



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

CONTRIBUTING TO
**Physical Activity
and Healthy Eating**
FOR YOUNG CANADIANS



FALL 2007

why now?

26% or roughly one quarter of all children and youth aged 2 to 17 were overweight or obese by 2004. This figure has more than doubled since 1978 when it stood at 12%.¹

QUICK FACTS

- 91% of Canadian children and youth were not meeting Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines in 2007.²
- Groups having higher than average rates of obesity in Canada include Aboriginal peoples, many immigrant communities, those living in rural and remote areas, those living in the Atlantic region and those with a lower socio-economic status.³ For example, 55 % of aboriginal children living on reserve and 41 % living off reserve were either overweight or obese.⁴
- In neighbourhoods with low socio-economic status (SES) the prevalence of overweight kids was 35% as compared to high SES neighbourhoods where 24% of the kids were overweight.⁵
- Over 40.7% of food bank users in 2004 were children and the number of children using food banks has increased since 1989 the year the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty.⁶
- More than 24% of children in grade four do not eat breakfast every day. By grade eight, 47% of girls and 33% of boys are not eating breakfast daily. A recent study found that children who don't eat breakfast are 1.5 times more likely to be overweight.⁷
- 338,000 children, representing 4.1% of Canadian households, are experiencing "severe" food insecurity.⁸ The average rate of suicide among 15-20 year old Canadians is 15%, the third worst record among the OECD countries. There is a clear link between depression and lack of physical activity, and the rate of depression and anxiety among young people in Canada is growing.
- Factors that decrease the incidence of chronic health and mental disorders in adults include: preventing childhood stress, obesity and adolescent smoking; preventing child abuse, and; reducing exposure to environmental toxins.⁹

the trends

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC) has a 107 year history of providing support and services dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children, youth and their families. As one of the largest child and youth serving organizations in Canada, we currently provide over 200,000 children and youth with safe, supportive and affordable places to discover, develop and achieve their potential.

BGCC's approach is consistent with the goals of the Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy to improve overall health outcomes and reduce disparities. BGCC strategies are specifically tailored to support marginalized and vulnerable groups of children and youth, particularly those from lower socio-economic status, Aboriginal identity, new Canadians and ethno-cultural minorities. In addition, many Clubs provide programs especially targeted to girls. Clubs tend to be located in under-resourced neighbourhoods, in rural and isolated settings, in at-risk urban centres and on reserve.

Worsening Trends but Clear Opportunities

For the first time in many generations there is an increasing likelihood that children in Canada will have poorer health and a shorter life expectancy than their parents. The incidence of obesity and poor health outcomes is growing at an alarming rate. These conditions are especially extreme for certain low income populations, communities and regions in Canada. Canada's Standing Committee on Health highlighted these alarming trends in their March 2007 report, noting that a number of experts are drawing dire conclusions from recent health indicators.¹⁰

Despite significant investments in a world-class health care system we are losing ground. Why is this so? In part it is because we are failing to take action on the broader factors influencing our children's health. To do so will require a more concerted effort to address the social and economic circumstances that influence their opportunities to develop healthy eating and physical activity patterns from a young age.

It is widely documented that physical activity and good nutrition are essential to a child's long term physical well-being and to his or her healthy emotional, social and intellectual development. But too many children are not receiving these basic building blocks

Many young Canadians do not have access to safe, constructive activities outside of school hours. Programs offering developmentally appropriate and engaging activities are not available to many families. In areas where families view their neighbourhood to be unsafe for kids to play outside on their own, many kids are kept indoors.

Additionally, too many children have poor access to nutritious food. Despite the mounting evidence of need, Canada remains one of the few developed countries without a national meal program for children.

Under-nourishment and obesity carry a heavy cost for individuals, families and society. Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity in childhood are associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, several cancers, musculoskeletal problems and obesity in later life. It is estimated that 25% of all medical costs are attributed to a small number of risk factors, including smoking, obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition.¹¹

With effort such worrisome developments are preventable and reversible. Research confirms that physical activity and nutritional behaviours learned in childhood are more likely to carry through into adulthood and affect one's lifestyle and health status.¹² We also know that participation by young people in structured recreation plays an important role in improving their physical and mental health, academic performance and self esteem, and fostering active citizenship and social inclusion. Those activities that involve elements of instruction, choice and skill development are particularly important.¹³

Interventions must take place at all levels – individual, family, schools, communities, and with support from all orders of government. Yet while we all have a role to play in addressing these critical issues, government leadership and investments are critical at this time. Policies and programs that strive to lessen Canada's existing health inequalities are urgently required, along with the political will to address food insecurity, hunger and the lack of physical activity opportunities for all children and youth.

