

Board of Health Briefing Report

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
Date: April 5 2023
Topic: Physical Literacy
Submitted by: Dr. Glenn Corneil, (a)Medical Officer of Health/CEO
Prepared by: Crystal Gorman, Janet Smale
Reviewed by: Amanda Mongeon, Randy Winters

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is Recommended:

1. **THAT** the Timiskaming Board of Health receive the briefing note for Physical Literacy for consideration;
2. **AND FURTHER THAT** the Board of Health endorse Public Health Sudbury & District's Motion #29-22: Physical Literacy for Healthy Active Children (Appendix A) and share a copy of THU's motion and a summary of this briefing note with local school boards, sports and recreation organizations, early learning centres, and the local member Provincial Parliament.¹

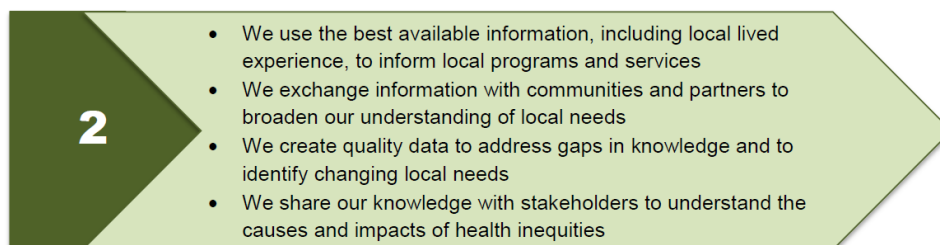
Overview

- Physical literacy is “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life”.²
- Physical literacy is an essential part of childhood development, equivalent to numeracy and literacy development.³
- The fundamental time for children to develop physical literacy skills is when they are at an early age.⁴ Developing physical literacy skills at an early age lays the groundwork for a life-long love of and engagement in physical activity and sport.⁴
- Physical literacy can be cultivated in children and youth populations through community, recreation, education, sport, and health settings.⁵
- The Ontario Public Health Standards recognize the requirement for boards of health to have the knowledge of and increased capacity to act on the factors associated with the prevention of chronic diseases and promotion of wellbeing, including healthy living behaviours, healthy public policy, and creating supportive environments which supports the work of physical literacy.⁶
- A Board of Health supported endorsement of physical literacy is an important step towards achieving physical literacy for all children and youth in the district of Timiskaming.

Ontario Public Health Standards (2021) and Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023

This work directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Ontario Public Health Standards (2021) and supports THU 2019-2023 strategic direction number 2.^{6,7}

We create, share and exchange knowledge



Background

Physical literacy is “the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life”.² The concept of physical literacy considers that people who are physically literate are more likely to develop progressive activity skills, and are more likely to engage in, and continue with physical activities throughout their lifespan.^{3,4} Physical literacy develops fundamental movement and sport skills such as running, jumping, throwing and swimming.⁴

The fundamental time for children to develop physical literacy skills is when they are young.⁴ Children’s encouragement to develop physical literacy skills from a young age lays the groundwork for a life-long love of and engagement in physical activity and sport.⁴ Physical literacy is an essential part of childhood development, equivalent to numeracy and literacy development.³ Physical literacy in children is developed through physical movement and activity.⁴ The importance of physical activity in children is well documented.⁸

Children benefit from regular daily physical activity.⁸ Current Canadian guidelines state children 5 to 17 should get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity per day but only 37.6% of this population in Canada meets the recommendation.⁸ Regular physical activity helps children to develop physical literacy skills, cardiovascular fitness, strength, and bone density, and to maintain a healthy body weight while reducing the risk of chronic disease, cardiovascular illness, and substance use.^{4,8}

In the past, physical literacy skills were developed in part through active outdoor unstructured play in children and vocational and recreational activities in adults.⁴ In today’s electronic and largely sedentary world, an inactivity crisis has developed; children don’t engage in unstructured play and physical activity as much and adults are increasingly sedentary at work and at home.^{3,4,5} In 2019, 31.7%^E of children and youth in Timiskaming (aged 3 to 17 years old) indicated that they did not participate in sports or physical activities with coaches or instructors in the past week;⁹ this is not statistically different from the 25.6% of youth in Ontario.⁹ However, physical activity among children was disproportionately affected during the pandemic by measures including school and recreation and park closures and increased screen time.^{10,11} Structural inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic have also impacted children’s physical activity levels:¹⁰ children who experience poverty, or who have inequitable access to indoor or outdoor recreation spaces and built environment features continue to deter the development of fundamental movement and physical literacy skills among populations.^{3,10} Screen time is considered any time spent with an electronic device, and can be active (e.g., video chatting, online learning) or passive (e.g., watching television).¹¹ The rising trend of screen time shows 83% of Ontario students spent three hours or more a day in front of an electronic screen in their free time.¹² This rate increased between 2019 and 2021 and also increased with the grade of the student (age).¹² Increased screen time is equated with decreased physical activity and is associated with harms to children’s physical and mental health.^{4,11}

Interventions to Promote Physical Literacy in Timiskaming

In 2015 THU launched and provided training to implement a toolkit for childcare providers intended to increase children's physical literacy skill development in early learning settings. The toolkit was developed in collaboration with other Northeastern Ontario public health units. Subsequent trainings and resources were offered to professionals working with children in Timiskaming.

