

# IS CANADA IN THE RUNNING?

How Canada Stacks Up Against  
14 Other Countries on Physical Activity  
for Children and Youth

10TH  
ANNIVERSARY  
EDITION

# 2014

Active Healthy Kids Canada  
Report Card on Physical Activity  
for Children and Youth



# KIDS NEED ROOM TO MOVE

When Canada is considered in a global context, we are a developed country. But when looking at the lifestyles of our children and youth, it might be more accurate to say we are **overdeveloped**.

Canada is among the leaders in our relatively sophisticated policies, places and programs, with a B+ in Community & the Built Environment, a C+ in School and a C+ in Organized Sport Participation:

- ▶ 95% of parents report local availability of parks and outdoor spaces, and 94% report local availability of public facilities and programs for physical activity, such as pools, arenas and leagues.<sup>123</sup>
- ▶ There is a physical education (PE) curriculum in place at schools in every province and territory,<sup>PHE Canada</sup> and most students have regular access to a gymnasium (95%), playing fields (91%) and areas with playground equipment (73%) during school hours.<sup>112</sup>
- ▶ 75% of Canadian kids aged 5-19 participate in organized physical activities or sport.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, even though we excel in these areas, Canada's Overall Physical Activity levels are at a D-, clustered near the back of the pack with Australia (D-), Ireland (D-), the United States (D-) and Scotland (F). Even though 84% of Canadian kids aged 3-4 are active enough to meet guidelines, this falls to only 7% of kids meeting guidelines at ages 5-11, and only 4% meeting guidelines at ages 12-17.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>

The question is, if our policies, places and programs are well developed, why is this not translating into enough activity for our kids? **It seems that we have built it, but they are not coming.** Canada lags behind most of the international group in Active Transportation (D) and Sedentary Behaviours (F):

- ▶ 62% of Canadian parents say their kids aged 5-17 years are always driven to and from school (by car, bus, transit, etc.).<sup>42</sup>
- ▶ Canadian kids aged 3-4 spend 5.8 hours a day being sedentary, those aged 5-11 spend 7.6 hours and those aged 12-17 spend 9.3 hours.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>

Why are our kids sitting more and moving less? The answer requires a hard look at our **culture of convenience**. For most Canadians, the socially acceptable walking distance to school is less than 1.6 km, and distance between home and school is the single most reported reason why kids do not walk or bike to get there.<sup>69, 82</sup> In Finland, however, 74% of children who live between 1-3 km from school use active transport, and nearly all children living 1 km or less from their school commute actively. Finland is a world leader with a B in Active Transportation, in part because its social norms differ dramatically.

Our country values efficiency – doing more in less time – which may be at direct odds with promoting children's health. We have engineered opportunities for spontaneous movement (such as getting to places on foot and playing outdoors) out of our kids' daily lives, and have tried to compensate with organized activities such as dance recitals, soccer leagues and PE classes. **Canadian parents look to structured activities and schools to get their kids moving:**

- ▶ 82% of parents agree that the education system should place more importance on providing quality PE.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ 79% of parents contribute financially to their kids' physical activities (through equipment, fees, etc.), but only 37% of parents often play actively with their children.<sup>97</sup>

**Organized sports and plenty of places and spaces for activity may never make up for lost (active) time:**

- ▶ One study shows only 24% of kids got a full 60 minutes of moderate/vigorous activity in one session of soccer, and only 2% got this at softball practice.<sup>34, 35</sup>
- ▶ Kids on hockey teams spend close to half of the time during practices in moderate/vigorous activity, but in an actual game they are sedentary nearly a third of the time.<sup>185</sup>

In Canada, there is a tendency to **build more, do more and impose more structure**, but perhaps these efforts are somewhat misguided. In New Zealand, which leads the pack with a B in Overall Physical Activity and a B in Active Play, university researchers created a global media storm in early 2014 with preliminary reports of a study looking at ways to encourage active play in children. When 4 elementary schools banned all safety-based playground rules, not only did the students get more active, the administrators reported an immediate drop in bullying, vandalism and injuries. In this case, **less was more**.

