

Increasing the number of active Canadians

- 51 percent of Canadians are physically inactive. Physical inactivity is the most widespread risk factor for heart disease and, after smoking, the greatest contributor to death and disability. It also costs Canadians \$1.6 billion and \$3.7 billion in direct and indirect costs annually.
- Achieving recommended physical activity levels, on the other hand, has been proven to reduce all cause mortality rates by up to 30 percent. Increasing physical activity levels by just 10 percent would also save Canadians over \$150 million annually in direct health costs alone.
- Sport offers a fun and relaxing means of engaging more Canadians in moderate to vigorous physical activity on a regular basis. Adult Canadians active in sport average almost three hours of mostly moderate or vigorous physical activity per week and are, therefore, likely reaching recommended activity levels.
- In 2004, about 80 percent of sportspeople surveyed rated sport as very important in improving their physical fitness and health. In the same survey, over 70 percent described their overall state of health as excellent or very good compared with less than 50 percent of those not active in sport.

Stemming the tide of child obesity

- 25 percent of adult Canadians and almost 10 percent of children aged 7-13 are currently at risk of disability, disease and premature death because they are obese.
- Between 2003 and 2006, the number of obese children and youth in Canada increased a further 35.7 percent. Aboriginal children are particularly affected with 55 percent of children and youth on reserves overweight or obese, and 41 percent of those living off reserve.
- Physical inactivity is one cause of this obesity. 91 percent of Canadian children and youth are not meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines for their age group.
- Children who participate in organized physical activity and sport, however, are more likely to meet these guidelines than those who do not. However, even among children active in sport, too few are achieving target activity levels (11 percent versus 5 percent of those not involved in sport).
- Greater efforts are needed to help children and youth become more active, with sport providing one important avenue.

Reducing the burden of chronic disease

- Physical activity plays a critical role in preventing and managing many chronic and non-communicable diseases that rank among the leading causes of death and disability in Canada and account for a large portion of our health care spending:
- Cardiovascular disease – People who participate in regular physical activity are at much less risk of suffering a heart attack and those who have cardiovascular disease can reduce their risk of negative outcomes by over 60 percent by being physically active.
- Cancer – Physical activity reduces the risk of cancer by 30-40 percent, relative to people who are less active, with particular benefits in helping to prevent breast and colon cancer.

- Diabetes – Both cardiovascular and resistance exercise can help lower the risk of Type 2 diabetes, particularly among people who are overweight and at greatest risk. Exercise also helps people manage their diabetes by stabilizing their blood sugar levels.
- Osteoporosis – Physical activity (particularly resistance exercise), with calcium and vitamin D, plays an important role in building bone mass, slowing the rate of bone loss, and improving bone density in older women, helping to prevent bone fractures which affect 25 percent of post-menopausal North American women.

Enhancing mental health

- Mental illness affects 1 in 5 Canadians and is closely linked to social isolation, poor quality of life and increased mortality, as well as enormous economic and social costs. Depression alone costs Canadians over \$5 billion annually, while the total annual cost of all mental illness is estimated at \$1,056 per capita.
- Physical activity offers important mental health benefits: enhancing self-esteem, helping to manage stress and anxiety, and alleviating depression. In patients with psychiatric disorders, physical exercise has been shown to diminish clinical symptoms, especially for depression.
- Sport, as distinct from individual activity, offers opportunities for social relationships, friendship, and support that contribute significantly to emotional and mental health.

Promoting healthy aging

- While sport participation rates tend to decline with age, 17 percent of all Canadians over 55 still actively participate in sport.
- Physical activity helps to improve strength, balance and coordination as people age, reducing the risk of falls and injuries, improving overall functioning and quality of life, and enabling individuals to remain independent longer. Recent research has also shown that exercise improves memory and learning, and reduces the risk of cognitive loss through Alzheimer's and small strokes.
- Sport participation also provides an important source of social connection for older Canadians who are at greater risk of social isolation once they retire from the labour force.
- At the population level, longer healthier lives translate into greater aggregate productivity for Canada's labour force. This has important economic implications as our population continues to age and more Canadians reach the traditional retirement age.

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