Inaction is causing us to fall behind



What Children Want!

Kids themselves crave physical activity. In a recent BC study, when asked what they wished they were doing after school, the vast majority of children said that they wanted to be physically healthy and engaged in activities that build their competences and their connectedness. 48.7 % wished they were doing more physical activities, followed by 11.5% saying they wished to be with friends.

The average child spends 67 hours of discretionary time each week – more hours than they spend in school.¹⁴

healthy

Boys and Girls Clubs: A Part of the Solution

For over a century, Boys and Girls Clubs have been transforming the after school experience of children and youth from an unsupervised uncertain time to one that is full of creative and safe opportunities for growth, leadership and learning.

Boys and Girls Clubs utilize an integrated model of age-appropriate social, recreational and academic activities. These programs are developed in collaboration with families, local schools and other community partners to positively influence healthy living opportunities for children and youth.

A central feature of these programs is the creation of supportive environments that assist children and youth to make informed choices about eating well and being active. We understand that developing healthy patterns takes more than just individual willpower. Boys and Girls Clubs ensure that the growing number of children attending their programs have increased opportunities to be physically active, eat healthily, and reach a healthy weight.

At the national level our healthy living objectives are furthered by partnerships with organizations such as Breakfast for Learning, Concerned Children's Advertisers, Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, and Healthy Active Kids.

A wide range of Boys and Girls Club activities specifically support the objectives of increasing physical activity and healthy eating habits. Recreation and leadership programs promote physical fitness, participation, the positive use of leisure time and the development of the social and interpersonal skills that enable children to develop healthy patterns of physical activity. Breakfast clubs, lunch programs, dinner services, nutrition education and cooking clubs provide access to healthy food and opportunities to learn about nutrition and healthy eating.

Clubs base their programming on a child and youth development approach that identifies and builds upon individual assets. Staff and adult mentors model positive approaches that are non-punitive, that do not stigmatize obesity or ability, and that are culturally appropriate. Clubs are particularly aware of and sensitive to the significant issues of body image and self-esteem that today's pre-teens and teens are facing.

Boys and Girls Clubs incorporate a number of proven strategies to connect with and support hard to reach children and youth. These features enable Boys and Girls Clubs to have impact on the health conditions of children and youth that are often left out of more general recreational programming. Such strategies include: reduction and where possible elimination of program fees; additional parent/caregiver supports such as safe walk programs and child care; providing transportation and offering programs at outreach sites to improve access; collaborating with other organizations, volunteers, and youth leaders to build relationships; and creating flexible programs that are culturally and linguistically inclusive, along with a range of specialized programs to address the needs of local groups.

Amidst this success in developing responsive and appropriate programming, Boys and Girls Clubs are also witnessing a significant growth in more complex service demands, particularly in the areas of children with mental health difficulties, substance-abuse, increased community and family violence, unmet English-as-a-Second Language needs for new Canadians, and inadequate academic supports. There have also been significant reductions in available recreational services and facilities in communities. At this time there is a growing need for sensitive community supports that can motivate children and adolescents' participation in physical activity and healthy eating while ensuring that they are not stigmatized for the various challenges they are facing.

Creating Innovative Approaches to Healthy Living

Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada have developed innovative responses to address the healthy activity and nutrition needs of children and youth. Across Canada last year the Boys and Girls Clubs collectively provided over 1 million meals. Targeted nutrition grants from Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada enhanced local Clubs' capacity to expand and sustain nutritional programs through the purchase of equipment and supplies, assistance with the transportation of donated food or getting children and youth to locations where nutritious meals are served, and supporting staff who can coordinate, supervise and engage other community partners to strengthen the ongoing viability of these nutrition programs. The following are some examples of the contributions of Boys and Girls Clubs in these areas.

"There are many ways that support should be made available to low income families to increase the opportunities for their children to participate in physical activity. Based on our experience, we believe it is essential to support the places where those children feel safe and comfortable and, where there are skilled staff to motivate and encourage them to participate. It is particularly important for kids who are overweight/obese, who lack self-confidence and self-esteem, to have access to activities which are designed to engage them. They also need the support of caring adults to motivate them to participate."
PAM JOLLIFFE, President & CEO.



solutions

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

BGCC's national healthy lifestyle program called Cool Moves (supported by Kraft Canada), educates children about what constitutes good nutrition and how to choose what they eat wisely in combination with daily exercise. Cool Moves provides all equipment and supplies and healthy snacks. Activities and foods are culturally appropriate. The emphasis is on motivating participation, fun activities, constant encouragement and an aim to inspire.

