



PARTICIPACTION

**2023 Budget Submission to
The Department of Finance Canada**

Moving Canadians to Action



ParticipACTION: Recognized Leader

As Canada's recognized and trusted physical activity leader for over 50 years, ParticipACTION helps people move more where they live, learn, work and play.

By mobilizing and aligning efforts of partners and interested parties within the sport, physical activity and recreation sectors, we envision a Canada where physical activity is a vital part of everyday life for everyone.

As a globally unique organization, ParticipACTION's work is often referenced and replicated around the world. From our award-winning public education campaigns to our evidence-based Report Cards on physical activity, ParticipACTION's leadership influences international policy and programming.

To continue to be a viable, impactful and resourceful organization, **it is critical that ParticipACTION receive a Government of Canada investment of \$50 million over five years to continue to support the health and well-being of Canadians.**



“ ParticipACTION is doing amazing work that helps professionals like me educate, engage and activate our community. This in turn helps citizens be active and healthy for life, which decreases chronic disease and cost to our overall health care system.”

Denise Fredeen, Health Promotion Facilitator- Move Your Mood Coordinator, Community Addiction & Mental Health, Alberta Health Services

Physical Activity: Vital to our Health and Well-Being

Physical activity is essential to living a long, healthy and productive life, and provides a wide range of physical, socio-cultural and mental health benefits.¹ Unfortunately, less than half of adults (49%), and only 28% of children and youth meet recommended physical activity guidelines.^{2 3} Alarmingly, racially diverse groups, women and girls, newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities, and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ and Indigenous communities report even lower rates of physical activity participation, placing these equity-deserving groups at greater risk for poor health outcomes and premature death.^{4 5 6}

Since the creation of ParticipACTION in 1971, the demands, distractions and conveniences associated with our modern lifestyle have accelerated at an alarming rate and have contributed to physical activity being socially engineered out of our daily lives. From the introduction of the internet to smartphones, social media, streaming services, food delivery services and now the metaverse, increases in screen time are at an all-time high and are a serious contributing factor to physical inactivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated already unhealthy sedentary habits, as both work and leisure pivoted to screen-centric indoor living.⁷

Every year, more and more pressures and competing priorities burden our population and physical activity is often not prioritized, despite all of the overwhelming benefits of an active lifestyle and the critical consequences of physical inactivity.

“ I’m glad I installed this app. Suffering from fibromyalgia and back pain, osteoarthritis in the neck and knees, I often struggle to find the courage to move more. With ParticipACTION, I want to see my results every day. I give myself little challenges.”

Anonymous, ParticipACTION App User

The many benefits of being active

Supporting people to be more active has significant benefits not only for the physical and mental health of individuals, but also for societies, environments and economies.

Powerful Preventor

Physical activity can help prevent onset or further prognosis, lower risk, or help manage several non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, musculoskeletal issues, some cancers, dementia/cognitive decline and more.^{8 9 10}

Social Connector

Physical activity and sport are powerful connectors that can promote community cohesiveness. Inclusive physical activity and sport programs enrich communities, reduce inequities, increase connections between and across cultures and decrease isolation.¹⁴

Mental Health Support

40% of adults in Canada say their mental health has deteriorated since the onset of the pandemic, and this number is higher for vulnerable groups.¹¹ Physical activity helps minimize symptoms of depression and anxiety, promotes feelings of happiness, boosts moods and builds resiliency.^{12 13}

Economic Booster

Active Canadians are healthier Canadians. Recent studies have shown that over 2 million cases of health conditions were prevented in 2019 due to sport and physical activity participation, saving \$23.4 billion in healthcare costs.¹⁵



Conversely, **physical inactivity costs our healthcare system over \$3.9 billion annually, with an additional \$7.9 billion in lost productivity.** When translating to an individual level, each insufficiently active worker costs the nation's economy approximately \$2,069 in healthcare costs and lost productivity. In contrast, a \$2,000 investment in helping an inactive person to become active will pay for itself in less than one year on average, when accounting for the benefits to the overall economy and society.¹⁶

“ Newcomers to Canada have barriers of speech and difficulties in communication with society, so they are isolated usually in the home... The ParticipACTION program provides important support to Newcomers and seniors, and it brings a great benefit not only to our members (but) also to community.”