**To increase daily physical activity levels for all kids, we must encourage the accumulation of physical activity throughout a child's day, and consider a mix of opportunities** (e.g., sport, active play, active transportation). In some cases, we may need to step back and do less. Developed societies such as Canada must acknowledge that **children need room to move**.

# HOW CANADA STACKS UP



OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	ORGANIZED SPORT PARTICIPATION	ACTIVE PLAY	ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION	SEDENTARY BEHAVIOURS	FAMILY & PEERS
Mozambique <b>B</b>	New Zealand <b>B</b>	New Zealand <b>B</b>	Finland <b>B</b>	Ghana <b>B</b>	Australia <b>C</b>
New Zealand <b>B</b>	Australia <b>B-</b>	Kenya <b>C</b>	Kenya <b>B</b>	Kenya <b>B</b>	<b>Canada</b> <b>C</b>
Mexico <b>C+</b>	<b>Canada</b> <b>C+</b>	Mozambique <b>C</b>	Mozambique <b>B</b>	New Zealand <b>C</b>	Finland <b>C</b>
Kenya <b>C</b>	Finland <b>C</b>	Nigeria <b>C-</b>	Nigeria <b>B</b>	Ireland <b>C-</b>	Kenya <b>C</b>
Nigeria <b>C</b>	Ghana <b>C</b>	Finland <b>D</b>	Mexico <b>B-</b>	Colombia <b>D</b>	New Zealand <b>C</b>
England <b>D+</b>	Kenya <b>C</b>	Australia <b>INC</b>	England <b>C</b>	Finland <b>D</b>	Scotland <b>D-</b>
Colombia <b>D</b>	South Africa <b>C</b>	<b>Canada</b> <b>INC</b>	Scotland <b>C</b>	Mexico <b>D</b>	Colombia <b>INC</b>
Ghana <b>D</b>	England <b>C-</b>	Colombia <b>INC</b>	South Africa <b>C</b>	United States <b>D</b>	England <b>INC</b>
Finland <b>D</b>	Ireland <b>C-</b>	England <b>INC</b>	New Zealand <b>C-</b>	Australia <b>D-</b>	Ghana <b>INC</b>
South Africa <b>D</b>	United States <b>C-</b>	Ghana <b>INC</b>	Australia <b>D</b>	<b>Canada</b> <b>F</b>	Ireland <b>INC</b>
Australia <b>D-</b>	Colombia <b>D</b>	Ireland <b>INC</b>	<b>Canada</b> <b>D</b>	Nigeria <b>F</b>	Mexico <b>INC</b>
<b>Canada</b> <b>D-</b>	Mexico <b>D</b>	Mexico <b>INC</b>	Ghana <b>D</b>	Scotland <b>F</b>	Mozambique <b>INC</b>
Ireland <b>D-</b>	Mozambique <b>F</b>	Scotland <b>INC</b>	Ireland <b>D</b>	South Africa <b>F</b>	Nigeria <b>INC</b>
United States <b>D-</b>	Nigeria <b>INC</b>	South Africa <b>INC</b>	United States <b>F</b>	England <b>INC</b>	South Africa <b>INC</b>
Scotland <b>F</b>	Scotland <b>INC</b>	United States <b>INC</b>	Colombia <b>INC</b>	Mozambique <b>INC</b>	United States <b>INC</b>



This is the 10th Anniversary of the most current and comprehensive annual assessment of the physical activity of children and youth in Canada. Over the past decade, interest in the issue has increased, yet the global childhood physical inactivity crisis remains unresolved. Motivated by the opportunity to share interests and challenges worldwide, Active Healthy Kids Canada led 14 other countries from across five continents to work together to compare how we are doing and to seek solutions. Research teams from each country have consolidated multiple data sources, based on the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card framework, to reveal the first-ever global matrix of grades on the physical activity of children and youth. For the first time, this Report Card reveals how Canada stacks up against 14 other countries, to show where we are leading and lagging internationally.



