This document will assist you and your colleagues to deliver consistent messages on the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. Each message has supporting evidence, action steps, and motivational messages to use in your communication strategies and to create awareness of the guidelines.

Based on scientific research, the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines are available for age 0 to older adults. Many Canadians do not know how much or what type of physical activity they need to stay healthy, which is part of the rationale behind creating this document. In addition, the issues surrounding obesity and physical inactivity are complex and involve factors such as income, where you live, and employment status. These environmental factors that influence behaviour change are not reflected in the key messages below. These messages reflect only what individuals from different age groups should strive to achieve for their own optimal health.

It is also important to note that the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines are different and have separate health outcomes. To provide greater consistency and clarity, the following motivational message has been applied to both sets of guidelines for each population group: “Now is the time to get up and get moving!”

**Messaging that applies to all Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines:**

- Start slowly and gradually increase time, frequency, and intensity of activity.
- Being physically active is beneficial for all age groups in the prevention or maintenance of some chronic diseases.
- More daily physical activity provides greater health benefits.
Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for the Early Years — aged 0-4 years

- The evidence-based guidelines provide the minimum measured goals to achieve overall health benefits.
- The guidelines encourage children in the early years to be even more physically active than the guidelines state, as more health benefits come from being more physically active.
- The guideline recommendations place a high value on the benefits of physical activity that accumulate throughout life.

Why is this important?1

- There is an assumption that physical activity occurs naturally at a young age and that young children are active enough, but research suggests this is not necessarily the case.
- The number of overweight and obese Canadians younger than 6 years old is rising. Two regional reports tell us that the prevalence of obesity in children aged 2 to 5 years is between 8% and 11%.
- National data show that 15.2% of 2-5-year-olds are overweight and 6.3% are obese.
- The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) indicates that only 36% of 2-3-year-olds and 44% of 4-5-year-olds regularly engage in an unorganized sport and physical activity each week.

Action:2 For healthy growth and development:

Infants (aged less than 1 year) should be physically active several times daily – particularly through interactive floor-based play.

Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for the Early Years — aged 0-4 years

- The evidence-based guidelines provide the maximum measured amount of time children in the early years should be sedentary to achieve overall health benefits.
- The guidelines are evidence-based and provide guidelines to minimize the amount of time children in the early years should be sedentary to achieve health benefits.
- According to the guidelines, less time spent being sedentary and more time being physically active is encouraged and better for children’s health.
**Why is this important?**

- Sedentary behaviours dominate the waking hours during the early years with approximately 73% to 84% of this time being spent sedentarily.³
- Approximately 90% of children are being exposed to screen-based activities before 2 years of age.⁴
- Young children may experience additional negative health outcomes when exposed to excessive sedentary behaviour, such as impaired attention span and cognitive development.⁵
- A Canadian survey reported that approximately 25% of children aged 2-5 years watch more than two hours of television a day.⁶
- Promoting appropriate sedentary behaviour habits at a young age may have positive effects on immediate and long-term health.
- Sedentary screen time is associated with detrimental effects on aspects of cognitive and psychosocial development and may be associated with adverse effects on body composition.

**Action:**

- For healthy growth and development, parents and caregivers should minimize the time young children spend being sedentary during waking hours. This includes prolonged sitting or being restrained (e.g., stroller, high chair) for more than one hour at a time.
- For those under 2 years, screen time (e.g., TV, computer, electronic games) is not recommended.
- For children 2–4 years, screen time should be limited to under an hour per day; less is better.
- Sedentary behaviour is time when children are doing very little physical movement, such as sitting or reclining in a stroller, high chair, or car seat; watching television; or playing with electronic games.

**Motivational message:**

- Spending less time being sedentary can help young children maintain a healthy body weight, develop social skills, and improve language skills.
- **Now is the time to get up and get moving!**

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**Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Children — 5-11 Years**

- The evidence-based guidelines provide the minimum measured goals to achieve overall health benefits.
- The guidelines encourage children to be even more physically active than the guidelines state, as more health benefits come from being more physically active.

**Why is this important?**

- Over the past few decades, Canadian children have become less active.⁷
- According to the 2011 Canadian Health Measures Survey, only 9% of boys and 4% of girls participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity a day.⁸
- Many Canadians do not know how much or what type of physical activity children need to stay healthy.⁹
- Over the past 30 years, childhood obesity rates have tripled in Canada, and today’s children are at risk of becoming the first generation who may not live as long as their parents.¹⁰
- A total of 28% of Ontario children and youth are overweight or obese.¹¹

**Action:**¹² Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity every day and should include vigorous-intensity activities three days a week.