Long Jin Chen, Table Tennis Team, Tong Le Senior Association

National and international alignment

Given the wide-ranging benefits of getting active, the promotion of physical activity has important alignments with several national priorities. The Government of Canada's Active Transportation Strategy, Framework for Diabetes, Sport Policy, Recreation Framework, Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity, Community Sport for All Initiative and Healthy Community Initiatives, among others, can all be supported through the promotion of physical activity.

Internationally, to help countries increase levels of participation, the World Health Organization's (WHO's) Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA) 2018–2030 provides a set of evidence-based policy recommendations to increase levels of participation across four strategic policy areas: active societies, active environments, active people and active systems. If effectively implemented by all countries, GAPPA will accelerate action towards meeting the **global target of a 15% relative reduction in population levels of physical inactivity by 2030.**¹⁷

Physical activity and sport promotion also supports several of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth: goals #3 (Good Health and Well-Being), #5 (Gender Equality), #10 (Reduced Inequalities) and #13 (Climate Action) through active transportation.¹⁹



Budget Recommendation: Investment with Significant Returns

The WHO's recent [Global Status Report on Physical Activity](#) reinforces the urgency to position physical activity as a shared, whole-of-government priority, and to strengthen coordination and partnerships to promote physical activity.¹⁸ Physical inactivity is a national (and global) public health issue; therefore, it is important for the Government of Canada to have a primary role as an investor and supporter of national physical activity promotion and participation strategies.

With this in mind, **we ask that the Government of Canada support the health and well-being of people living in Canada through funding of ParticipACTION for \$50 million over five years.**

Since 2018, ParticipACTION has received a total of \$44 million in federal government funding from a variety of sources in support of its mission to help people move more. The primary component of this funding included a 2018 Budget commitment of \$25 million over five years. **Currently all ParticipACTION funding commitments end March 31, 2023, putting the organization in a precarious situation.**

Our 2023 Budget request is therefore critical in ensuring ParticipACTION's viability and sustainability going forward. This current funding request provides a strategic opportunity to consolidate organizational funding, allowing for better long-term planning and efficiencies to deliver the best possible return on investment. When accounting for the significant inflationary pressures over the past few years, our budget request of \$50 million is comparable to the total funding received (\$44 million) during the past five years.

ParticipACTION relies on the federal government as its primary funder and is limited in its ability to secure significant revenue from alternate sources. Our programs and services are provided completely free as a public service to ensure that they can be accessible to everyone, especially those that need support the most. Private sector sponsorship opportunities post-pandemic have dramatically changed, making it significantly more challenging for non-profit organizations to access private funding. Despite these challenges, ParticipACTION has been successful in leveraging federal government funding to secure \$52.7 million from the private sector over the last five years, the vast majority of which as value in-kind contributions.

Funding received since 2018 has enabled ParticipACTION to successfully reach and engage more people. We have developed, sustained and continuously enhanced inclusive and engaging initiatives that have helped participants increase their physical activity, providing a boost to their mental health and sense of community:

43
million
more Canadians
have been reached
(cumulatively) through
our initiatives.

2
million
more Canadians have
made physical activity a
daily priority.

4.2
million
more Canadians
believe physical activity
can support their
mental health.

69%
of Canadians
engaged (4.3 million)
in the ParticipACTION
Community Challenge
report an increased
sense of belonging to
community.

ParticipACTION's budget request of \$50 million over five years is the minimum amount required to continue to build on the momentum generated to date while continuing to increase the number of people reached and engaged through our initiatives, ultimately improving the physical activity levels of people living in Canada, especially those from equity-deserving groups.





Approach: Plan for Action and Impact

Overarching priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vital importance of regular physical activity for both mental and physical health. It also, however, exposed inequities in access and opportunities for some communities to be physically active.¹⁹ In order to accelerate progress towards increasing physical activity for everyone – including the least active and most disadvantaged – ParticipACTION will be delivering all future initiatives through the lens of the following key priorities:

Support Equity-Deserving Groups

Who consistently report lower rates of physical activity participation, increased sedentary behaviours and poorer sleep habits, due to systemic barriers to participation such as racism, inequitable access, and a legacy of colonialism, placing them at greater risk for developing poor health outcomes.²⁰

Support Mental Health and Wellness

The pandemic has led to significant mental health challenges and stress for many, especially for those with pre-existing mental health conditions, youth, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and individuals with disabilities.²¹ Physical activity can help manage stress, increase self-esteem, reduce anxiety and depression, increase social connectivity, and should be a part of every person’s mental health toolkit.^{22 23}

“The support of ParticipACTION has allowed us to expand our Indigenous Girls Hockey Program to create more opportunities to celebrate our participants and their involvement and important contributions to hockey... ParticipACTION has continuously demonstrated clear capacity and commitment in being strong allies in this work.”

