

## Highlights from the 2010 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

### ***Healthy habits start earlier than you think***

- The early years are a critical period for healthy development. Research shows lifestyle patterns set before the age of five predict obesity and health outcomes in later childhood and through adulthood.
- Sadly, 15.2 per cent of two- to five-year-old Canadian children are overweight and 6.3 per cent are obese.<sup>1</sup> These overweight children are four times more likely to become overweight as adults.<sup>2</sup>
- Less than half of Canadian children under five are getting regular physical activity as part of daily routines – meaning many are already on the path to inactivity before they reach their fifth birthday.
- While international guidelines vary, the consensus is all children aged one to five years should participate in at least two hours of physical activity every day, accumulated over many sessions through play, games, transportation and recreation.<sup>3</sup>
- Many children under five years old spend a lot of their time in day care settings where active play should be routine, but recent research indicates this isn't the case. In fact, one study reported 89 per cent of the day spent in day care was sedentary.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Canadian children are still glued to the screen***

- The 2010 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card once again assigns an F for Screen Time as 90 per cent of Canadian children are still spending too much time in front of television, computer and video screens instead of being physically active. Kids are accumulating six hours of screen time on weekdays and more than seven hours on weekend days – roughly equivalent to an adult's work week.<sup>5</sup>
- For healthy development, it's recommended children under age two get zero screen time. However, 90 per cent of children begin watching TV before their second birthday.<sup>6</sup>
- In 1971, the average age children began to watch TV was four years; today, it is five months.<sup>7</sup>
- Despite the effects of early childhood screen time exposure, new e-parenting products continue to surface – a recent survey shows four of the 10 best-selling education apps in the iTunes store are designed for children under four years of age.
- The typical 8- to 18-year-old's home contains an average of 3.8 TVs, 2.8 DVD or VCR players, one digital video recorder, two computers and 2.3 console video game players.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shields M. Overweight and obesity among children and youth. *Health Rep.* 2006;17:27-42.

<sup>2</sup> Freedman D, Kettel Khan L, Serdula M, Dietz W, Srinivasan S, Berenson G. The relation of childhood BMI to adult adiposity: the Bogalusa Heart Study. *Pediatrics.* 2005;115:22-27.

<sup>3</sup> Okely A, Salmon J, Trost S, Hinkley T. Discussion paper for the development of physical activity recommendations for children under five years. Canberra, ACT, Australia: Australian Department of Health and Ageing, Government of Australia; 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Brown W, Pfeiffer K, McIver K, Dowda M, Addy C, Pate R. Social and environmental factors associated with preschoolers' nonsedentary physical activity. *Child Development.* 2009;80:45-58.

<sup>5</sup> Active Healthy Kids Canada. *It's Time to Unplug Our Kids. Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth 2008.* Toronto, Canada: Active Healthy Kids Canada; 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Christakis D. The effects of infant media usage: what do we know and what should we learn? *Acta Paediatr.* 2009;98:8-16.

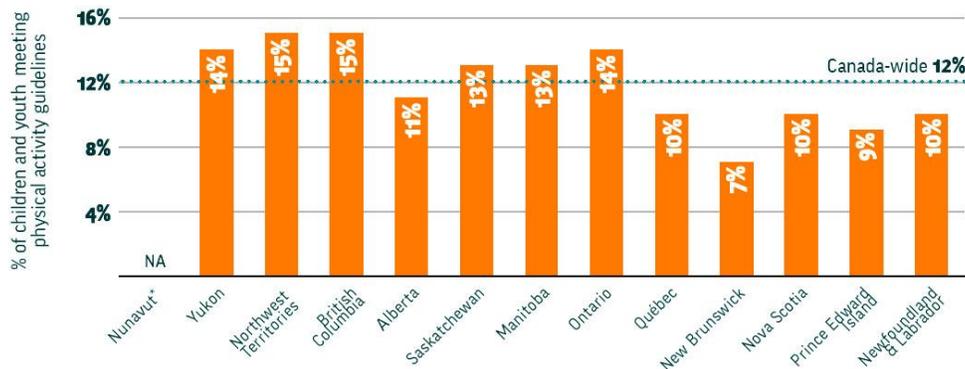
<sup>7</sup> Zimmerman F, Christakis D, Meltzoff A. Television and dvd/video viewing in children younger than 2 years. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2007;161:473-479.

