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## **Less is more, global comparisons on physical activity reveal** ***The 2014 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card goes global for the first time***

**TORONTO (ONTARIO) MAY 20, 2014** – For the first time, the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card looks at how Canadian child and youth physical activity stacks up against 14 other countries. The Report Card, released by Active Healthy Kids Canada in partnership with ParticipACTION and the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO), reveals Canada is among the top countries for having well-developed physical activity infrastructure and programs, but trails at the back of the global pack for overall physical activity levels—other developed countries included in the report saw similar results. The global comparisons confirm that we’ve built it, so why are they not coming? The answer requires an honest look at Canada’s culture of convenience—doing more in less time—which may be at direct odds with promoting children’s health. In some cases, perhaps less is more.

“Our society values efficiency—we build more, do more and impose more structure—but perhaps this approach is somewhat misguided when it comes to getting kids more active,” says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and Director of HALO. “A child’s day is so structured that there is no room for free play or walking or biking to school. Having plenty of local playgrounds is important, but what if they never get used? To increase daily physical activity levels for all kids, we must encourage a mix of opportunities, such as organized sport, active play and active transportation.”

When it comes to getting kids physically active, there is a tendency in Canada to prioritize structured opportunities. Canadian parents look to organized activities (e.g. dance recitals and sport leagues) and schools to get their kids moving, many local arenas and gyms are booked for organized activities, and there is a structured physical activity curriculum in place at schools in every province and territory. But, these means alone cannot make up for the lack of opportunities for spontaneous movement—such as getting to places on foot and playing freely outdoors—in our kids’ daily lives.

“Overall, child and youth physical activity levels remain alarmingly low—the Report Card tells us that only five per cent of five- to 17-year-olds are meeting the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines,” says Elio Antunes, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “That’s why we need to encourage a wider variety of opportunities to improve the grade on kids’ physical activity levels, and in some cases we need to step back and do less. Many parents see active transportation and active play as inconvenient or unsafe, which results in kids spending their free time indoors being sedentary. In fact, these are great, cost-efficient ways to get kids moving more.”

New Zealand and Mozambique lead the pack with “B” grades in Overall Physical Activity. The global comparisons reveal that New Zealand seems to have found success in providing a balance of opportunities for organized activities and active play, with most kids saying they spend an average of 78 minutes per day

in free play.<sup>1</sup> And, in Mozambique, where the majority of the population lives in rural environments, high physical activity levels consist largely of transport and domestic chores.<sup>2,3</sup>

“Considered in a global context, Canada is a developed country, but it might be fair to say Canada is overdeveloped when it comes to its physical activity infrastructure and programs for children and youth,” says Jennifer Cowie Bonne, CEO, Active Healthy Kids Canada. “Canada will never reap the benefits of our well developed policies, programs and places unless we relax our grasp and give our kids room to move. Parents and families, policymakers, schools and community leaders must work together to make it easier for our kids to make the active choice, more often.”

### More on the global comparisons

For its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, Active Healthy Kids Canada brought research teams from 15 countries across five continents together to establish and compare grades, and seek solutions to the worldwide childhood inactivity crisis. Countries that participated in the international comparison process, based on the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card framework, included: Australia, Canada, Colombia, England, Finland, Ghana, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nigeria, Scotland, South Africa and the United States. The results of the global comparisons and Canada’s Report Card were shared with 700 international delegates at the first-ever Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children, hosted by Active Healthy Kids Canada on May 19 to 22 in Toronto.

Among the ten grades assigned to Canada, key grades and comparisons include:

- “D-” for Overall Physical Activity – Mozambique and New Zealand lead with a B, and Scotland lags with an F.
- “C+” in Organized Sport Participation – New Zealand leads with a B and Mozambique lags with an F.
- “B+” in Community & the Built Environment – Australia leads with an A-, and Mexico and Mozambique lag with an F.
- “D” in Active Transportation – Finland, Kenya, Mozambique and Nigeria lead with a B, and United States lags with an F.
- “F” in Sedentary Behaviours – Ghana and Kenya lead with a B, and Scotland, South Africa and Nigeria also received an F.
- “C+” in School – England leads with an A- and Colombia lags with an F.

Full copies of the short-form and long-form Report Card can be found at [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca).

The global comparisons were also published today in the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, Supplemental Issue on the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children, available at:

<http://journals.humankinetics.com/jpah-supplements-special-issues/jpah-volume-11-2014-global-summit-on-the-physical-activity-of-children>.

### About the Report Card

The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the most comprehensive annual assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada. Active Healthy Kids Canada works with its strategic partners to develop and disseminate the Report Card. The Children’s

<sup>1</sup> Maddison R, Turley M, Legge N, Mitchell G. A national survey of children and young people’s physical activity and dietary behaviours in New Zealand: 2008/09. Auckland, New Zealand: Clinical Trials Research Unit, The University of Auckland; 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Prista A, Picardo S, Ribeiro E, Libombo J, Doca T. Results from the Mozambique 2014 Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Adolescents J Phys Act Health 2014;11(suppl.1)

<sup>3</sup> Wachira LM, Muthuri SK, Tremblay MS, Onywera VO. Results from Kenya’s 2014 Report Card on the Physical Activity and Body Weights of Children and Youth. J Phys Act Health 2014;11(suppl.1)

Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute's Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO), works with an interdisciplinary Research Work Group that includes top researchers from across Canada, to ensure that the Report Card includes the most up-to-date evidence about physical activity for children and youth. ParticipACTION provides strategic communications expertise and support to produce and deliver the Report Card.

Production of the Report Card is possible through support from The Lawson Foundation, RBC, the George Weston Foundation through its Wonder+Cares funding program, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Loblaw Companies Limited, the MLSE Foundation, General Mills Canada, the Jays Care Foundation, Canadian Tire Active At School and provincial and territorial governments through the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC).

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