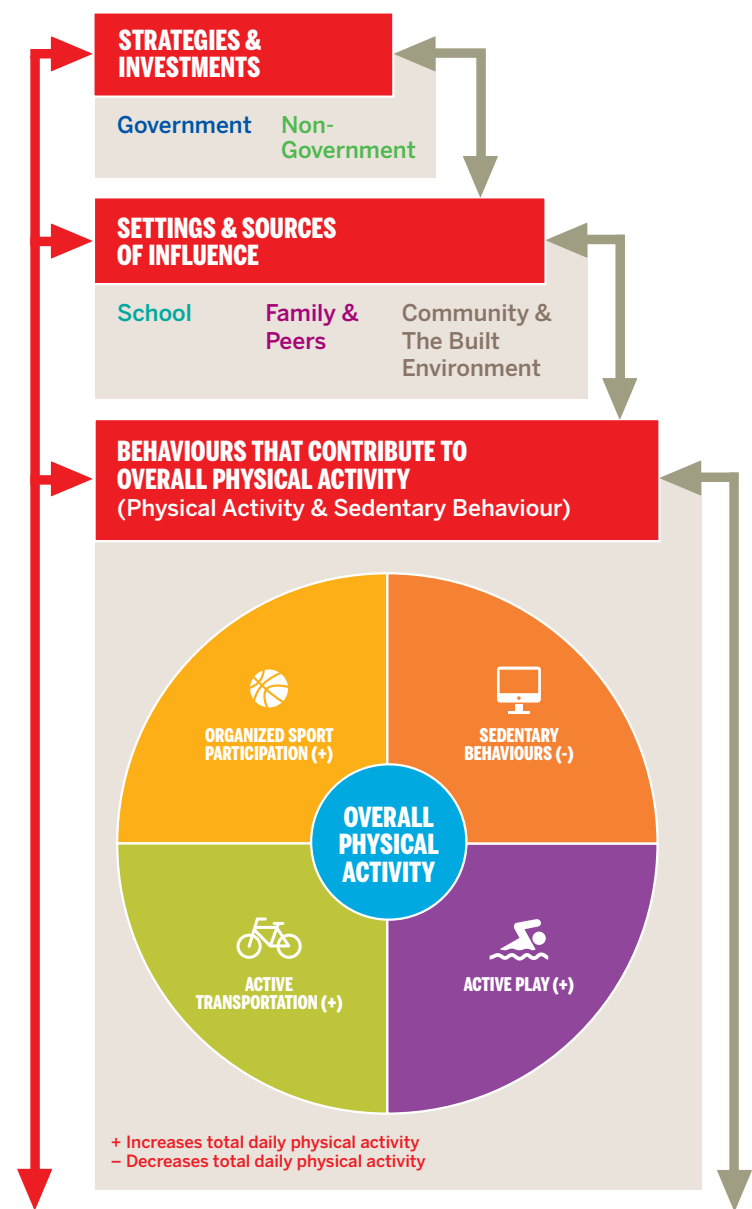
SCHOOL		COMMUNITY & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT		GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES & INVESTMENTS	
England	<b>A-</b>	Australia	<b>A-</b>	Colombia	<b>B</b>
Finland	<b>B</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>B+</b>	Finland	<b>B</b>
Australia	<b>B-</b>	England	<b>B</b>	Scotland	<b>B</b>
New Zealand	<b>B-</b>	Finland	<b>B</b>	South Africa	<b>B</b>
<b>Canada</b>	<b>C+</b>	Ireland	<b>B</b>	Australia	<b>C+</b>
Kenya	<b>C</b>	Scotland	<b>B</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>C</b>
Mozambique	<b>C</b>	United States	<b>B-</b>	Kenya	<b>C</b>
Ireland	<b>C-</b>	New Zealand	<b>C</b>	Mexico	<b>C</b>
United States	<b>C-</b>	Ghana	<b>D</b>	Mozambique	<b>C</b>
Ghana	<b>D</b>	South Africa	<b>D</b>	Ghana	<b>D</b>
Mexico	<b>D</b>	Mexico	<b>F</b>	England	<b>INC</b>
South Africa	<b>D</b>	Mozambique	<b>F</b>	Ireland	<b>INC</b>
Colombia	<b>F</b>	Colombia	<b>INC</b>	New Zealand	<b>INC</b>
Nigeria	<b>INC</b>	Kenya	<b>INC</b>	United States	<b>INC</b>
		Nigeria	<b>INC</b>	Nigeria	<b>INC</b>