Youth Action! (sponsored by Coca Cola), was designed to provide Boys and Girls Club youth with a unique opportunity to develop valuable new leadership skills, participate in Club and community service projects and inspire children and youth in their Clubs to be more physically active. The activities are based on youth culture and active outreach is undertaken to youth by youth.

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Food & Nutrition at School (FANS) program has been operating since 1988 out of Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary. This program provides food to hungry school children in Calgary, with an aim to reduce the emotional and health risks of poor nutrition and the negative effects hunger has on a child's ability to learn. It offers school children important meals such as breakfast and lunch as well as emergency shelf services for urgent needs.

Junk Free Zones – In 2004, in response to alarming Health Canada Statistics showing that Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest rate of childhood obesity in the country at 36%, Clubs throughout the province established a policy of Clubs as Junk Free Zones.

Fuel-Up Project of Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg provides healthy food and nutrition education for children attending Boys and Girls Clubs' after-school programs. The Fuel-Up program is designed to contribute to the personal development and nutritional well-being of children and youth. The specific outcomes for participants include reducing hunger, increasing access to healthy food, increasing awareness of good nutrition and healthy eating habits, and motivating youth to make good food and activity choices for a healthy lifestyle. (supported by The Canada Safeway Foundation and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada Foundation)

TARGETED HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING

"Girls Decide" is a program designed for girls by girls. In 2003, Boys and Girls Clubs of Newfoundland and Labrador began an initiative to increase girl's involvement in sports, recreation and leadership.

"Girls Night Out" program delivered by Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg targets Aboriginal girls and young women at six clubs across the City. Girls Night Out is a girls-only recreational sport and physical activity program that introduces girls and young women to new and interesting types of physical recreation activities in a safe and supportive environment, while developing friendships and building self-esteem.

Basketball Program – Boys and Girls Clubs of LaSalle offers a developmental basketball program for children and youth aged 7 to 15. Additionally, the Club runs basketball nights, 3 on 3 and 1 on 1 tournaments and special alumni games vs. present club youth. It also offers youth aged 13 to 18 a chance to play in highly competitive teams. (Midget, Bantam and Juvenile teams).

Flag rugby camp is a camp that is offered in 22 Clubs across the Province of Ontario to low income children ages 6 -12.

Camp Potlatch, a wilderness-based residential summer camp owned and operated by Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Vancouver has been providing quality summer experiences to children from low income families since 1944. High adventures in the wilderness marine and mountain environment also provide opportunities for physical activity and leadership for youth.

Young People rated the components of Cool Moves:

94% rated the "Eat Smart" component as "pretty good or awesome"

86% rated the "Play Cool" component as "pretty good or awesome"



15% of Canadian boys and 11% of girls aged 18 and under say they never had access to after-school programs, sporting and recreational activities.¹⁵

call to action

“Recent attention has been focused on the fact that after-school physical activity options are limited, and children are seeking meaningful, enjoyable activities. We need to continue to support kids in replacing sedentary time with physical activity time.”¹⁶



“Decisive action with a federal commitment of adequate resources is needed now to counter the growing problem affecting Canada’s children. However, the Committee acknowledges that there is no single intervention or bullet that can effect change. As such, it understands that a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach for all Canadian children is essential. It is also aware that there are groups of children within Canada that require very specific actions in recognition of their diverse circumstances, most particularly First Nations and Inuit children.”¹⁷

A Call for Action:

Making access to physical activity and food security a federal priority.

Addressing two of the central building blocks of children’s health – food intake and physical activity – will require comprehensive and coordinated action by a range of stakeholders. There is a clear need for government policies and investments to reduce the barriers that undermine and inhibit the ability of children and youth to access quality physical activity and healthy foods. We must also ensure that policy measures do not widen the differential that currently exists between low income families and families of higher socio-economic status. Our allocation of resources must benefit children of all ages, all ability levels, all socio-economic strata and all ethno-cultural backgrounds.