<sup>8</sup> Rideout V, Foehr U, Roberts D. *Generation M2 – Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study.* Menlo Park, California: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation; 2010

- Children and youth living with household rules about media use are exposed to nearly three hours less screen time per day than those who don't have rules.<sup>9</sup> However, only 28 per cent of children reported having rules about how long they're allowed to watch TV.
- Too much screen time is associated with negative psychological consequences such as reduced academic achievement and sleep, and engagement at a younger age in high-risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol and having sex.
- Active video gaming is a suitable replacement for sedentary activities, but should not replace outdoor play or physical education.

### Canadian youth are still sedentary

- For the fourth year in a row, the 2010 Report Card awarded an F for physical activity levels, as only 12 per cent of Canadian children and youth are meeting the guidelines set forth by Canada's Physical Activity Guides of 90 minutes per day.<sup>10</sup>
- No Canadian provinces or territories are meeting the Canadian physical activity guidelines of 90 minutes of physical activity per day.



Percentage of children and youth meeting physical activity guidelines in each province and territory.

\*Nunavut percentage not available due to small sample size.

- It's notable that 31 per cent of Canadian children and youth are achieving international physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity a day.
- The inactivity crisis is particularly serious for girls. Only five per cent of adolescent girls are meeting Canadian physical activity guidelines. However, 20 per cent of boys aged five to 10 and 15 per cent of boys aged 11 to 14 are meeting the guidelines.<sup>11</sup>
- Physical activity doesn't just benefit children's physical health. Research shows physical activity can be associated with improved psychological well-being, reduced depression and anxiety levels,<sup>12</sup> reduced bullying<sup>13</sup> and improved self-esteem.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Rideout V, Foehr U, Roberts D. Generation M2 – Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study. Menlo Park, California: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation; 2010

<sup>10</sup> Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines. September 7, 2008. <http://www.csep.ca/main.cfm?cid=574&nid=8363>.

<sup>11</sup> CAN PLAY data from CFLRI (2007-2009)

<sup>12</sup> Larun L, Nordheim L, Ekeland E, Hagen K, Heian F. Exercise in prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression among children and young people. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2006:Art. No.: CD004691.

<sup>13</sup> Storch E, Milsom V, Debraganza N, Lewin A, Geffken G, Silverstein J. Peer victimization, psychosocial adjustment, and physical activity in overweight and at-risk-for-overweight youth. J Pediatr Psychol. 2007;32:80-89.

<sup>14</sup> Ekeland E, Heian F, Hagen K, Abbott J, Nordheim L. Exercise to improve self-esteem in children and young people (Cochrane Review). Vol. CD003683. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons; 2004.

