reducing chronic disease in Canada
CDPAC
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HOT TOPICS – FEB 2008

Active Transportation
Moving Canadians towards better health

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What is Active Transportation?

Active transportation consists of human-powered forms of travel such as walking, cycling, using a wheel chair, in-line skating, skate boarding, cross-country skiing, canoeing and kayaking. The most popular forms are walking and cycling, and active transportation can be combined with other modes such as public transit. The best thing about active transportation is that everyone can do it!

Every trip we make begins and ends with walking, whether it is to our cars, the bus stop, school or work. Our bodies were built to use our legs and feet, yet the majority of Canadians make a conscience decision every day to use motorized transportation for short trips. If we all used active modes of transportation for those trips within 30 minutes (2.5 km of walking or 8 km of cycling), we would not only make a direct, positive impact on our environment, but we would fulfill the daily requirement of physical activity that is part of a healthy lifestyle and improve the quality of life in our communities.

With six in ten Canadians not physically active enough to achieve the full health benefits - sedentary living is a significant health issue today. Canadians live a car-centred lifestyle taking away a great opportunity to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives.[1]

At least 80% of premature heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes and 40% of cancer could be prevented through healthy diet, regular physical activity and avoidance of tobacco products.[2] According to Statistics Canada, 26 % of youth between the age of two and 17 years old are overweight or obese, with the proportion of obese children nearly tripling in the last 25 years. By incorporating physical activity into your day, such as walking and cycling, Canadians can greatly reduce the risk chronic diseases. In fact, many studies have shown that physical activity helps maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, manage weight, and reduce anxiety and depression. As you become more physically active, you'll feel healthier and more energetic.

Transportation is one of the largest contributors of air pollution in Canada, with urban passenger vehicles producing almost half of Canada's transportation greenhouse gas emissions.[3] By choosing active modes of transportation, you are contributing to the health of the environment, since walking, biking, and in-line skating have zero emissions.

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Who's doing what?

Federal, provincial, and municipal governments, NGO's, and not-for-profit organizations across the country have either adopted or are implementing strategies that foster active transportation.

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada www.heartandstroke.com

The Heart and Stroke Foundation, a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living and advocacy.
They have released several position statements, one of which is on the built environment, physical activity, heart disease and stroke.

Go for Green www.goforgreen.ca

This not-for-profit organization encourages Canadians to pursue healthy, outdoor physical activities that protect, enhance or restore the environment. Over the last 15 years, they have been the leaders in promoting active transportation. They have held workshops and information sessions in most provinces and territories, and developed numerous tools and publications supporting the benefits of active transportation.

Public Health Agency of Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/active_trans.htm

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), through their Healthy Living Unit, supports many national active transportation initiatives, both financially and informatively. This Unit promotes physical activity among Canadians in order to improve their health and well-being. This website includes information on being active at home, school, in the community and with family; and the resource Canada's Physical Activity Guide.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities www.fcm.ca

FCM is dedicated to improving the quality of life in all communities by promoting strong, effective and accountable municipal government. Among other programs, FCM provides financial services and resources to Canadian municipal governments through the The Centre for Sustainable Community Development and the Green Municipal Fund.

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute www.cflri.com

CFLRI is a national research agency concerned with educating Canadians about the importance of leading healthy, active lifestyles.

Established in September 1980, in recognition of the need identified by national organizations, federal and provincial governments, and Canadian universities, the Institute is the leader in bridging the gap between knowledge on physical activity and its use.

Canadian Institute of Planners www.cip-icu.ca

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) is a collaborative national federation that advances professional planning excellence through the delivery of membership and public services in Canada and abroad.

The Canadian Institute of Planners has been dedicated to the advancement of responsible planning throughout Canada since 1919.

OPPI – Ontario Professional Planners Institute www.ontarioplanners.on.ca

In 2006, OPPI prepared a position paper called *Healthy Communities, Sustainable Communities,* which focuses on how land use planning decisions affect obesity, heart disease, mental health, social isolation, nutrition, and air quality. This document and Call to Action centres on the importance of urban design, active transportation, and green infrastructure and how it relates to healthy and sustainable communities.

Other Resources

Active 2010 www.active2010.ca

Active 2010 is a one stop source of information on increasing physical activity in Ontario. The web site offers information on the benefits of physical activity and ways to get started on a more active, healthier lifestyle.

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (BEST) www.best.bc.ca

BEST is a strong voice for alternative transportation issues. They are dedicated to ensuring that effective transportation planning is adopted. The site gives people the tools they need to make environmentally sound transportation choices.

Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) www.tac-atc.ca

TAC is a non-profit association of transportation stakeholders in government, private industry, and educational institutions. This national association has the mission to promote the provision of safe, efficient, effective, environmentally and financially sustainable transportation services in support of Canada's social and economic goals.

Transport Canada – Urban Transportation Showcase Program www.tc.gc.ca/utsp

The UTSP website provides case study information on sustainable transportation options with a particular focus on Canadian examples. The site includes a case study library, profiles of demonstration projects being funded under the program, a database of transportation demand management project results, an image bank, and other resources. The goal of presenting this information is to foster replication of innovative sustainable transportation practices.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corp (CMHC) www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is Canada's national housing agency. They are committed to helping Canadians access a wide choice of quality, affordable homes, while making vibrant, healthy communities and cities a reality across the country. CMHC works to enhance Canada's housing finance options, assist Canadians who cannot afford housing in the private market, improve building standards and housing construction, and provide policymakers with the information and analysis they need to sustain a vibrant housing market in Canada.

References

[1] Public Health Agency of Canada, http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/active_trans.htm
[2] Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada http://cdpac.ca/content.php?doc=1
[3] Transport Canada, 2006

About the Author
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