In this regard Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada endorses and will actively work to advance the following “Call for Action”:

WE CALL UPON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO:

1. Invest the equivalent of 1% of federal health spending in physical activity in collaboration with existing reputable child and youth serving organizations as identified by the Conservative election platform in 2006.
2. Provide new and dedicated infrastructure funding to ensure access to quality physical activity and healthy food choices for all children. In this regard the federal government should broaden the definition of infrastructure under the gas tax transfer to include social infrastructure. (Recommendation from the Standing Committee on Health, Report 2007: Healthy Weights for Healthy Children)
3. Develop and adopt a Canada Food Bill. The federal government should create a national policy and/or legislation to support, regulate and set standards for improving children’s nutrition and ensuring they have access to good quality food and regular opportunities to eat and drink under caring and nurturing adult supervision.
4. Invest in specific program initiatives designed to ensure health equality for First Nations and Inuit children. (Recommendation by the House of Commons, Standing Committee on Health, Report 2007)
5. Develop a comprehensive investment plan for community-based children and youth programming that will:
 - enhance, expand and sustain existing community infrastructure;
 - support the coordination and expansion of current out-of-school programs promoting wellness and physical fitness, with particular measures to ensure accessibility for low income families;
 - include a framework and resources to enable ongoing collaboration and planning among provincial/territorial and municipal governments, national Aboriginal organizations, child and youth serving organizations and other key stakeholder groups.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada recognizes the underlying necessity for the adoption of poverty reduction strategies to complement any measures aimed at improving physical activity and food security. Poverty influences the ability to make healthy food choices and physical activity choices. For children living in poverty very few food and physical activity choices are available. Sustainable solutions will require a commitment to economic and social policy reforms that rest within the auspices of both the federal and provincial governments. In this regard we also call upon the provinces and territories to commit to concrete poverty reduction targets, and make the required investments to achieve these goals.

now is the time

“It is good to see that the Boys and Girls Club is taking an active role in my child’s life and leading by example of healthy living - they don’t get those messages in the school cafeteria or through a few minutes of gym class.” PARENT TESTIMONIAL

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) gives all children the right “to rest and leisure; to engage in appropriate play and recreational activities, the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” (CRC)

It is time for all governments, communities and families to recommit to ensuring that these rights are a lived reality for all of our children and youth, and to immediately act to reverse the deterioration of health outcomes facing our future generations.

ENDNOTES

1. Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, 2007, Report of the Standing Committee on Health, House of Commons, Ottawa. Canada.
2. Older But Not Wiser – Canada’s Future At Risk, Canada’s Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, Active Healthy Kids Canada.
3. Obesity in Canada – CIHR, 2003.
4. Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, 2007, Report of the Standing Committee on Health, House of Commons. Ottawa. Canada.
5. Maier, Niki (2006). Healthy Children, Healthy Communities, UNAC; Oliver, Lisa. (2006). Canadian Journal of Public Health.
6. Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004. “Young People in Canada: Their Health and Well-being.” Chapter 11, Division of Childhood and Adolescence, Ottawa.
7. Canadian Public Health Initiative, 2004.
8. Rainville and Brink, 2001; Che and Chen, 2001.
9. Hanvey, L (2006) “Issues Affecting the Well-Being of Canadian Children in the Middle Years – 6 to 12: A Discussion Paper.” Prepared for the Canadian Council of Social Development.
10. Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, 2007, Report of the Standing Committee on Health, House of Commons. Ottawa. Canada.
11. Coalition for Active Living, Active communities, healthy Canadians, 2005, http://www.activeliving.ca/pdf/CAL_key_messages_final.pdf
12. International conference on Physical Activity and Obesity in Children, 2007, <http://www.phe.queensu.ca/epi/obesity/presentations.htm>
13. Hanvey, Louise, Issues Affecting the Well-Being of Canadian Children in the Middle Years – 6 to 12: A Discussion Paper.
14. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl. Middle Childhood Inside and Out: The Psychological and Social World of Children 9 – 12. March 2007. UBC and United Way of Lower Mainland Report.
15. Save the Children Canada, July 2001. A Canada Fit for Children.
16. Older But Not Wiser – Canada’s Future At Risk, 2007. Canada’s Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, 2007, Active Healthy Kids Canada.
17. Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids, 2007, Report of the Standing Committee on Health, House of Commons. Ottawa. Canada.

A good place to be

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
Clubs Garçons et Filles du Canada
7100 Woodbine Avenue, Suite 204
Markham, Ontario L3R 5J2
T 905-477-7272
F 905-477-2056

www.bgccan.com



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