Physical Activity, Sport and the Healthy Child

Commonwealth Partners Meeting on Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) Children and Young People Geneva, 14 May 2011

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Changes in the environment (social, physical, political) increase opportunities for PA and in turn prevent and control chronic diseases. WHO (2005)
The rights-based arguments

- Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948).
E.g. International Charter of Physical Education and Sport

- Fundamental right for all.
- Essential to lifelong education.
- Must meet individual & social needs.
- Performed by qualified personnel.
- Adequate facilities & equipment.
- Ethical & moral values.
- Positive mass media.
The evidence-based arguments
The primary health benefits

- Primary and secondary prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), especially cardio-respiratory diseases, diabetes, some cancers, and obesity.

- Strengthened immune surveillance, reduced risk of infection.

- Strengthened bone health, reduced risk of osteoporosis.
The social benefits

- Strengthened social inclusion.
- Strengthened community safety, reduced youth crime.
- Fewer sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, sexual assaults.
- Increased school retention, academic achievement, and school safety.
- Strengthened citizenship (moral behaviour, empathy, reasoning and leadership).
Yet

- Yet only a small minority of children and youth in most Commonwealth countries enjoy these benefits; e.g. in Canada, only 12% meet the national guidelines for daily participation.

- The extent of opportunity varies widely across class and gender; e.g. in Canada, upper-class children three times more likely to participate than those from the lower income households.
Research cautions

- The benefits of physical activity and sport cannot be understood in isolation from other social and material conditions; to be successful, programs should be part of a multi-agency approach.

- Participants must feel physically safe; personally valued; socially connected; morally and economically supported; personally and politically empowered; and hopeful about the future.

- The skills and enthusiasm of trained, committed administrators, coaches and volunteers is key.

- Sport programs are most successful when they are person-centred, as opposed to outcome oriented, and emphasize choice and autonomy over rules and a focus on winning.

- The demonstrated health benefits are much clearer for non-competitive physical activity than for sport.
The Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meetings (CSMM)

- Endorse the use of physical activity and sport to enhance child and youth development, and urge closer collaboration and cooperation between ministries of health, youth, sport and education to bring about this result.
We urge

- Commonwealth Health Ministers and senior officials to embrace this initiative and make use of the modalities of physical activity and sport to pursue their own public policy objectives with respect to children and youth.
Thank You for Your Attention