

DRAFT

September 19, 2001

Coalition For Active Living (CAL)

Working to ensure the environments in which Canadians live, learn, work and play support regular physical activity.

A Plan of Action**A. PREAMBLE**

In order to determine the issues that the Coalition for Active Living could address, nationwide consultations were held from December 2000 to January 2001. Some 200 active living leaders across Canada were asked to identify

- (a) the most critical national issues relating to physical activity,
- (b) some effective and realistic solutions to these issues and
- (c) the specific actions that CAL could take in the short term.

The consultations affirmed the need for a strong national voice and an identification of five national issues:

- infrastructure
- Access
- Children and Youth
- Diversity
- Communication.

In April 2001, active living leaders from across Canada met to develop compelling descriptions of the five national issues; identify the evidence of the nature, scope and importance of the issues; propose policies and actions to address the issues; and identify decision-makers who could act on the proposed policies and actions.

Representatives from 38 organizations across Canada met in June 2001 to adopt the Plan of Action and to discuss ways of influencing key decision-makers to act on the six-point plan. They also determined that the Coalition should be defined as

an “action” coalition whose only purpose is to advocate for and promote the Coalition for Active Living Plan of Action.

B. STATE OF AFFAIRS

Physical Inactivity: A Canadian Epidemic

During the 1970s and 1980s, Canadians embraced physical activity with enthusiasm and vigour. Throughout the 1990s, however, participation slackened alarmingly, and in all segments of the population. Today, the trend to physical inactivity is reaching epidemic proportions.

The irony is that most Canadians recognize the benefits of physical activity to their overall well-being, health, independence, and quality of life. They say they understand the vital role that physical activity plays in controlling the costs of health care. They acknowledge that physical activity has a positive impact on academic performance, youth behaviour, and workplace productivity.

Still they remain inactive, despite the many pitfalls of physical inactivity. One of the most compelling is the escalating incidence of childhood and youth obesity which has doubled in recent years. A major factor is the nationwide failure to adopt mandatory physical education in Canada’s schools, despite widespread support for such action. Another factor is the failure to support initiatives that ensure other physical activity opportunities for our children.

Canada is not alone. In every country around the world where physical inactivity is a concern, efforts to promote healthy behaviours are clear on one point: even when citizens support a healthy lifestyle, they must first be educated about its value and second, must be assured of access to physical activities that are attractive and safe.

Why the Erosion?

The Coalition for Active Living knows why physical activity in Canada has steadily eroded over the past decade.

FACT: Physical education in our schools has been cut — drastically.

FACT: Physical activity opportunities during non-school hours have been cut.

FACT: Recreation budgets have been cut to a dangerous level resulting in fewer leaders, fewer training opportunities for those who remain, and reduced programming.

FACT: Poor maintenance of aging municipal facilities, workplaces, and schools has led to an inability to attract clientele or to adequately serve the needs of those who do come.

FACT: Schedules and programs fail to consider accessibility.

FACT: Safety factors and integration barriers prevent seniors and persons with a disability from participating in physical activity.

FACT: Fees for programs and facilities, both indoors and outdoors, discourage physical activity among the economically disadvantaged.

FACT: Programs and facilities fail to keep up with changing cultural and demographic trends.

FACT: Transportation and urban planning are designed for cars, not legs, creating environments that fail to support and encourage active living.

FACT: A motivating media campaign that portrays physical activity as the norm and shows how easily a physically active lifestyle can be achieved is not in place.

FACT: Governments, health professionals, service providers, and the media fail to provide consistent messaging about the values and varieties of physical activity.

Stamping Out the Epidemic

The Coalition for Active Living calls upon parents, health care professionals, and decision-makers at all levels, public, private, and non-governmental sectors to stamp out the physical inactivity epidemic.

Because this issue is on a par with the plagues of tobacco, drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS, physical inactivity demands open and frank discussion backed by a meaningful allocation of resources and a six-point action plan.

C. A SIX-POINT PLAN OF ACTION FOR A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE CANADA

POINT 1

Establish national, targeted, ongoing, and state-of-the-art communications for distribution to the media and advertising agencies. Develop messages that are consistent, reach all levels of the population, and strongly promote specific opportunities for physical activity where Canadians live, learn, work, and play.

POINT 2

Implement a comprehensive plan to educate children and youth about the importance of physical education and how to access activity within the community in order to make healthy lifestyle choices.

POINT 3**Advocate for new and upgraded transportation systems**

that include the creation of safe, effective, and accessible paths and networks for cycling, walking, and wheeling.

POINT 4

Advocate for the removal of barriers to publicly funded facilities and programs. Address unaffordable fees, poorly maintained facilities, reduced schedules and programs, diminished human resources, and the ever-increasing cultural diversity of activity interests.

POINT 5

Advocate for adequately funded health promotion and for physical activity to be recognized as a priority to be integrated into a wide range of community health initiatives.

POINT 6

Advocate that employers adopt policies that promote, support, and reward physical activity in the workplace.

Note:

The Coalition for Active Living pledges to urge elected officials and decision-makers in health, education, recreation, and business to develop and adopt policies that will stamp out the physical inactivity epidemic.

Join the Coalition for Active Living by calling (613) 523-8794 or by email at pjhunt@magma.ca