

Coalition for Active Living (CAL)

Summary of Consultations Leading up to the June 2001 Meeting

Proposed Areas of Focus for the CAL in 2001-2002

The Coalition for Active Living held nationwide consultations to discuss CAL's priorities over the next 20 months. The purpose was to identify areas or issues that CAL can address from a national perspective. Some 200 active living leaders across Canada participated in the December 2000-January 2001 consultation in eight provinces. An additional consultation was held with national organizations. The territories and other individuals submitted suggestions, comments and documents. The input received forms the basis for the CAL meeting to be held in June 2001.

Consultation participants were asked the following questions:

- What are the top three to four national issues related to our common goal, which is "to ensure that the environments where Canadians live, learn, work and play support regular physical activity"?
- What are the solutions deemed necessary, effective and realistic?
- What are the actions that CAL could take between April 2001 and the end of 2002 to complement work carried out by other organizations?

Overall Erosion of Support for Physical Activity

Participants expressed the opinion that a strong national voice is needed now more than ever. There is a feeling that many policy-related issues are challenging our ability to ensure that the environments where Canadians live, learn, work and play support regular physical activity. This is particularly true in some communities and various settings. There is special concern for children and youth. The fact that the Canadian population is aging was also mentioned as both an opportunity and a challenge for CAL.

Participants reported a wide range of signs that point to an erosion of support and commitment to physical activity/active living in many sectors. Participants offered the following examples to illustrate their point (not in order of priority):

- Downloading to communities
- Lack of long-term strategy and policies
- Aging infrastructure
- Lack of support for professional/leadership development and training
- Lack of supportive policies, physical education, school programs and “play” opportunities in communities
- Lack of support from the general public (e.g., parents)
- Lack of access to facilities and programs (e.g., rural areas and low-income population)
- Focus on competitive sport

Recommended Areas of Focus

Five areas of focus would summarize the input received:

1. Infrastructure: Aging facilities across the country require very significant upgrades and other physical environments need to be made more conducive to active living by involving non-traditional partners (e.g., urban planners).
2. Access: Policies and action need to be taken to address the fact that many Canadians are still facing obstacles in terms of physical and financial access to programs and facilities.
3. Children and Youth: Concerns about obesity, as well as the erosion of policies and support for physical education and active living in schools and communities were mentioned in almost all consultations. To make a significant breakthrough, concrete actions need to be promoted among key decision and policy-makers. Support from parents is also a must.
4. Diversity: Canadians in large metropolitan areas and remote communities need access to programs that are relevant to their particular interests and cultural preferences.

5. Communication: National-level, targeted and state-of-the-art communications activities are required to generate awareness and interest among the public and decision-makers. Activities of this nature are most effective when messages are consistent throughout — at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels. Communication is also an issue within our field. We should at least know what each other is doing to leverage, complement and optimize our respective efforts.

Need for Effective and Timely Actions

While the situation may be discouraging, participants expressed a renewed sense of hope, namely in CAL. Participants felt that the situation creates an opportunity for CAL to implement a focused approach, and thereby become influential and effective in terms of policy promotion to specific policy-makers around priority areas. Simple and concrete action combined with proven policies need to be promoted through timely and effective national strategies that could be picked up or complemented at other levels. Influential organizations and champions also need to be mobilized.