



Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada

Call for Increased federal investment in healthy living; a healthy, productive population for a thriving economy

September 17, 2015

Conservative Party of Canada
1204 – 130 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 5G4

Dear Mr. Harper,

In Canada, three out of five people over the age of twenty live with preventable chronic diseases, and four out of five are at risk. Every year, over 150,000 Canadians die from them. Together, these preventable diseases account for 65% of all deaths in Canada. The causes of chronic diseases are complex and require a comprehensive approach.

Although the causes of chronic diseases are complex, prevention strategies are well-known. What is really needed is federal leadership.

In 2011, the UN General Assembly unanimously endorsed the Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases which include cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also commonly referred to as 'chronic diseases' are largely caused by a common set of risk factors, most notably: tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke; unhealthy diet; insufficient physical activity; unhealthy weights; harmful use of alcohol; and, poverty.

Canada has made good progress in the area of tobacco control over recent decades, largely due to sustained federal leadership and the use of a variety of policy levers – education, legislation and taxation. Now, we must apply that same leadership and determination to the next big threat to Canadian's health. There has been an increase in unhealthy weights. According to recent data, approximately 60% of adults and 32% of children and youth are overweight or obese.

Evidence shows that upstream prevention of unhealthy weights in children and youth will lead to a significant reduction in the rates of adulthood overweight and obesity. According to the OECD, unhealthy weights “foreshadow increases in the occurrence of health problems (such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some cancers) and higher health care costs in the future.”

It is well understood that early childhood development is a critical determinant of health. CDPAC acknowledges the ongoing role the Government of Canada is playing, in partnership with the provinces and territories to develop and deliver comprehensive, culturally appropriate early intervention and prevention programs that promote the health and social development of vulnerable children in communities across Canada (notably, via the *Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program* and *Community Action Program for Children*). But much more can and should be done.

The Government of Canada has committed to a number of specific objectives outlined in the Public Health Agency of Canada’s *Preventing Chronic Disease Strategic Plan 2013-2016* which support the accomplishment of goals outlined in the *Integrated Strategy on Healthy Living and Chronic Disease*. Continued and increased financial commitments are needed to escalate the pace of progress.

Recommendations:

CDPAC urges the Government of Canada to strengthen its commitment to the support of healthy living through these three priorities:

1. A significant increase in federal government investment in the promotion of healthy living for chronic disease prevention

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating significant economic and social returns on investment for healthy living policies and programming. Leading edge work by Hans Krueger at the University of British Columbia¹ for example, provides excellent data and modeling resources for an evidence-informed approach to investment decisions for chronic disease prevention.

The federal government should increase its investment in healthy living, with an emphasis on scale-up of evidence informed policies and programs, in collaboration with provinces, territories and municipal governments.

2. Taxation: Establish a tax on Sugary Drinks

There is a strong body of evidence linking sugar to obesity and other adverse health outcomes. Sugary drinks are the largest source of sugar in our diet, supplying much energy but little or no nutritional value. Aggressive marketing by the beverage and fast food industries has normalized daily consumption of sugary drinks. Sugary drinks are now known to be a leading driver of obesity

¹ Krueger H, J Krueger, J Koot. “Variation across Canada in the Economic Burden Attributable to Excess Weight, Tobacco Smoking and Physical Inactivity”, *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 106(4), e171-7, 2015.

An economic intervention by government, such as a manufacturer's levy on sugary drinks could generate revenues to help fund counter-measures such as healthy-living initiatives. Recent results from jurisdictions such as Mexico² show that price-related disincentives do have a significant impact on consumption.

3. Infrastructure and Communities: Promote physical activity through greater investment in active transportation

As well as being fundamental to our economy, transportation is an important determinant of health. Transportation systems and planning have an enormous impact on the shape, form and air quality of communities as well as citizens' travel choices, safety and social connectivity. At the individual level, transportation choices impact on one's ability to access health promoting services including essentials such as grocery stores, schools, recreation facilities, health care, employment and social supports.

The federal government, in collaboration with provincial, territorial and municipal governments should invest in active transportation systems to help Canadians be as physically active as possible.

Media coverage of the election campaigns to date makes it clear that much greater focus on the protecting the health of Canadians is needed from all parties. If the Conservative Party of Canada forms the next government, CDPAC urges you to raise the prominence of healthy living for chronic disease prevention in the health portfolio. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you or your team to discuss specific ways that these or other prevention strategies could be enacted.

Sincerely,



Hon. Mary Collins, P.C.
Chair



Craig Larsen
Executive Director

² Alianza por la salud alimentaria. (2015). Mexico's National Institute of Public Health study indicates the federal sugar-sweetened beverage tax is successfully reducing purchases in Mexican households - Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria. Retrieved September 20, 2015, from <http://alianzasalud.org.mx/2015/06/mexicos-national-institute-of-public-health-study-indicates-the-federal-sugar-sweetened-beverage-tax-is-successfully-reducing-purchases-in-mexican-households/>



The Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada (CDPAC) is a network of major organizations that have come together around the common cause of healthy living for chronic disease prevention.

Mission

“Working primarily at the national level, CDPAC’s mission is to take an integrated, population health approach to influence policies and practices that will help prevent chronic disease. CDPAC has two inter-related functions – advocacy and mobilizing knowledge for action”.

Vision

“Canadians will be supported by a comprehensive, sufficiently resourced, sustainable, and integrated system of research, surveillance, policies, and programs that promote health and prevent chronic disease.”

Alliance Members

Alliance representatives provide strategic direction and oversight to CDPAC’s shared priorities for action on chronic disease prevention. The Chair of the Alliance is Hon. Mary Collins P.C., (BC Healthy Living Alliance). The past Chair is Ms. Ida Thomas (YMCA Canada). The Alliance Members are:

- The Arthritis Society
- BC Healthy Living Alliance
- Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health
- Canadian Cancer Society
- Canadian Diabetes Association
- Canadian Medical Association
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Nurses Association
- Dietitians of Canada
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
- The Kidney Foundation of Canada
- Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance
- YMCA Canada