

Key Messages and Policy Recommendations for Physical Literacy





Background

In 2011, the Ontario Society of Physical Activity Promoters in Public Health (OSPAPPH) member survey identified access to recreation and physical literacy as key priorities for their health units. Building on the survey results, this key message document was developed to assist physical activity promoters from across the province to deliver consistent messaging from a public health perspective about physical literacy.

These key messages, including policy recommendations, were identified and researched by a physical literacy working group made up of physical activity promoters from a number of OSPAPPH member health units. These messages also received further input from a stakeholder consultation survey.

Using the Key Messages & Policy Recommendations

This document has been created for *internal use* and is not meant to be a stand-alone resource for widespread distribution. It would be appropriate to share this document with your community partners who are working on physical literacy initiatives to ensure consistent messaging.

Several ways that you may utilize this key message document include, but are not limited to:

- Preparing media releases;
- Preparing for media interviews;
- Writing opinion pieces and/or responses to editorials;
- Developing physical literacy-related support material (e.g. presentations, resources);
- Writing position papers;
- Writing reports or guidance documents; and
- Developing or enhancing policies and supporting the work of your community groups or key stakeholders.

This document may also assist you if you are just beginning to develop strategies in the area of physical literacy.

Each of the key messages has supporting evidence from the literature. You may see that a number of evidence points support more than one key message. This is done purposely to fit the format of a media interview when a journalist with his/her questions may attempt to lead you in any number of directions. The repetition helps you to stay on message, internalize the information and ensures your key points are heard.

The policy recommendations outlined in this document were identified to help support and advance the issue of physical literacy in your community. The decision-makers who are targeted to endorse these recommendations are the Ministry of Education and those who oversee educational and childcare settings.

Although the key messages and policy recommendations are directed toward specific decision-makers, physical literacy is an issue affecting a broader audience. As such, the key messages can also be used to raise awareness and mobilize the community around the issue. The key messages are written in a way to answer the following questions:

- What's wrong? The answer to this question further defines the problem and conveys a clear statement of concern;
- Why does it matter? The answer to this question includes the value dimension and will appeal to the decision-maker, but also highlights this is an issue that affects everyone.
- What needs to be done about it? The answer to this question provides clearly defined policy objectives.

A corresponding key message document to address access to recreation has also been developed for similar use.

Key Messages

What is physical literacy?

Individuals who are physically literate move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the healthy development of the whole person. ¹

- Physically literate individuals consistently develop the motivation and ability to understand, communicate, apply, and analyze different forms of movement. ¹
- They are able to demonstrate a variety of movements confidently, competently, creatively and strategically across a wide range of health-related physical activities.¹
- These skills enable individuals to make healthy, active choices that are both beneficial to and respectful of their whole self, others, and their environment.¹

Physical literacy is essential for optimal growth and development.

- Enhancing physical literacy provides children with a sound foundation in movement and sport skills to build on later in life. ²
- Individuals who are physically literate move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit the development of the whole person.¹
- Physical literacy plays a critical part in how an individual's health develops and sets the stage for a healthy active future. ²

Physical literacy lays the foundation for an active life.

- Children and youth who are physically literate have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to lead healthy active lifestyles. ^{2,3}
- Children and youth who are lacking fundamental movement and sport skills are less likely to participate and have fewer opportunities to refine their skills.²
- Not being able to perform just one fundamental movement skill can seriously restrict future opportunities for physical activity, sport and recreation. For example, if you can't swim, you likely won't take part in swimming, diving, water polo, kayaking, sailing, triathlon, sailing and any other sport or activity that requires swimming. ²
- Without physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from or avoid physical activity and sport and may turn to sedentary or unhealthy lifestyle choices. ²

Physical literacy is an important public health issue.

- Many children today lack the basic skills, knowledge, and physical activity behaviours needed to lead healthy active lifestyles as evidenced by the startling rates of inactivity, obesity and decreased fitness.³
- Less than 10 per cent of Canadian children are meeting the recommended daily minimum physical activity requirements for health benefits.⁴
- Physical inactivity is a major contributor to chronic disease and health care spending in Canada. Specifically, 15% to 39% of the seven chronic diseases* examined were attributable to physical inactivity.⁵
- The 2009 estimates indicate that the total annual economic burden of physical inactivity in Canadian adults was \$6.8 billion.⁵
- Today's children and youth are poised to become the first generation that may not live as long as their parents.⁶
- Physical literacy must be made a priority to reverse the trend of chronic disease and other problems related to physical inactivity.²

***Coronary artery disease, stroke, hypertension, colon cancer, breast cancer (women only), Type 2 diabetes, and osteoporosis.**

Developing physical literacy and participation in regular physical activity supports learning readiness and positive behaviours.

