

The Toronto Charter for Physical Activity



TOWARD POLITICAL COMMITMENT, POLICY ACTION AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING AND SUSTAINING HEALTH ENHANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity promotes health and prevents disease, improves social connections and quality of life, provides economic benefits and contributes to environmental sustainability. Communities that support health enhancing physical activity, in a variety of ways, in different settings, and throughout life can achieve many of these benefits.

This Charter is a call for all countries, regions and communities to strive for greater political commitment and community action to achieve physical activity for all.

Physical activity – a powerful investment in people

Throughout the world, technology, urbanization and automobile-focussed community design have engineered physical activity out of daily life. Opportunities for physical activity continue to decline while the prevalence of sedentary lifestyles increases in most countries, resulting in major health, social and economic consequences.

In relation to health, physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor associated with non-communicable diseases and contributes to over two million preventable deaths annually worldwide. Physical inactivity also contributes to increasing childhood obesity which in turn increases the likelihood of adult obesity and other chronic conditions. Physical activity benefits people of all ages. For older adults it is never too late to start physical activity, and the benefits of becoming physically active will be felt rapidly. ***For the economy***, physical inactivity has been estimated to account for 1 to 3% of health care costs in high income countries and has a significant impact on low and middle-income countries in terms of lost productivity and lost healthy life years. ***For sustainable development***, promotion of active modes of transport such as walking, cycling and public transport can reduce harmful exhaust and carbon emissions. These measures as well as healthy urban planning have been identified as important strategies for promoting physical activity and reducing dependence on motor vehicle use in all countries, and importantly, in those developing countries experiencing rapid urbanization.

Actions that increase opportunities for physical activity are a powerful investment in reducing non-communicable diseases and improving health, as well as providing benefits for economic and sustainable development of countries throughout the world.

Why a Charter on Physical Activity?

This Charter for Physical Activity is both a call for action and a platform for advocacy to improve opportunities for physically active lifestyles for all. Organizations and individuals interested in promoting physical activity can use this Charter to influence decision makers at national, regional, and local levels. This Charter can be used to unite health, transport, sport and recreation, education and private sectors toward a shared goal, namely:

To elevate physical activity as a policy priority and develop, adequately resource, and implement cross-sector policies, plans and intervention programs to increase population levels of physical activity throughout the world.

Guiding principles for a population-based approach to physical activity

Countries and organizations working to increase participation in physical activity are encouraged to adopt the following guiding principles. These principles are consistent with the World Health Organization's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health as well as other international health promotion charters.

1. Adopt evidence-based strategies for physical activity that target the whole population as well as specific population sub-groups.
2. Embrace an equity and human rights approach aimed at reducing social inequalities and disparities of access to physical activity.
3. Address the physical, social and environmental determinants of physical activity aggressively.
4. Implement actions that are sustainable at multiple levels and across multiple sectors to achieve greatest impact.
5. Undertake advocacy to gain support from decision makers and the general community to obtain an increase in resources and political commitment.
6. Support capacity-building in research, practice, and training, including capacity-building in public health systems.
7. Take a life-stage approach that addresses the needs of children, families, adults and older adults.
8. Ensure cultural sensitivity and recognise the need to adapt physical activity strategies to varying 'local realities' and resources.



A framework for action

This Charter calls for concerted action across five key areas. This action should involve governments, non-government organizations, professional associations, and other agencies, both within and, importantly, outside the health sector as well as communities themselves.

1. IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

Develop and disseminate a national action plan for physical activity promotion that makes physical activity a health and social priority. National plans should:

- Have input from a broad constituency representative of the intended target population.
- Provide a framework for implementation that can be articulated at the national, regional, provincial, district and/or local levels.
- Describe roles and actions that government, non-government and private-sector organizations can and should take to implement the plan and promote physical activity.
- Define accountability for actions to ensure reasonable chance of implementation. Leadership for physical activity planning may come from the health sector, the sport and recreation sector, and other relevant agencies or from a cross-sector coalition.

2. DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACTION

Actions aimed at increasing population levels of physical activity should be planned and performed through partnerships and collaborations involving different health and non-health sectors at multiple levels. Successful partnerships are developed by fostering:

- Synergy across missions, values, and activities of organizations.
- Mutual support across organizations that encourages sharing information and best practices for success.
- Promotion of shared responsibilities and shared resources in the development and implementation of policies and activities.