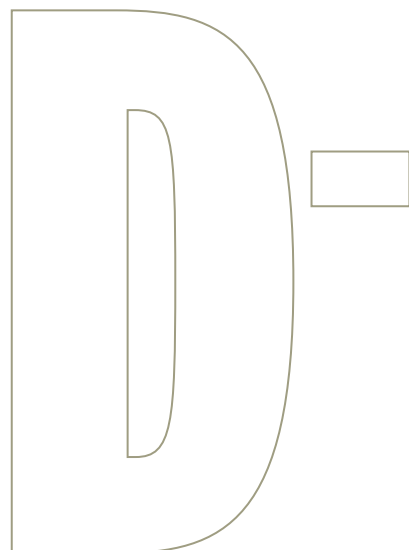
\* For more information on the global matrix of grades, please refer to *Physical Activity of Children: A Global Matrix of Grades Comparing 15 Countries* in the Supplemental Issue on the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, or the 14 detailed country pages in the Long Form version of this Report Card.

## 2014 REPORT CARD

The 2014 Report Card assigns letter grades to 10 different indicators grouped into three categories: **Strategies & Investments** (Government and Non-Government), **Settings & Sources of Influence** (Family & Peers, School, Community & the Built Environment), and the **Behaviours that Contribute to Overall Physical Activity Levels** (Organized Sport Participation, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviours). A child's physical activity level affects outcomes such as mental health, cardiovascular health and body weight; in turn, these outcomes may affect a child's overall levels of physical activity. Letter grades are based on an examination of current data for each indicator against a benchmark, along with an assessment of trends over time and the presence of disparities (e.g., age, gender, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status). Together, the indicators provide a complete and robust assessment of how we are doing as a country in promoting and facilitating physical activity opportunities among children and youth in Canada.



**A CHILD'S OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS LINKED TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, MAINTENANCE OF A HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT & PHYSICAL LITERACY, AMONG OTHER BENEFITS.**



## STRATEGIES & INVESTMENTS

### GOVERNMENT

- C**
- ▶ There is evidence of leadership in school and after-school initiatives at the provincial/territorial level; for instance, 11 of 13 provinces/territories have comprehensive school health initiatives that encompass physical activity, in place or underway.<sup>110</sup> While some federal policy and investment efforts are encouraging, implementation and evaluation of these efforts are lacking.
  - ▶ 85% of Canadians agree that federal and provincial/territorial governments should devote a greater percentage of the healthcare budget to preventive measures.<sup>17</sup>

### NON-GOVERNMENT

- A-**
- ▶ There is evidence of a growth in leadership and commitment from non-government organizations/groups and the private sector to develop strategies and allocate funds and resources to increase physical activity for children and youth. Non-government organizations and groups are recognizing the challenges related to obesity and physical inactivity more today than in the past. However, partnerships and coordination of activities remain fragmented.

# OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

It is encouraging that 84% of young kids aged 3-4 are getting the recommended 180 minutes of daily activity at any intensity. However, the guideline recommendations change to 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day for those aged 5 and up, and here the picture changes. The rates fall to only 7% of kids meeting guidelines at ages 5-11, and to only 4% for those ages 12-17.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>

40% of kids (5-17 years) meet the guidelines at least 3 days per week; but to achieve health benefits, these kids need to get 60 minutes *every day* of the week.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>

## SETTINGS & SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

### SCHOOL

- C+** ▶ 55% of Canadian school administrators report having a fully implemented policy for daily PE for all students.<sup>68</sup>
- ▶ 82% of parents agree that the education system should place more importance on providing quality PE.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ A large majority of school administrators report students have access to gymnasiums (95%), playing fields (91%), bicycle racks (79%) and playground equipment (73%).<sup>112,113</sup>

