Results from Canada’s 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Joel D. Barnes, Christine Cameron, Valerie Carson, Jean-Philippe Chaput, Rachel C. Colley, Guy E.J. Faulkner, Ian Janssen, Roger Kramers, Travis J. Saunders, John C. Spence, Patricia Tucker, Leigh M. Vanderloo, and Mark S. Tremblay

Introduction

The majority of children and youth in Canada are not meeting the physical activity recommendation (at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day) within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth.1 This relatively stable trend over the past decade is concerning given the negative health consequences linked to physical inactivity, particularly in adulthood.2 To better understand this concern, several indicators of child and youth physical activity are measured periodically in Canada and compiled into Canada’s Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the results of the 2018 Report Card (Figure 1).

Methods

The 2018 Report Card included the 10 core physical activity indicators that are common to the Global Matrix 3.0 (Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport and Physical Activity Participation, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviors, Physical Fitness, Family and Peers, School, Community and Environment, Government). Additional indicators included Physical Education, Physical Literacy, Sleep, and 24-Hour Movement Behaviours. Each of these 14 indicators belongs to 1 of 4 categories: Daily Behaviours (Overall Physical Activity, Active Play, Active Transportation, Organized Sport and Physical Activity Participation, Physical Education, Sedentary Behaviors, Sleep, 24-Hour Movement Behaviours), Individual Characteristics (Physical Literacy, Physical Fitness), Settings and Sources of Influence (Family and Peers, School, Community and Environment), and Strategies and Investments (Government).

The Report Card synthesized data from multiple sources to inform the 14 indicator grades. The data sources relied on most heavily were national surveys, which included the Canadian Health Measures Survey (2007-09, 2009-11, 2012-13 and 2014-15 CHMS, Statistics Canada), Canada’s Physical Activity Levels Among Youth study (2014-16 CANPLAY, Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute), the Canadian Health Behavior in School-Aged Children survey (2013–14 HBSC, World Health Organization/Public Health Agency of Canada), the Opportunities for Physical Activity at School study (2015 OPASS, CFLRI), the Cohort Study for Obesity, Marijuana Use, Physical Activity, Alcohol Use, Smoking and Sedentary Behaviour (2016-17 COMPASS, University of Waterloo) and the Canadian Assessment of Physical Literacy (2014-17 CAPL, Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group, Ottawa, Canada). Other sources of data included peer-reviewed literature and gray literature (eg, government and non-government reports).

Figure 1 — Canada’s 2018 Report Card cover.
The Government grade has dropped from a B- to a C+ despite considerable investment from the federal government owing to doubt around whether the investment will have a direct impact on child and youth physical activity.

Similar to previous Report Cards in Canada, research gaps remain that, if addressed, would better inform the grades. For example, the data used to grade the Active Transportation indicator are based on parent- or self-report, focused generally on trips to and from school with little information about other destinations (eg, park, friend’s house), and do not provide a measure of the amount of time spent in active transportation. Several indicators also stand to gain from more evidence-informed benchmarks including Active Play and Physical Fitness.

### Conclusion

Results from Canada’s 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reveal that behavioural indicator grades are
generally poor despite the presence of more favourable grades in the support and investment indicators. Physical activity promotion efforts that directly target these behavioural indicators may be needed before any detectable improvements will be achieved.

References