

Renewal of Federal Health Accord

Introduction

As discussions on the new Health Accord continue between Canada's Premiers, the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) would like to inform and support this critical dialogue.

Public health research and expert commentary on the current health care funding crisis are urging the health care system to move the focus away from traditional reactive measures of treatments and cures to a strengthened commitment to proactive initiatives such as health promotion and prevention. Prevention through an increase in physical activity and improved citizen access to recreation will significantly lower the incidence of chronic disease and its related health care costs.

The BCRPA urges Provincial and Territorial Premiers to prioritize and direct funding to the promotion of health and the prevention of chronic disease as a means by which to address the national escalation of health care costs and the deterioration of our nation's health.

A focus on health promotion and prevention

It has been reported that the largest proportion of health care costs in Canada – both direct (health care) and indirect (lost production) – are attributable to chronic diseases (52.7%) and injuries (7.9%)¹. Chronic diseases alone are costing the Canadian economy around \$93 billion annually.²

Yet, chronic disease is preventable. Reductions in its occurrence and severity will dramatically reduce the strain on health care spending and resources. Investing in prevention keeps people healthy and reduces the need for more costly treatment later on. Prevention also supports a healthy population that can generate greater economic growth as healthy people are more likely to maximize their potential¹.

Federal, Provincial, and Territorial governments have already acknowledged the importance of health promotion and prevention in two significant ways. The first is within the current (2004) Health Accord which recognizes that in order to improve the health outcomes of Canadians strategic investments are needed in the areas of health promotion and disease prevention. The second is within the *Declaration on Prevention and Promotion* adopted in September 2010 by Canada's F/P/T Ministers of Health and of Health Promotion/Healthy Living. The Declaration reflects the important role that health promotion and disease prevention play in

The development of a new Health Accord provides an opportunity to examine where to most effectively spend health care dollars and create new health care spending priorities that are set within the context of the current state of our nation's health and common provincial/territorial health care challenges.

This current context includes drastically escalating health care costs and unprecedented growth rates of chronic disease across Canada.

¹ Kendall P.R.W., OBC, MBBS, MSc, FRCPA *Investing in Prevention: Improving Health and Creating Sustainability*. The Provincial Health Officer's Special Report. September 2010. Provincial Health Officer, British Columbia

² Mirolla M. The cost of chronic disease in Canada. *A study prepared for the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada*. January 2004.

improving the health of Canadians, and makes the promotion of health and the prevention of disease a priority for action.

Health Promotion and Prevention has the best return on health dollar investment compared to other forms of healthcare related to curing sickness and disease.

The role of recreation in active healthy living and chronic disease prevention

One specific health promotion and prevention strategy that is universal in application - across all provinces and territories and to Canadians of all ages - is that of promoting and supporting active and healthy lifestyles through recreation.

Recreation is an effective health promotion and disease prevention tool that is available within virtually every community throughout Canada. Prioritizing funding for community based recreation initiatives and recreation infrastructure renewal will have a significant effect in reducing the occurrence of chronic disease and its related health care costs, and provide the greatest return on investment.

Recreation is a key factor in combating the high physical inactivity rates in our country. Physical inactivity is a leading contributor to obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, certain types of cancers, and fall-related injuries and chronic conditions in older adults. Community-based recreation supports physical activity and leads to healthier lifestyles, stronger civic and social engagement, improved mental health, increased productivity and economic growth.

Estimates have placed the cost of physical inactivity in Canada at \$5.3 billion in health care expenditures³. A 10% reduction in the prevalence of physical inactivity has the potential to reduce direct health care expenditures by \$150 million a year⁴. Even modest reductions in inactivity levels could result in substantial cost savings.

With appropriate levels and types of physical activity, Canadians of all ages and abilities can experience improvements in physical, mental and emotional wellbeing⁵.

The role of recreation infrastructure in active healthy living

Community recreation infrastructure is a means through which people achieve the benefits of recreation and reach their healthy living goals and as the need for recreation services increases so too does the need to support these facilities. Recent investment has not kept up with rising and changing demands and investment in our nation's recreation facilities is now critical. 66% of Canadian municipalities report that their sport and recreation facilities are in need of repair/ maintenance⁶. In BC alone, upwards of 70% of indoor recreation facilities are over 25 years of age and require an investment of \$7B to adequately address the indoor recreation facility infrastructure deficit and population growth⁷.

³ Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD). (2004) *Physical Activity: Health benefits and costs to health care system*. Ottawa, Ontario: Author.

⁴ Katzmarzyk, P.T., Gledhill, N., Shephard, R.J. (2000). *The economic burden of physical inactivity in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: School of Kinesiology and Health Science, York University.

⁵ Healthy Aging and Wellness Working Group. (2006). *Healthy Aging in Canada: A New Vision, A Vital Investment. From Evidence to Action. A Background Paper for the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Committee of Officials (Seniors)*. Ottawa, Ontario: Author.

⁶ 2009 Survey of Physical Activity in Canadian Communities www.cflri.ca/media/node/119/files/Municipalities_B11_PA_small.pdf

⁷ A Time For Renewal. BC Recreation and Parks Association.

http://www.bcrpa.bc.ca/recreation_parks/facilities/sports_recreation/documents/BCRPA_ExecutiveSummary_Web.pdf 2009

Community recreation facilities are one of the most cost-effective prescriptions for our good health

Investment in recreation infrastructure is an investment in public health. It is a preventative approach for individual and community health that offsets spending on reactive investments in health care. Resources required to provide adequate recreation facilities are significantly less on a per user basis than medical facilities such as hospitals, medical laboratories and care facilities.

Recreation infrastructure investment also supports economic goals and objectives by maintaining the economic and social viability of BC communities; increasing property values and tax revenue; generating construction and operations job opportunities; and supporting tourism.

The Recreation sector remains committed to working collaboratively with the health sector and related stakeholders in identifying the health issues most seriously afflicting Canadians. We do this through partnerships with provincial and local public health authorities in developing strategies that leverage the resources available through community recreation.

The BCRPA asks that Premiers continue to invest in public health and prioritize financial support to the areas of health promotion and chronic disease prevention, ensuring good health and a high quality of life for all Canadians.

On behalf of the BC Recreation and Parks Association,



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