THU's focus on physical literacy has since been replaced by a focus on active outdoor play recognizing that in children, physical literacy is naturally developed through outdoor and unstructured play. Community partners have also invested in outdoor play through collaboration, trainings, and built environment. As was the case with many other public health programs, this work was stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Opportunities

To reinvigorate physical literacy and reinstate the value and importance of this fundamental child and youth skill development, many approaches may be considered.

In Sudbury, the sport, recreation, education and health communities are undertaking a Physical Literacy for Communities project (PLFC) to improve physical literacy development across the district.⁵ A PLFC project brings together local community partners within the health, education, recreation, sport and media sectors within a specified community under the leadership of a physical literacy project convenor.⁵ Funding support is secured through grants or partnerships to cover the project's three phases of education and awareness, training and mentorship.⁵ In Sudbury, the PLFC project is intended to "create a community that understands and is invested in physical literacy, and ultimately, one that maintains active and healthy lifestyles, regardless of age or ability".¹³

Schools are also an ideal setting and conduit for physical literacy.³ The Government of Canada's Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity Across Canada calls for schools to use a whole of school model to implement physical activity throughout the school day, not just during physical education class.³ Essential to this model would be the incorporation of physical literacy to build the range of skills to assist children and youth in making movement a life-long pursuit.³ The Government of Canada has called upon schools and school boards to:

- Use a comprehensive approach to work with local health authorities and recreation leaders to bring physical activity opportunities, including initiatives that promote the development of physical literacy, to children and youth before and after school.³
- Partner with community organizers through joint use agreements to increase community access to school sport and recreation facilities to improve physical literacy outside of school hours.³

Additionally, the federal government has called upon all governments, organizations, communities, and leaders to view physical literacy with a lens that will:

- Recognize and promote physical literacy as an essential part of childhood development, like numeracy and literacy.³
- Promote physical literacy education and knowledge development.³
- Recognize that developing physical literacy, regardless of jurisdiction, is a component of a quality physical education curriculum, and that a minimum of 30 minutes of quality daily physical education is required for students to learn the knowledge, skills, competencies, and confidence for life-long movement.³

Not all children and youth have access to appropriate and safe recreation and physical activity promoting spaces¹⁰ and inequalities between populations create barriers to development of physical literacy and activity skills.¹⁰ Investments are needed to increase equitable access to public indoor and

outdoor facilities or spaces through improvements in safety of existing spaces, development of additional facilities in low-income or racialized neighbourhoods, and increased availability of public transportation to green spaces outside of urban areas.¹⁰

Next Steps

Active outdoor play is still an important strategy to develop physical literacy among children and youth.⁴ Recognizing partners have an interest in active outdoor play, combining opportunities for development of physical literacy skills with active outdoor play can be an effective approach which requires wider partnership to ensure all children and youth have opportunities to develop movement skills in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Using a public health approach, THU can advocate for the development of built and natural environments that support physical literacy skill development while addressing the social determinants of health, provide resources and training opportunities for professionals working in early learning centres, education and recreation, and advocate for affordable access to recreation, while considering policies and strategies to encourage populations at risk of physical activity disengagement, such as girls and women would all support greater development of physical literacy skill development among children and youth.^{3,4,5,10}

Physical literacy is necessary to build competency for movement and physical skills among children and youth.^{3,4} The incorporation of physical literacy into schools, sport, recreation, and community organizations should become standard practice.^{3,4,5} To facilitate the uptake of physical literacy awareness, training and skill development among children and youth, the health unit will:

1. Collect data from community partners on their needs and interests in physical literacy skill development;
2. Support all area school boards, sport and recreation organizations, and early learning centres to work together in a comprehensive manner to improve physical activity levels among children and youth across the district of Timiskaming;
3. Offer resources, trainings, supports and opportunities for collaboration to school, community and sport and recreation partners based on need and interest;
4. Advocate for equitable access to public indoor and outdoor facilities or spaces through improvements in safety of existing spaces, development of additional facilities in low-income or racialized neighbourhoods, and increased availability of public transportation to green spaces outside of urban areas.