Ryan Francis, co-founder and lead of the Hockey Nova Scotia Indigenous Girls Hockey Program



Key Activities

Since 2018, we have successfully shifted attitudes and perceptions about the benefits of physical activity, and as we look ahead to the next five years, our activities will focus on **Moving Canadians to Action** to increase their physical activity behaviour.

Over the next five years, we will achieve the following goals through the proposed activities:

100% increase in the number of people reached and engaged by our initiatives.

70% of individuals engaged with our initiatives are representative of equity-deserving groups.

60% of individuals engaged with our initiatives report using physical activity to improve their mental health.

Contribute to the improvement of physical activity levels of people living in Canada consistent with the WHO global target of increasing physical activity by **15% by 2030**

Public Education

Implementing best practice public education campaigns is a key strategy to build active societies. Public education campaigns support the creation of a paradigm shift in all of society by enhancing knowledge and understanding of, and appreciation for, the multiple benefits of regular physical activity, and is therefore foundational to impacting behaviour change.^{24 25}

Starting in 1971 with the “60-year-old Swede” campaign, ParticipACTION has been at the forefront of internationally recognized public education campaigns that shift attitudes and perceptions about physical activity. ParticipACTION has been successful in increasing Canadians’ awareness of the many benefits of getting active, with 81% agreeing that physical activity is an urgent issue in Canada. Future efforts will now focus on **moving awareness to action:**

- Create a new and relevant marketing platform that brings the Moving Canadians to Action theme to life through **mass media campaigns and targeted communications** to equity-deserving groups.
- Create a dedicated **mental health** communications campaign highlighting how physical activity is a free, accessible way to boost your mood. This campaign will focus on supporting people through simple, effective and accessible strategies to include in their mental health toolbox.
- Develop and disseminate **toolkits** to key stakeholders to facilitate supportive environments for promoting physical activity, such as workplaces, schools and health practitioner offices.
- Establish strategic **partnerships** to effectively reach and meaningfully engage equity-deserving groups with campaigns, communications, content and other activities.

“Movement is made more accessible, easier to tackle! Wealth of videos and articles are offered. All for free! Love the option to create your own team/community for support and motivation.”

Dixon, ParticipACTION app user



Community Engagement

Physical activity and sport are powerful connectors, from two people going on a walk around their neighbourhood to events engaging thousands of participants. ParticipACTION contributes towards building stronger, healthier and more vibrant communities through its annual Community Challenge – a national initiative that encourages residents to get active with their community in search of Canada’s Most Active Communities.

The 2022 ParticipACTION Community Challenge was embraced across the country, with more than 600,000 participants in over 1,700 communities tracking over 500 million physical activity minutes. To help support local physical activity and sport programming efforts during the challenge, ParticipACTION distributed more than \$500,000 in grants to over 600 organizations in every province and territory. 90% of organizations that hosted Community Challenge events experienced a benefit as a result of the program, especially in their ability to provide safe and inclusive sport and physical activity programming. Future efforts will continue to **move communities to action** by building the capacity of community organizations to provide ongoing physical activity and sport participation opportunities:

- Continue to grow the ParticipACTION **Community Challenge** using key insights and learnings to better support and engage communities and organizations in delivering physical activity and sport programming, with a focus on equity-deserving groups.
- Evolve the Community Challenge **granting program** with an increased focus on those serving equity-deserving groups.
- Develop a Community Challenge **school engagement strategy**, working alongside key partners to deliver quality and accessible active programming.
- Develop a Community Challenge **workplace engagement strategy**, actively engaging workplaces to support their employees through physical activity and sport.

“ ParticipACTION is amazing and the Community Better Challenge they run has meant so much to my Village as we have seen such great uptake in physical activity, and it has meant so much both on a physical and mental health level. We are so appreciative.”

Rob Campbell, Mayor of Salisbury NB

Digital Health Intervention

With the increasing reliance and utility of digital technology, it is imperative that ParticipACTION continue to utilize digital approaches to influence physical activity behaviours. Our most powerful tool to connect directly with people is through the free, bilingual ParticipACTION app. Steeped in data science and behavioural economics, and powered by innovative digital technology, the ParticipACTION app is a simple, accessible support for adults trying to **move their intentions to action** in making the recommended 150 minutes of heart-pumping physical activity per week habitual.

