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April 8, 2013

Hon. Deb Matthews, Ph.D.  
Health Promotion Division, Strategic Initiatives Branch  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
777 Bay Street, 19th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Dear Minister Matthews,

The Ontario Society of Physical Activity Promoters in Public Health's (OSPAPPH) mission is to elevate physical activity as a public health priority in Ontario through engagement, education, advocacy and strategic alliances. We aim to be the unified voice representing public health practitioners with the mandate of promoting physical activity in their respective communities. This society builds on the strengths of an established infrastructure and mandate within the public health system, as well as the partnerships formed at the community, provincial and national levels, with the ultimate purpose of increasing physical activity levels in Ontario.

We are pleased to see that a number of the twenty-three recommendations put forth by the Healthy Kids Panel's report – *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy* – align with those made by OSPAPPH in their [submission letter](#) and by the OPHA Collaborative Chronic Disease Prevention Work Group, of which OSPAPPH is a member, in their report [Strategic Actions to Address Childhood Obesity](#). It is our belief as a society, that the life-course perspective, as well as the creation of communities and environments that support healthy behaviours will positively impact the health of children across Ontario.

While many of the recommendations in the Healthy Kids Strategy Report will aim to reduce childhood obesity by 20 per cent in five years, OSPAPPH is dissatisfied with the limited recommendations on encouraging children and youth to increase physical activity levels. It is our interpretation of this report that most of the recommendations on physical activity are missing the link to effective policy and infrastructure investment that indicates government responsibility for ensuring supportive environments.

OSPAPPH acknowledges that healthy eating is integral to have an impact on obesity rates and we support the Healthy Kids Panel's decision to focus on food. It is our suggestion that a long-term strategy to address healthy weights and the overall health and wellness of Ontario's children and youth, should include a greater emphasis on

physical activity. Specifically, in two priority areas related to physical activity: physical literacy and access to recreation.

### **Physical Literacy:**

Physical literacy lays the foundation for an active life. 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.<sup>1</sup> Children and youth who are physically literate have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to lead healthy active lifestyles<sup>2,3</sup>. Without physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from or avoid physical activity and sport and may turn to sedentary or unhealthy lifestyle choices.<sup>4</sup>

OSPAPPH agrees that schools and childcare settings ideal environments to deliver physical activity and quality programming to foster the learning and nurturing of physical literacy. We support that schools and childcare centres are hubs for child health and community engagement. We believe that these settings are ideal environments to deliver physical activity and quality programs. Such quality programs will foster the learning and development of physical literacy from birth to onset of adolescence. Nonetheless, these recommendations must go beyond the inclusion of 'physical activities' in these settings and support the implementation of physical activity fully into the education curriculum. Physical literacy must be held to the same standard as literacy and numeracy, which will require an investment in quality instruction and programming. This will be achieved by:

- Adopting a mandatory assessment of physical literacy for elementary and secondary students;
- Ensuring quality, daily health and physical education programming is delivered by health and physical education specialists in all Ontario elementary and secondary schools;
- Evaluating the compliance and enforcement of the Daily Physical Activity requirement;
- Ensuring staff training related to physical literacy for all teachers, early childhood educators and childcare providers;
- Strengthening the Day Nurseries Act to promote and support physical literacy development in licensed daycares; and

<sup>1</sup>Mandigo, J., Francis, N., Lodewyk, K. & Lopez, R. (2009). Position Paper – Physical Literacy for Educators. *Physical & Health Education Canada* (2012). Retrieved from [http://www.phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/current\\_research\\_pdf/07-22-10/PhysicalLiteracyPositionPaper.pdf](http://www.phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/current_research_pdf/07-22-10/PhysicalLiteracyPositionPaper.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>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>

<sup>3</sup>Tremblay, M and Lloyd, M (2010). Physical Literacy Measurement – The Missing Piece, *Physical and Health Education Journal*, 76(1), 26-30

<sup>4</sup>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>

- Making health and physical education credits a mandatory requirement for grades 9-12.<sup>5</sup>

### **Access to Recreation:**

Access to recreation means being able to participate in structured and unstructured physical activity to improve health, develop a skill or build self-esteem.<sup>6</sup> We acknowledge that school and childcare settings can provide great opportunities for physical activity and recreation and we support the recommendations set forth. Nonetheless, we urge the government to recognize the additional value of increasing access to recreation in Ontario communities.