References

¹ Public Health Sudbury & Districts (2022). Physical literacy for healthy active children (Motion #29-22). Retrieved from <https://www.phsd.ca/about/board-health/motions-approved-sudbury-district-board-health/physical-literacy-for-healthy-active-children-motion-29-22/>

² International Physical Literacy Association. (2017). Physical literacy definition. Retrieved from <https://www.physical-literacy.org/>

³ Government of Canada. (2020). A common Vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: Let's Get Moving (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/lets-get-moving.html>

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- ⁵ Physical Literacy. (2023). Physical Literacy for Communities Across Canada. Retrieved from: <https://physicalliteracy.ca/physical-literacy-for-communities-across-canada/>
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- ⁸ Government of Canada. (2016). Children and Physical Activity. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/being-active/children-physical-activity.html>
- ⁹ Statistics Canada. [Table 13-10-0113-01 Health characteristics, two-year period estimates](#) Canadian Community Health Survey 2017-18. Accessed March 28, 2023.
- ¹⁰ Science Table. The Impact of Physical Activity on mental Health Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. (2022). Retrieved from <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/the-impact-of-physical-activity-on-mental-health-outcomes-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
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- ¹² Boak, A., Elton-Marshall, T., & Hamilton, H.A. (2022). The well-being of Ontario students: Findings from the 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS). Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.
- ¹³ Physical Literacy. (2023). Active Sudbury. Retrieved from <https://physicalliteracy.ca/physical-literacy-for-communities-across-canada/active-sudbury/>



December 30, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Directors of Education, Local School Boards
Sports and Recreation Organizations
Early Learning Centres

Dear Recipient:

Re: Physical Literacy for Healthy Active Children

At its meeting on October 20, 2022, the Board of Health carried the following resolution #29-22:

WHEREAS being physically active every day helps children and youth perform better in school, learn new skills, build strong muscles, improve blood pressure and aerobic fitness, strengthen bones and reduce the risk of depressionⁱ; and

WHEREAS the implementation of stay-at-home orders, closures of schools, and indoor and outdoor spaces to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 is the reduction of physical activity levels in all age groupsⁱⁱ; the percentage of youth meeting the Canadian physical activity recommendations for children and youth fell from 50.8% in 2018 to 37.2% in 2020ⁱⁱⁱ; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada's national policy document Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada: Let's Get Moving identifies physical literacy as the foundation for an active lifestyle^{iv}. Studies show that children who have high physical literacy scores are more likely to meet national physical activity or sedentary behaviour guidelines^v; and

WHEREAS physically literate individuals have been shown to have the motivation, confidence, physical competence,

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knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engaging in physical activities for life^{vi} and these skills help them make healthy, active choices that are both beneficial to and respectful of their whole self, others, and their environment^{vii}; and

WHEREAS the school community offers one of the best opportunities to improve the quality of sport and physical activity participation for children and youth; and

WHEREAS the Ontario Public Health Standards require that: “community partners have the knowledge of and increased capacity to act on the factors associated with the prevention of chronic diseases and promotion of wellbeing, including healthy living behaviours, healthy public policy, and creating supportive environments.”^{viii} This includes knowledge of the importance and impact of physical literacy on increasing physical activity participation thereby reducing the risk of chronic disease;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Health for Public Health Sudbury & Districts encourage all area school boards, sport and recreation organizations, and early learning centres to work to improve physical activity levels among children and youth across Sudbury and districts, including through collaboration with Sport for Life Society, Active Sudbury and Public Health Sudbury & Districts, agencies that provide comprehensive physical literacy training to teachers, coaches, recreation providers and early childhood educators; and

FURTHER THAT a copy of this motion be shared with the Sport for Life Society, Active Sudbury, local members of Provincial Parliament, all Ontario Boards of Health, and area school boards, early learning centres and sport and recreation organizations.

As we look ahead to increase physical activity and to decrease sedentary behaviours in the population; the need for improving physical literacy is greater than ever before. It is crucial that we embrace physical literacy as a catalyst for children and youth to be active and healthy. We know that *it takes a village to raise a child* and the collaboration of multiple sectors to embed physical literacy development in plans, programs, and policies. Therefore the Board of Health for Sudbury & Districts encourages all area school boards, sport and recreation organizations, and early learning centres across Sudbury and districts to work to


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improve physical activity levels among children and youth through collaboration with agencies that provide comprehensive physical literacy programming, including the Sport for Life Society, Active Sudbury and Public Health Sudbury & Districts.

Sincerely,



Penny Sutcliffe, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer

cc: Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Loretta Ryan, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
France Gélinas, Member of Provincial Parliament, Nickel Belt
Jamie West, Member of Provincial Parliament, Sudbury
Michael Mantha, Member of Provincial Parliament, Algoma-Manitoulin
All Ontario Boards of Health
Constituent Municipalities

ⁱ Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Benefits of Physical Activity for Children (2021). Taken from: <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adults/health-benefits-of-physical-activity-for-children.html>

ⁱⁱ Science Table. The Impact of Physical Activity on mental Health Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. (2022) taken from : [The Impact of Physical Activity on Mental Health Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic - Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table \(covid19-sciencetable.ca\)](https://www.covid19-sciencetable.ca/)

ⁱⁱⁱ Statistics Canada. The unequal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical activity habits of Canadians. (2022) Taken from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2022005/article/00003-eng.htm>

^{iv} Government of Canada. A common Vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: Let's Get Moving. (2018) Taken from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/lets-get-moving.html>

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