Examples of partnerships that support the promotion of physical activity are:

- Cross-level government working parties including representatives from national, regional, and local levels of government to implement action plans at each level in a synergistic manner.
- Whole-of-government and community initiatives involving different departments and agencies (for example, transport, urban planning, economic development, environmental development, education, sport, recreation, and health) work in collaboration and sharing resources to achieve the common goal of promoting physical activity in the population they serve.
- Coalitions of non-government organisations formed to advocate for and promote physical activity.
- National or regional partnership forums with key agencies in health and non-health sectors, and public and private stakeholders to promote programs and policies.



3. REORIENT SERVICES AND FUNDING TO PRIORITISE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In most cases, successful action to promote a more active population will require a reorientation of priorities in favour of health-enhancing physical activity. Reorienting services and funding systems towards physical activity can deliver multiple benefits including: better health; cleaner air; reduced traffic congestion; cost-saving; and greater social connections. Examples of actions underway in many countries and which are potentially relevant for adoption elsewhere include:

In health:

- Screening of patients for levels of physical activity at every primary care consultation, and provision of brief, structured advice and referral to community programs for insufficiently active patients.
- For patients with diseases/conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers or arthritis, screening by health and exercise professionals for contraindications and provision of advice on physical activity as part of treatment, management and review plans.
- Health sector funding for physical activity related health promotion campaigns and programs.

In education:

- Education systems prioritizing high quality compulsory physical education in schools and enhancing physical education training for all teachers.

In transportation:

- Transport policies and services prioritizing walking, cycling and public transit infrastructure over roads.
- Transportation departments fund programs to promote the benefits of using these modes of transport.

In planning:

- Planners implementing evidence-based healthy urban design codes that support walking, cycling and recreational physical activity.
- Planners prioritising urban design that provides opportunities for sport, recreation and physical activity by increasing access to public space where people of all ages and abilities can be physically active.

In sport and recreation:

- Continuing a focus on Sport for All promoting increased participation.



4. INTRODUCE REGULATIONS AND POLICIES THAT ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Lessons learned from both developed and developing countries, show that a supportive policy framework and regulatory action are required to achieve sustainable changes in government and organisational 'systems'. Policies that support health enhancing physical activity are needed across the health, transport, education, and sport/recreation systems and services.

Examples of supportive policy and regulations include:

- Clear national objectives for increasing population levels of physical activity that state by how much and by when. All sectors can share common goals and identify their contribution. An example of a national target might be: 'to increase physical activity levels in adults from 25% to 30% by 2015'.
- Urban planning policies and design guidelines that support walking, cycling, public transport, sport and recreation with a particular focus on access and safety.
- Transport policies that support non-motorized modes of transportation.
- Fiscal policies such as subsidies, incentives and tax deductions that may support participation in physical activity.
- Labour and workplace policies that support physical activity.
- Education policies that support physical education, healthy school environments and active travel to school.

5. ADOPT COMMUNITY-LEVEL APPROACHES

Education programmes and environments that inform, motivate and support the community to be active should form key parts of any successful national approach to physical activity. Community-level approaches that influence behavioural, social and built environmental determinants are necessary. These actions can be implemented across settings and can include:

In schools:

- Good quality compulsory school physical education.

In cities and suburbs:

- Walking and cycling programs in neighbourhoods.
- Healthy urban design that supports opportunities for sport, recreation and physical activity by increasing access to places where people can be physically active.
- Sustainable and efficient transport systems that prioritise walking, cycling and the use of public transport.

In workplaces:

- Workplace programs that encourage and support employees and their families to lead active lifestyles.

In primary care:

- Physical activity interventions and funding systems in primary care.

In sport and recreation:

- Sport and recreation policy that prioritises increased community participation.



A call to action

All those who are committed to improving the health and quality of life of individuals and populations must emphasize the important role of health-enhancing physical activity to achieving this objective. The **Toronto Charter for Physical Activity** provides a solid foundation and direction for the development and implementation of actions to increase population levels of physical activity. However, high level advocacy is required to obtain and maintain commitment to the full adoption and implementation of these principles and five areas of action in all countries.

We encourage all interested stakeholders to use the **Toronto Charter for Physical Activity** as an advocacy tool and to engage with government representatives, across all sectors, to secure their role and support in advancing population levels of health enhancing physical activity.

We encourage you to play a role in advocating for greater recognition and action on health-enhancing physical activity and to use the **Toronto Charter for Physical Activity** to start and to scale up action in your country and region. We welcome your support and ask you to act now!

For further information about the Charter please visit:

<http://www.cflri.ca/icpaph/en/index.php>

To participate in the Global Consultation
underway please visit
www.econsultation.org.uk



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