreation, education, etc.) regarding the health and environmental benefits of active transportation and being active outside for leisure, and advocate for improvements in built environment design. How do we get set to do this?

### ON OUR MARKS

The Report Card tells us that the built environment—defined as the manufactured physical structures and infrastructure of communities—plays an important role in the uptake of child and youth physical activity. The design of our communities impacts the settings in which our kids live, and affects their choices to be active.

Despite this, most Canadian communities are designed in ways that encourage car dependency, and discourage walking and “people-powered” transport. Suburban communities and rural areas often lack active living basics such as sidewalks and cycling lanes, safe lighting, crosswalks and amenities within walking distance of homes. “Playable” communities are also important—we need green spaces, streets, parks and playgrounds that support physical activity and let kids be kids. Plus, communities designed with universal access in mind will provide ease-of-use for all community members.

### GET SET

The Report Card recommends that we educate municipal decision makers (urban design/planning, transportation, public health, recreation, education, etc.) regarding the health and environmental benefits of active transportation and being active outside for leisure, and advocate for improvements in built environment design. How do we get set to do this?

ParticipACTION and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (HSF) believe it is important to educate and engage the public in understanding the relationship between the built environment, physical activity and health. Working together with organizations such as the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) or Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) can help us educate the public, planning professionals and others about health and the built environment. We have great opportunities to influence the design of new communities, but we have to focus on retrofitting our own neighbourhoods, too. As OPPI puts it, “you are where you live!”

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**EDUCATION DECISION MAKERS** can identify ways in which their facilities, programs and policies can support communities in becoming more active, including support for Active and Safe Routes to School initiatives, beautifying the grounds, fostering school-community partnerships and making the school a “community hub” that offers physical activity opportunities to the whole neighbourhood.

**NGOs** can facilitate community-level multi-sectoral engagement and collaboration between citizens, community organizations, municipal planning professionals, parks and recreation, local elected officials, property developers and small businesses. Physical activity promoters and their volunteer boards and committees should include urban planners and engineers to help shape a built environment that can help promote physical activity, accessibility and equity.

**HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** (physicians, nurses, PTs...) can educate parents about the benefits of active transportation, particularly as it relates to getting their children to/from school. Further, they can encourage parents to advocate for policies in

the community, and at school, that support active transportation. They can take part in forums and workshops where community plans and policies are being developed.

**RECREATION AND PARKS DEPARTMENTS,** with their municipal colleagues, play a key role in assessing the internal and external infrastructure needs and assets in a community, and ensuring that the elements of a safe and walkable community are in place. A healthy community needs official plans and zoning guided by sustainability guidelines, as well as good lighting, level access (where appropriate), clean parks, aesthetically pleasing neighbourhoods and maintained trails.

**ALL PARTNERS** can share and implement evidence-based, policy-relevant knowledge, best practices and resources on the built environment and health relationship. As well, we must measure results, share successes and lessons learned with audiences who can apply them to promote active, healthy community design.

# RESOURCES

Active Healthy Kids Canada and ParticipACTION have created plenty of free resources that you can download and share. Here's what's out there and where you can find them.



## ACTIVE HEALTHY KIDS CANADA REPORT CARD (SHORT FORM)

This Short Form is a quick-reference research report with all the main findings and grades in this year's Report Card. It's online at [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)



## ARTICLE – ACTIVE KIDS SCORE HIGHER

Free article for newsletters, websites, etc., with key findings and quotes from researchers. Great for translating research for a lay audience. It's online at [www.activehealthykids.ca/Resources](http://www.activehealthykids.ca/Resources)



## ACTIVE HEALTHY KIDS CANADA REPORT CARD (FULL)

This Long Form is the fully referenced research report with full descriptions of all findings in this year's Report Card. Intended for researchers and policy makers. It's online at [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)



## PARTICIPACTION PARENT'S GUIDE

A free, downloadable parent's guide with tips on how to use the Report Card information to get your kids more active. It's online at [www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids](http://www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids)



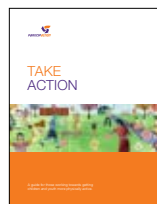
## REPORT CARD PRESENTATION

A fully downloadable PowerPoint presentation with key findings from the Report Card. You are welcome to edit and use in your own presentations. It's online at [www.activehealthykids.ca/Resources](http://www.activehealthykids.ca/Resources)



## PARTICIPACTION PARENT'S WEBSITE

A website with links to stories, radio ads and "A day in the life of an active child" for parents. It's online at [www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids](http://www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids)



## PLAN FOR ACTION

This Plan for Action is available on ParticipACTION's website at [www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids](http://www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids)



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Plus, find additional resources and links to partner downloads at [www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids](http://www.participACTION.com/inspiringkids)

At ParticipACTION, we are committed to bringing people together to address the issue of physical inactivity in Canada. As a strategic partner with Active Healthy Kids Canada, we will continue to bring you resources that translate research into useful tools for partners, parents, schools and communities.

Together, we can achieve a healthier, more active Canada.

Thank you to our partners who provided and reviewed content with us to create this Plan for Action:



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**ParticipACTION** is the national voice of physical activity and sport participation in Canada. Through leadership in communications, capacity building and knowledge exchange, we inspire and support Canadians to move more.

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