



Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada
Clubs Garçons & Filles du Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada Endorses Key Recommendations for Improving Children's Health in Leitch Report – "Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth"

For Immediate Release: Markham, ON (March 28, 2008) – Pam Jolliffe, President and CEO, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC), today applauded the report "Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth", released earlier this week by Dr. Kellie Leitch, for its emphasis on addressing child obesity, child mental health and the after-school needs of children and youth.

The report takes the important step of identifying the need for government policy initiatives at the federal level to improve the opportunities, health and well-being of Canadian children and youth. It also clearly states that, "investing from a public policy perspective, in the health of all of our children, is as essential to our growth as a nation as investing in its infrastructure."

"As a leading provider of quality after-school programs for 200,000 children and youth across Canada," said Jolliffe, "Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada wholeheartedly supports the recommendations in the Leitch report, particularly the need for government support for quality after-school programs for all children and youth. We are very pleased to see the call for a national after-school initiative as one of the key recommendations in addressing the issue."

In over 700 community locations across Canada, Boys and Girls Clubs offer after-school and out-of-school programs that positively and preventatively address many child health issues including child obesity, mental health and overall development. In addition to lessening the risk for poor physical health and mental health, these programs reduce the risk of engagement in risky and destructive behaviours, and the risk of likelihood of accidents and injuries.

There is mounting evidence that structured community programs and opportunities for positive activities are critical for healthy development and provide powerful benefits to children, youth and their communities. These are also the things that young people themselves say they want. After-school programs have been shown to enhance academic performance, improve peer relationships and feelings of increased competency.

"With many of our members being from low income or less advantaged communities, we are also pleased to see that this report supports "giving every child an opportunity to achieve the same health outcomes - no matter what background they are from," added Jolliffe.

Low income families face a number of barriers to ensuring that their children have opportunities to participate in extracurricular and out-of-school programs (e.g. sports, recreation, after-school, care) including the costs of programs, rising user fees, limited program availability, language barriers for newcomers, the pressures of two parents working, and growing conditions of poverty affecting many families.

"Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is also pleased to see the emphasis on addressing child obesity and acknowledgement of the role of after-school programs as a key recommendation in addressing this issue, given Canada's abysmal current ranking as 27th among 29 OECD nations in child obesity rates," noted Jolliffe.

Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada offer children and youth many opportunities for supervised structured and unstructured physical activity, healthful snacks and meals, as well as education on healthy lifestyle.

For more information on the approach Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is taking to address inactivity among young people, please refer to the BGCC position paper, "Contributing to Physical Activity and Healthy Eating for Young Canadians" available at <http://www.bgccan.com/content.asp?DocID=72>.

"Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is very pleased that the Government of Canada, and in particular, the Minister of Health, the Honourable Tony Clement, has shown leadership in commissioning this report that stresses the need for a national strategy addressing the needs of Canada's children and youth," said Jolliffe. "We look forward to working with the federal government to further develop and implement the key recommendations outlined in the report."

About Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada is a leading, national provider of programs to children and youth that support the healthy physical, educational and social development of close to 200,000 young people and their families each year. In 700 community locations across Canada, clubs offer after-school programs in physical recreation, technology, the arts, literacy, personal growth and more. Many clubs also provide meals, emergency shelter, family support programs and other support to children, youth and families at risk. Boys and Girls Clubs have been helping young Canadians to discover, develop and achieve their potential for over 100 years. To learn more, visit www.bgccan.com.

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