- Moderate-intensity physical activity causes children to sweat a little and breathe harder and includes activities such as bike riding and playground activities.
- Vigorous-intensity physical activity causes children to sweat and be “out of breath” and includes activities such as running or swimming.
- The intensity of the exercise is dependent upon the effort exerted during the activity.
- Examples of other moderate- to vigorous physical activities are playing tag, rollerblading, skateboarding, or sledding in the park.
These guidelines also recommend activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least three days per week, such as jumping, skipping, and climbing.

Motivational message:

• Being physically active every day helps children perform better in school, learn new skills, and feel happier.

• Being physically active every day helps children maintain a healthy body weight, grow stronger, and improve self-confidence.

• Now is the time to get up and get moving!

Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children — 5-11 Years

• The evidence-based guidelines provide the maximum measured amount of time children should be sedentary to achieve overall health benefits.

• According to the guidelines, less time spent being sedentary and more time being physically active is encouraged and better for children’s health.

Why is this important?

• Over the past few decades, Canadian children have become less active.13

• For the third year in a row, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” for Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviour (Screen Time in previous report cards), as most Canadian children and youth are still not meeting the recommended guideline of less than two hours a day.14

A total of 73% of parents report their children are watching TV, reading, or playing video/computer games after school.15

Children and youth are getting an average of 44 hours of screen time a week: six hours a day on weekdays and more than seven hours a day on weekends.16

Too much screen time is associated with negative psychological consequences, such as reduced academic achievement and sleep, and engagement at a younger age in high-risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and having sex.17

Motivational message:

• Spending more time being active and less time being sedentary helps children perform better in school, learn new skills, and improve self-confidence.

• Make family time active time.

• Now is the time to get up and get moving!

Action:18 Children should minimize the time they spend being sedentary every day to achieve optimal health benefits.

• Sedentary behaviour is time when children are doing very little physical movement, such as sitting for long periods, watching television, playing video games, and using the computer.

• Children should limit their free time in front of any type of screen to no more than two hours per day and can achieve additional health benefits if this time is decreased further.

• These guidelines also recommend that inactive forms of transportation (such as being in a car), extended sitting, and time spent indoors throughout the day should be limited.
Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Youth — 12-17 years

• The evidence-based guidelines are based on scientific research and provide the minimum measured goals to achieve overall health benefits.

• The guidelines encourage youth aged 12-17 years to be even more physically active than the guidelines state, as more health benefits come from being more physically active.

Why is this important?

• Canadian youth aged 12-17 years have become inactive.19

• A total of 28% of Ontario children and youth are overweight or obese.20

• Many Canadians do not know how much or what type of physical activity youth aged 12-17 years need to stay healthy.21

• According to the Canadian Community Health Survey for Ontario, in 2010, 20.1% of youth (aged 12-17 years) were overweight or obese (24.9% of males, 14.8% of females).22

Action:23 Youth need at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity every day and should include vigorous-intensity activities three days a week.

• Moderate-intensity physical activity causes youth aged 12-17 years to sweat a little and breathe harder and includes activities such as skating and bike riding.

• Vigorous-intensity physical activity causes youth aged 12-17 years to sweat and be “out of breath” and includes activities such as running and rollerblading.

• The intensity of the exercise is dependent upon the effort exerted during the activity.

• Examples of other moderate- to vigorous physical activities are skateboarding, fitness classes, basketball, hockey, soccer, swimming, tennis, or skiing.

• The guidelines also recommend activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least three days per week, such as jumping, skipping, and climbing.

Motivational message:

• Being physically active every day helps youth aged 12-17 years perform better in school, learn new skills, and feel happier.

• Being physically active every day helps youth aged 12-17 years to maintain a healthy body weight, grow stronger, and improve self-confidence.

• Now is the time to get up and get moving!

Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Youth — 12-17 Years

• The evidence-based guidelines provide the maximum measured amount of time youth aged 12-17 years should be sedentary to achieve overall health benefits.

• According to the guidelines, less time spent being sedentary and more time being physically active are encouraged and better for youth health.

Why is this important?

• Canadian youth have become inactive.24

• For the third year in a row, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” for Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviour (Screen Time in previous report cards), as most Canadian children and youth are still not meeting the recommended guideline of less than two hours a day.25

• A total of 73% of parents report their children are watching TV, reading, or playing video/computer games after school.26

• Children and youth are getting an average of 44 hours of screen time per week: six hours a day on weekdays and more than seven hours a day on weekends.27
Too much screen time is associated with negative psychological consequences, such as reduced academic achievement and sleep, and engagement at a younger age in high-risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and having sex.  