### FAMILY & PEERS

- C** ▶ 79% of parents support their kids' physical activity financially (e.g., through fees, equipment), but only 37% of parents say they often played active games with their children in the past year.<sup>97</sup>
- ▶ Kids of more active parents participate in more sport and unstructured play after school than kids of less active parents.<sup>27</sup>

### COMMUNITY & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- B+** ▶ 95% of parents report local availability of parks and outdoor spaces, and 94% report local availability of public facilities and programs for physical activity, such as pools, arenas and leagues.<sup>123</sup>
- ▶ 59% of adults report living in a neighbourhood that supports overall physical activity (e.g., has bike lanes, is walkable).<sup>133</sup>

## BEHAVIOURS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

### ORGANIZED SPORT PARTICIPATION

- C+** ▶ 75% of kids aged 5-19 participate in organized physical activities or sport.<sup>25</sup>
- ▶ According to parents, 34% participate in sport at least 4 times per week, 50% participate 2-3 times per week and 14% participate 1-2 times per week.<sup>26</sup>
- ▶ Participation in organized physical activities and sport is notably lower among girls, children and youth with a disability and those with a low household income.

### ACTIVE PLAY

- INC** ▶ A grade is not available due to limited research in this area and the lack of an evidence-based benchmark.
- ▶ Parents of kids aged 5-11 report their kids get only 4.1 hours of physical activity per week outside of school while participating in unorganized physical activities, whether alone or with a friend.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>

### ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

- D** ▶ Only 24% of Canadian parents say their kids, aged 5-17, always walk or wheel to/from school, while 62% say their kids are always driven.<sup>2010-11 PAM, CFLRI</sup>
- ▶ 58% of parents say they always walked to school when they were kids, while only 28% say their kids do so today.<sup>43</sup>

### SEDENTARY BEHAVIOURS

- F** ▶ 61% of Canadian parents agree that their kids spend too much time watching TV or using the computer.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ Kids aged 3-4 spend 5.8 hours a day being sedentary, those aged 5-11 spend 7.6 hours and those aged 12-17 spend 9.3 hours.<sup>2009-11 CHMS</sup>
- ▶ High levels of sedentary behaviour increase health risks in kids regardless of how active they are.<sup>91,92</sup>



# METHODOLOGY, DETAILED FINDINGS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Active Healthy Kids Canada's interdisciplinary research team identifies and assesses evidence for Report Card indicators to determine grade assignments based on the best available data, research and key issue areas from the past year. Consideration is also given to prevalence levels, trends over time, disparities (age, geography, etc.) and newly emerging initiatives.

The detailed, Long Form version of this Report Card includes background on our methodology and process; in-depth analyses; summaries of key research, charts and figures; and complete references. A supplemental issue of the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* was commissioned to expand on the global matrix of grades and the unique results from each participating country.

Visit [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca) to download:

- > 2014 Report Card – Short Form
- > 2014 Report Card – Long Form
- > Presentations, articles and media materials that will help you further understand and share the 2014 Report Card findings with others.

Active Healthy Kids Canada is a national charitable organization established in 1994 with a mission to inspire the country to engage all children and youth in physical activity. We provide knowledge and expertise to policy-makers and the public to support action that will build better programs, and will enhance campaigns and policies that increase physical activity opportunities for Canadian children and youth. Our vision is to create a nation of active healthy kids. Active Healthy Kids Canada relies upon its strategic partners, who play a critical role in the research, content development and communication of the Report Card:



Production of the Report Card has been made possible through financial support from the following partners:



Additional support is provided by the provincial and territorial governments through the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC) and by IA Clarington Investments.



**Active Healthy Kids Canada**  
77 Bloor Street West, Suite 1205 Toronto, ON M5S 1M2  
[www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)

Aussi disponible en français : [www.jeunesenforme.ca](http://www.jeunesenforme.ca)



/ActiveHealthyKidsCanada



@ActiveHealthyKi

## Donate now!

Since 2005, the Report Card has helped over 80,000 individuals and groups like YOU advocate for and devise solutions to get Canada's kids moving.

Help power the movement!  
Text "AHKC2014" to 41010 to make a \$10 donation

Make an online donation at [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)