The ParticipACTION app has been consistently rated as one of the top apps nationally in its category, successfully impacting behaviour through its engaging content, motivating nudges, fun challenges and rewards. 53% of engaged app users became significantly more active, reporting an average increase of 53 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity within their first month:

- Enhance and optimize the **ParticipACTION app** through key learnings, data, user feedback, market research and industry insights. Apply the Multi-Process Action Control (M-PAC) behaviour change theory to evolve the app to positively impact users' physical activity levels and continue to increase accessibility by expanding connected devices such as health kits and wearables.
- Co-develop customized and relevant **content** to target people with disabilities, women and girls, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, newcomers, Indigenous and racially diverse groups, as well as addressing topics such as mental health, chronic disease, aging, family, etc.
- Leverage data insights, user feedback and market demand to evolve in-app **challenges** and better deliver individual and team experiences by fostering community engagement through social connection.
- Develop a **Movement Index**, actioning Canada's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines into a tangible, measurable health index delivered through the app that will provide a real-time snapshot of an individual's (and Canada's) movement behaviours that dynamically recalibrate, keeping a user engaged, motivated and active.

“The app has been life changing for me the last 3 years, so far. Tracking, articles, workouts, tips, learning and more!”

Laura G, ParticipACTION app user

Issue Leadership and Sector Coordination

The WHO suggests employing a “systems-based” approach, where effective physical activity policy implementation requires bold leadership combined with cross-government and multi-sectoral partnerships at all levels to achieve a coordinated, whole-of-system response.¹⁷ National leadership is essential to the success of such an approach, providing a centralized coordination role, partner and knowledge mobilization, priority development, and aligned implementation efforts across the country.

Given our national recognition as the top, credible physical activity organization in Canada (87% of sector organizations agree that we advance and communicate knowledge on issues associated with physical activity and sedentary behaviours), and considering our sector and thought leadership efforts, ParticipACTION, as a strategic partner of the Government of Canada, is uniquely suited to **move knowledge and systems to action**:

- Provide leadership, coordination and communications support for the **Common Vision** for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada, linking with other national and international strategies and policies.

- Continue to be Canada’s go-to physical activity resource, providing essential **knowledge mobilization** activities and bridging the gap between research and practice to implementation.
- Host an **annual summit**, inviting government and non-government organizations in the sport, physical activity, recreation and public health sectors to discuss issues, new policies, frameworks, strategies, communication approaches, progress monitoring and more.

“ParticipACTION has been a valuable partner since 2015 and the Government of NL has been able to leverage and amplify ParticipACTION’s national public education campaigns, digital app challenges, and the development of targeted tools and resources to motivate and support residents of this province to become more active and less sedentary. This partnership has been a cost-effective and efficient way to help increase physical activity levels of individuals in this province.”

Michelle Healey, Director, Recreation and Sport Division, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador



Summary: A Canadian Legacy in Jeopardy

Physical inactivity is a pervasive public health issue that must be urgently recognized as a national priority.

There are few areas in public health like physical activity where evidence on required action is so convincing, cost-effective and practical.¹⁷ The health and economic burden of physical inactivity is not inevitable, but avoiding it requires action and investment in implementing effective policy and interventions at a national scale, which ParticipACTION is uniquely suited to deliver against.

Despite the enormous demands, distractions and conveniences associated with our modern lifestyle and the vast pressures and competing priorities that burden our society, ParticipACTION has been successful in shifting attitudes and perceptions about physical activity with promising impacts on behaviours.

With renewed funding from the Government of Canada, we can build on this momentum and scale initiatives to reach and engage more people living in Canada, especially those who face social inequities to getting active, because our message is more important than ever – physical activity is vital to our health and well-being.

Without committed federal government funding after March 31, 2023, ParticipACTION's situation is urgent and tenuous. **A lack of ongoing, sustained funding would severely jeopardize the viability, and possible continued existence, of ParticipACTION as an iconic Canadian institution and recognized leader** in helping people make physical activity a vital part of everyday life.

Helping us all become a more active and less sedentary population should not be seen as a burden or a cost but rather a powerful investment that will make Canada a healthy, joyful, environmentally progressive, inclusive and economically strong nation.



Endnotes

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