**Action:** Youth should minimize the time they spend being sedentary every day to achieve optimal health benefits.

Sedentary behaviour is time when youth aged 12-17 years are doing very little physical movement, such as sitting for long periods, watching television, playing video games, and using the computer.

Youth aged 12-17 years should limit recreational screen time to no more than two hours per day and can achieve additional health benefits if this time is decreased further.

The guidelines also recommend that inactive forms of transportation (such as being in a car), extended sitting, and time spent indoors throughout the day should be limited.

**Motivational message:**

- Spending more time being active and less time being sedentary helps youth aged 12-17 years do better in school, learn new skills, and improve self-confidence.

**Now is the time to get up and get moving!**

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**Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults — 18–64 Years**

- The evidence-based guidelines provide the *minimum* measured goals to achieve overall health benefits.

- The guidelines encourage adults to be even more physically active than the guidelines state, as more health benefits come from being more physically active.

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**Why is this important?**

- Canadian adults have become inactive.

- Currently, only 15% of Canadian adults engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity per week.

- Many Canadians do not know how much or what type of physical activity they need to stay healthy.

- Nearly half (47%) of Canadian adults aren’t active for even 30 minutes one day of the week.

- According to the Canadian Community Health Survey for Ontario, in 2010, 34% of adults (18 years and older) were overweight (40.7% of males, 27.3% of females) and 18.7% of adults (18 years and older) were obese (20.3% of males, 17.0% of females).

- Approximately one-third of deaths related to coronary heart disease; one-quarter of deaths related to stroke and osteoporosis; 20% of deaths related to colon cancer, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes; and 14% of deaths related to breast cancer could be prevented by following the current Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.

**Action:** Adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

- Moderate-intensity physical activity causes adults to sweat a little and breathe harder and includes activities such as brisk walking and bike riding.

- Vigorous-intensity physical activity causes adults to sweat and be “out of breath” and includes activities such as jogging and cross-country skiing.

- The intensity of the exercise is dependent upon the effort exerted during the activity.

- Examples of other moderate- to vigorous physical activities are dance classes, fitness classes, or playing a sport.

- The guidelines also recommend muscle and bone strengthening activities such as skipping, jumping, and light weight-resistance training using major muscle groups at least two days per week.
Motivational message:

- Being physically active 150 minutes per week can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke.
- Being active also improves strength, morale, and self-esteem.
- Now is the time to get up and get moving!

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults — 65 Years and Older

- The evidence-based guidelines provide the minimum measured goals to achieve overall health benefits.
- The guidelines encourage older adults to be even more physically active than the guidelines state, as more health benefits come from being more physically active.

Why is this important?

- Canadians have become inactive. 37
- Many older adults may be uncertain about how much or what type of physical activity they need to stay healthy. 38
- A total of 80% of Ontarians older than age 65 have at least one chronic disease, while approximately 70% suffer from two or more. 39
- The cost of medical treatment and lost productivity for chronic diseases is estimated to cost Ontario $80 billion a year. 40
- Improved health behaviours related to physical activity could help prevent a provincial health care crisis. 41
- The CANSIM table, which includes information for adults 65 years and older, shows that in Ontario in 2010: 42
  - 34.0% of adults (18 years and older) were overweight (40.7% of males, 27.3% of females),
  - 18.7% of adults (18 years and older) were obese (20.3% of males, 17.0% of females).
- 20.1% of youth (12-17 years) were overweight or obese (24.9% of males, 14.8% of females),
- 39.6% of adults 65 years and older were overweight (46.4% of males, 34.0% of females), and
- 18.4% of adults 65 years and older were obese (18.6% of males, 18.2% of females).

Action: 43 Older adults should aim to achieve 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week in 10 minute bouts or more.

- Moderate-intensity activity causes an older adult to sweat a little and breathe harder and includes activities such as brisk walking and bicycling.
- Vigorous-intensity activity causes an older adult to sweat and be “out of breath” and includes activities such as cross-country skiing and swimming.
- The intensity of the exercise is dependent upon the effort exerted during the activity.
- Examples of other moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activities are dancing, fitness classes, running, urban/Nordic pole walking, and playing a sport. These guidelines also recommend muscle and bone strengthening activities such as heavy gardening or light weight-resistance training using major muscle groups at least two days a week.

Motivational message:

- It’s never too late to start being active.
- Older adults who are physically active may have enhanced balance and may become less likely to experience a fall.
- Being physically active for 150 minutes per week can help reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.
- Being physically active helps older adults maintain independence longer and increases bone health and mental health.
- Now is the time to get up and get moving!
References:
6 AHKC. (2010).

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21 CSEP. (2011). Key messages.
30 CSEP. (2011). Q6A.
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