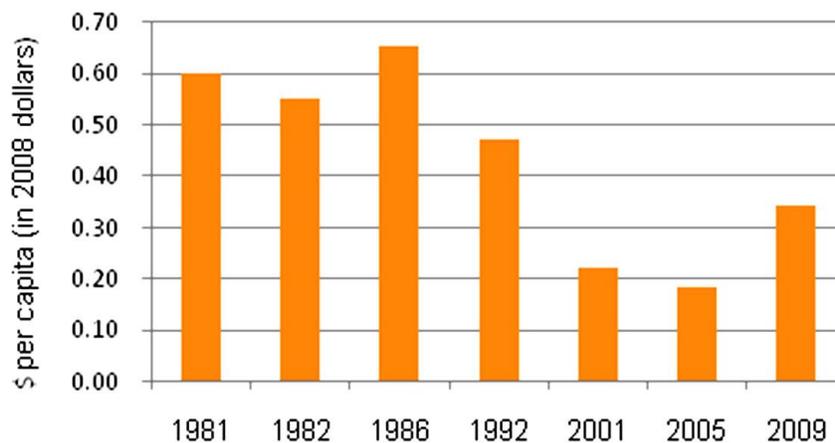
### **The importance of active play**

- Active play is free, unstructured activity such as running with friends at the playground, playing with balls, and collecting sticks in the woods.
- Active play is critical for the healthy development of children under five as it helps build social skills, imaginations and self-esteem.
- It has been suggested that children require blocks of free time to plan, pretend, and enact play as individuals and a group. Families, child care centres, schools and community settings need to provide safe, supervised yet unstructured play spaces for active play where children and their peers can engage in physical activity of their own design.
- Research indicates that at least half of the physical activity accumulated by children should be through active play.

### **Is Canadian society investing enough?**

- The 2010 Report Card assigns an F for Federal Government Investment for the first time this year. New data show funding in real dollars per capita has risen slightly since 2005, but is only half of what it was in 1986.

Federal spending on physical activity, 1981-2009



*Federal Government spending on physical activity promotion from 1981 through to 2009 in 2008 dollars (adjusted for inflation using the 2008 Consumer Price Index).*

- The federal government has exhibited a commitment to funding sport and physical activity at some levels, but more investment is needed in getting Canadian children and youth more physically active.
- Despite being aimed at lower income families, the Canadian Fitness Tax Credit appears to be yielding more benefit for middle and upper income families. More needs to be done to target households which require support to overcome barriers to sport and physical activity participation; such barriers include income, transportation and work schedules.
- A 2008 UNICEF study ranked Canada at the bottom of 25 countries for early childhood education and care, citing lack of substantial public investment until children reach the age of five.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. *The child care transition, Innocenti Report Card 8. Report Card 8. Florence, Italy; 2008*

### ***At the community level***

- Sport and Physical Activity Opportunities at School receives a C this year in the Report Card, which is down from a B- in 2009. Schools must provide a variety of physical activity and sporting opportunities that appeal to students with different interests, ability levels and ages. A recent study shows preschoolers are products of their environments, as physical activity levels increase when children have access to appropriate play areas, green space, physical activity equipment and toys.<sup>16</sup>
- More than half of Canadians have physical activity facilities, parks and recreation centres easily accessible to them. However, less than half of Canadian children and youth use the available community physical amenities.
- Ninety-six per cent of 24 major municipalities surveyed in Canada have a community-level policy that hinders physical activity participation in children and youth; for example, advertised by-laws that state “Ball and Hockey Playing Prohibited.”

### ***Parents need to help too!***

- Parents need to keep the TV out of their child’s bedroom, institute screen time limits and create opportunities for active outdoor play for their children and as a family.
- Parents can set their children on the path to an active life with healthy household habits. One study showed that four-year-old children with home routines of regular family meals, adequate sleep and limited screen time had a 40 per cent lower risk of obesity.<sup>17</sup>
- Using active transportation to get to and from school is one of the easiest ways to incorporate physical activity into one’s day. Parents need to walk their kids to school more often.
- There is a disconnect between what parents think their kids are doing and what they’re actually doing when it comes to physical activity. A 2007 survey found that when parents and children of the same family were asked whether they engaged in family physical activity at least once per week their answers were very different – 60 per cent of parents reported this was true while only 25 per cent of children corroborated the claim.
- Parents must take responsibility for their children’s activity levels too. They should encourage their child to get involved in sports teams or clubs at school, advocate for physical education classes and active opportunities to be offered every day at school, and involve their youngest family members in active family chores such as raking, vacuuming and gardening.

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<sup>16</sup> Hannon J, Brown B. Increasing preschoolers’ physical activity intensities: an activity-friendly preschool playground intervention. *Prev Med.* 2008;46:532-536.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson S, Whitaker R. Household routines and obesity in US preschool-aged children. *Pediatrics.* 2010;Feb 8. [Epub ahead of print].