Having access to recreation is a critical part of creating healthy communities and reducing the economic burden of disease – including obesity. There are many barriers preventing Ontarians from accessing recreation: user fees, transportation and equipment costs are all barriers to being physically active, especially for low-income households. According to a 2007 survey of Ontario municipalities, nearly two-thirds of municipalities do not have approved policies that deal with access to recreation programs.<sup>7</sup> Investing in access to recreation is important to the creation of healthy communities. In fact, for every dollar spent on recreation, savings are made in health and social services.

The *No Time to Wait- The Healthy Kids Strategy report* does not address specific recommendations for government action prioritizing the investments needed by municipalities to promote accessible physical activity and recreation.

It is our position that:

- 1) Municipalities need to create environments that remove barriers to recreation and encourage physical activity. Municipalities can achieve this by:
  - Developing comprehensive policies around affordable access to recreation for all residents. This includes access to programs, facilities and green spaces.
  - Designing communities to support physical activity by including easy access to recreation facilities, sidewalks, trails, cycling paths and parks.
  - Implementing shared-use agreements for facilities and shared maintenance costs to sustain access to recreation in their communities.

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<sup>5</sup> Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario) (2012)0. Taking action to prevent chronic disease: recommendations for a healthier Ontario. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario

<sup>6</sup> Definition adapted from: Ontario Task Group on Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families (2009). Affordable access to recreation for Ontarians: Policy framework. Every One Plays, 4. Retrieved from <http://lin.ca/resource-details/15518>

<sup>7</sup> Redmond, D. & Associates. (2007). Every Child Plays: Access to Recreation for Low-Income Families in Ontario. Report of Survey Findings. Retrieved from [http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci\\_id/3727.htm](http://www.prontario.org/index.php/ci_id/3727.htm)



- Allocating and ensuring a certain percentage of their budget goes to improving access to recreation for all of their residents.
- Seeking out partnerships with other recreation providers and community groups working toward access to recreation.

2) Improving access to recreation requires a stronger investment from municipal, provincial and federal governments. An Ipsos Reid survey from January 2012 showed 70% of all respondents across Canada say governments should provide more funding to build recreation centres and provide resources to make it easier for kids to build exercise into their lives.<sup>8</sup> In addition, many provincial and federal associations - such as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Parks and Recreation Ontario, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities – also support an increased government investment in improving access to recreation.

OSPAPPH supports the Government of Ontario's desire to reduce childhood obesity by 20 per cent in the next five years. In order to achieve this goal, the Government of Ontario must aim to improve the health and wellness of all children and youth. This will require collaboration from government at all levels and across all sectors. The creation of environments supportive of active living and physical activity requires an investment of strategies that address social, cultural and environmental influences that result in physical inactivity. We encourage the Healthy Kids Panel and the Government of Ontario to prioritize the policy recommendations above to address access to recreation and physical literacy. It is our belief that should the Healthy Kids Panel and the Government of Ontario commit to changes in existing policy and create a supportive environment that includes both healthy eating *and* physical activity, our children and youth will achieve their maximum health potential.

OSPAPPH acknowledges that this endeavour is a long term process. We welcome the opportunity to be consulted on all physical activity matters related to this report or any of the recommendations outlined above.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Ontario Society of Physical Activity Promoters in Public Health.

  
Chantal L. Lalonde  
OSPAPPH Co-chair

  
Jackie Leroux  
OSPAPPH Co-chair

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<sup>8</sup> Ipsos Reid. (2011). Canadians' Perceptions of, and Support for, Potential Measures to Prevent and Reduce Childhood Obesity. Public Health Agency of Canada, 8.