- Active children and youth are fit to learn.⁷
- Physical activity in the early years helps increase creativity, learning and academic performance through improvements in cognitive function (e.g., concentration, memory, problem-solving skills/abilities), reduced misconduct and increased attention span.^{7,8}
- Aerobic physical activity is associated with positive self-concept, psychological well-being, and reduced anxiety or depression.⁹
- Physical activity and physical fitness have been directly correlated with improved academic performance.¹⁰
- Healthy active living benefits students in a number of ways including:
 - Increasing productivity and readiness for learning;
 - Improving morale;
 - Decreasing absenteeism;
 - Decreasing bullying and violence;
 - Promoting safe and healthy relationships and;
 - Heightening personal satisfaction.⁸

Physical literacy must be a priority in educational and childcare settings.

- Physical literacy must be held to the same standard as literacy and numeracy.
- There is the assumption that children naturally develop fundamental movement and sport skills, but research shows that this is not the case.²
- Assessment of physical literacy is necessary in order to evaluate the outcomes of future physical literacy programming and support the development of more physically literate children and youth.³
- Childcare and educational settings are the ideal settings for supporting the health and well-being of children and youth as they spend most of their time in these settings.²
- Educational and childcare settings are ideal environments to deliver activities and quality programs to foster the learning and development of physical literacy from birth to onset of adolescence.
- The quality of physical education is vitally important to cognitive and academic outcomes.¹⁰

Policy Recommendations

The Ministry of Education has a vital role to play in ensuring the development of physical literacy in children and youth and must ensure that educational and childcare environments are conducive to physical literacy development.

- The Ministry of Education needs to adopt a mandatory assessment of physical literacy for elementary and secondary students across the province.
- The Ministry of Education needs to ensure quality, daily health and physical education programming is delivered by health and physical education specialists in all Ontario elementary and secondary schools.
- The Ministry of Education needs to evaluate compliance and enforce the Daily Physical Activity (Policy/Program Memorandum No. 138) requirement.
- The Ministry of Education must ensure ongoing staff training related to physical literacy for all teachers, early childhood educators, and childcare providers.
- The Ministry of Education needs to strengthen the Day Nurseries Act to promote and support physical literacy development in licensed childcare settings.
- The Ministry of Education must make health and physical education credits a mandatory requirement for grades 9-12.¹¹

What can physical activity promoters in public health do?

- Connect with regional physical activity networks to help align priorities to support the advancement of physical literacy both regionally and locally.
- Join municipal/regional/local Best Start or Early Years planning tables
- Using a comprehensive school health approach, work with schools and/or school boards to adopt and implement policies that support physical literacy within the school setting.
- Ensure familiarity with the Ontario curriculum, in particular the Health and Physical Education Curriculum(revised 2010) (School Health Guidance Document)
- Work with childcare providers to support the implementation of policies that support physical literacy in early years and childcare settings.
- Seek out and work with community partners who are advancing the issue of physical literacy (sports associations, recreation programs, after-school programs, etc)
- Seek out and work with regional/local colleges offering the Early Childhood Educator diploma program to include physical literacy within the curriculum.
- Promote and support the development of physical literacy terminology within municipal, childcare and educational documents
- Build community capacity for change.
- Share best practice and sample policies relating to physical literacy development Engage in awareness-raising about physical literacy and its importance in increasing physical activity levels and improving health.
- Build internal capacity to ensure all public health staff working in school and childcare settings, and/or with parents and caregivers, are aware of and understand the importance of physical literacy and how it pertains to health.

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² Canadian Sport for Life (n.d.). Developing physical literacy – A guide for parents of children ages 0-12. Retrieved from <http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca/sites/default/files/resources/Developing%20Physical%20Literacy.pdf>

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⁹ Healthy Active Living and Sports Medicine Committee Canadian Paediatric Society (2012). Position Statement - Healthy active living: Physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents. *Paediatric Child Health*, 17(4), 209-10. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cps.ca/document/874/print-ready_e.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIQDIKLPWFMPMSEAA&Expires=2145934800&Signature=HA3ecUsbp4mS5EB%2BFM3oYJY4Smw%3D

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