2014 Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children

Mark S. Tremblay
Chair, Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children

Active Healthy Kids Canada, established in 1994, is a registered charitable organization that works to power the movement to get kids moving by providing knowledge, insight and understanding that influences thinking and action among issue stakeholders to help them build better programs, campaigns and policies to increase physical activity (PA) among children and youth. This year marks the 20th anniversary of Active Healthy Kids Canada. Since 2005, Active Healthy Kids Canada has prepared, produced and released an annual Report Card on the Physical Activity of Children and Youth (see www.activehealthykids.ca). Each year the Report Card provides a comprehensive overview of the “state of the nation” on how Canada is succeeding in providing PA opportunities for children and youth. The 10th Anniversary Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card was released in 2014.

A failing or unsatisfactory grade for PA has been assigned in Canada every year that the Report Card has been released.1 The most recent data suggest that only 5% of Canadian school children and youth meet minimum PA guidelines.2,3 Similar findings are available in many countries making childhood and youth physical inactivity a global concern4 with significant implications for future chronic disease. A recent comprehensive analysis of the effects of PA on the global burden of noncommunicable diseases and mortality has estimated that 6% of coronary heart disease cases, 7% of type 2 diabetes, 10% of breast and colon cancers, and 9% of deaths are directly attributable to physical inactivity.5 Consequently, 5.3 million deaths worldwide were attributed to physical inactivity in 20076 leading to the conclusion that “… in view of the prevalence, global reach, and health effect of physical inactivity, the issue should be appropriately described as pandemic, with far reaching health, economic, environmental, and social consequences”6(p.67) In Canada alone the annual health care costs attributed to physical inactivity among adults is estimated to be $6.8 billion.7

Concerns over high levels of physical inactivity and obesity and subsequent implications for the development of noncommunicable diseases have been expressed worldwide.4,10 Notably, at the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations (September 2011) in New York City, the General Assembly made a political declaration on the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases “… with concern [for] the rising levels of obesity in different regions, particularly among children and youth, and note that obesity, an unhealthy diet and physical inactivity have strong linkages with the four main non-communicable diseases, and are associated with higher health costs and reduced productivity”.8(p.4) Canada endorsed the United Nations declaration on September 19, 2011. Well before the United Nations declaration, the Canadian Government expressed a similar sentiment in their Declaration on Prevention and Promotion released in the fall of 2010, which communicated a general belief that, “more emphasis needs to be placed on the promotion of health and on preventing or delaying chronic diseases, disabilities, and injuries”9(p.21).

Acknowledging the global concern for physical inactivity and the need for preventive action, especially among children and youth, and in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Active Healthy Kids Canada and the 10th anniversary of the Report Card, Active Healthy Kids Canada hosted the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children in Toronto, Canada, May 19–22, 2014. In an effort to power a global movement to get kids moving, the four day conference brought together researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and funders from the PA, sport, recreation, education, fitness, transportation, early childhood development, public health and medical sectors. The Global Summit was organized into five successive half-day sessions (PA, sedentary behavior, active transportation, active play, organized sport). Each session followed four thematic tracks: home, school, community, and policy. Approximately 800 delegates from around the world participated in the Global Summit to meet and network with PA experts and innovators to learn and share their expertise and experiences.

Unique to the 2014 Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children was the cooperation among 15 countries (Australia, Canada, Columbia, England, Finland, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scotland, South Africa, United States) that prepared and released report cards on PA among children and youth in the respective countries using the best available evidence and following harmonized procedures.11 This exercise allowed for the creation of a global matrix of nine common indicators across 15 countries from around the world; the identification of areas of country-specific strengths and concerns; and the illumination of international differences and disparities.12 The process allowed for an examination of the global situation, and facilitated international cross-fertilization of research, surveillance, and intervention efforts. It is hoped that the process will lead to the establishment of a global active healthy kids network to promote healthy childhood PA behaviors.

This supplemental issue of the Journal of Physical Activity and Health serves to preserve the content legacy of the 2014 Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children. The supplement contains 17 original peer-reviewed manuscripts followed by the abstracts presented at the Global Summit. The supplement begins with a detailed account of the 10-year impact of the Active Healthy Kids Canada...
Report Card, followed by 15 papers for the participating countries (presented in alphabetical order). Each paper outlines the process used in each country to develop the report card, the data sources, partners, and final grades for each indicator. The closing manuscript compiles the grades from each of the 15 countries into a global matrix of 9 common indicators, discusses differences and similarities around the globe, and offers insights for improving the grades.

For those who attended the 2014 Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children, we hope you enjoyed the event and we thank you for your passion, involvement, and resolve. For those who missed the Summit, we hope this supplement provides inspiration and motivation, and serves as a resource to assist you in efforts to advocate for, create and promote solutions to increase PA for children and youth. Your comments on the Global Summit, this supplement and the work of the emerging global active healthy kids network are welcome at www.activehealthykids.ca.

I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the Guest editor, Dr. Robert Malina, for his dedication to this supplement and his tireless efforts to invigilate the reviews and ensure quality and consistency among all manuscripts. Thank you, Bob!

References