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# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Excerpt from the *Active Grand Baseline Research Report*

## **Backgrounder: Determinants of Health**

Many people in our community who face economic challenges are also those who are the least active. Furthermore, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) research indicates that socio-economic status is a strong predictor of health:

Much of the research is telling us that we need to look at the big picture of health to examine factors both inside and outside the health care system that affect our health. At every stage of life, health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the physical environment and individual behavior. These factors are referred to as 'determinants of health'. They do not exist in isolation from each other. It is the combined influence of the determinants of health that determines health status. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

Promoting increased physical activity, with the awareness of the determinants of health, will help prevent poor health status and improve overall well-being. The twelve key social determinates of health status identified by PHAC are the following:

**Income and social status:** Safe and healthy living are determined by income and social status. Limited options and poor coping skills for dealing with stress lead to a greater risk to a variety of diseases. The *Second Report on the Health of Canadians* indicates that, "Only 47% of Canadians in the lowest income bracket rate their health as very good or excellent, compared with 73% of Canadians in the highest income group." *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Social support networks:** Support networks (i.e. family, friends, community) seem to protect against health problems, as they help people solve problems, maintain a sense of accomplishment and control over life circumstances, increase self-esteem and well-being. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Education:** Education not only increases opportunities for income security, it also improves one's ability to access information and resources to make healthy decisions. The *Second Report on the Health of Canadians* states that "People with higher levels of education have better access to healthy physical environments and are better able to prepare their children for school than people with low levels of education. They also tend to smoke less, to be more physically active and to have access to healthier foods." *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Employment / working conditions:** Unemployment, underemployment, stressful or unsafe work environments are related with poorer health. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Social environments:** Communities are strengthened when resources are shared between the institutions, organizations and contributions of individuals. Resiliency, appreciation of diversity, safety, good working relationships, and collaborative communities provide a supportive social environment that reduces potential risks to good health. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Physical environments:** In addition to exposure of environmental contamination concerns, a community's built environment can create negative effects on well-being and participation in public activities due to factors related to housing, indoor air quality, the design of communities and transportation systems. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Personal health practices and coping skills:** Socio-economic environment influences in which people live, learn, work and play in, impact lifestyle choices through at least five areas: personal life skills, stress, culture, social relationships and belonging, and a sense of control. Interventions that help create supportive environments will strengthen the capacity of individuals to make healthy lifestyle choices. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Healthy child development:** Early childhood development is a powerful determinant of health on its own. On top of this, all of the other determinants of health affect the physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual development of children and youth. Evidence from the *Second Report on the Health of Canadians* indicates that experiences from conception to age six is the most influential life cycle period for the developing of the brain. Positive stimulation early in life improves learning, behaviour and health into adulthood. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Biology and genetic endowment:** Aging does not imply poor health. Rather, it is active living and opportunities for lifelong learning that may be particularly important for maintaining good health and cognitive capacity in old age. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Health services:** Health services, especially those that seek to maintain and promote health, prevent disease, and restore health and function, contribute to population health. However, many low- and moderate-income Canadians have limited or no access to health services (i.e. eye care, dentistry, mental health counselling and prescription drugs). *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Gender:** Even though women live longer than men, they are more likely to live with depression, stress overload (often due the challenge of balancing work and family life), chronic conditions such as arthritis and allergies, and injuries and death resulting from family violence. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

**Culture:** Dominant cultural values that contribute to the continuation of conditions such as marginalization, stigmatization, loss or devaluation of language and culture, and lack of access to culturally appropriate health care and services, may contribute to additional health risks for some people. *(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)*

The complete *Active Grand Baseline Research Report* is available on [www.activegrand.ca](http://www.activegrand.ca).

# CONNECTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & WELL-BEING

What other professionals are saying & doing

## **Active For Life**

Research shows there is a correct way and time to develop the fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that benefit children for their whole lives. *Active For Life* has learned that by making the process fun for children, they will stay active and have greater chances to become top-level athletes. The interactive website is great for Influencers and Participants.

[www.activeforlife.ca](http://www.activeforlife.ca)

## **Active Start**

Learn about Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) and refer parents/caregivers to the Parent and Resource sections of the website, for tips to help children get fun and quality activity they deserve. (See folder or a link on [www.activegrand.ca](http://www.activegrand.ca) for an *Active Start* article).

[www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)

## **Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines**

Learn how much physical activity is needed for health benefits. Colourful and easy to read posters are available on the website. (See folder or [www.activegrand.ca](http://www.activegrand.ca) for the *Guidelines*).

[www.csep.ca](http://www.csep.ca)

## **Dr. John Ratey, MD**

Dr. Ratey's research on physical activity's positive impact on the brain has inspired many schools across North America to implement physical activity before the school day begins. At the local library, pick up Dr. Ratey's book, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. On the website, read the article, *An ADHD Med Without Side Effects*.

[www.johnratey.com](http://www.johnratey.com)

## **Minding our Bodies**

An initiative of the *Canadian Mental Health Association* to increase capacity within the community mental health system in Ontario to promote physical activity and healthy eating for people with serious mental illness.

[www.mindingourbodies.ca](http://www.mindingourbodies.ca)

## **PARC (Physical Activity Resource Centre)**

PARC provides supports to Physical Activity Promoters across Ontario through consultation, training (including free webinars), networking, and knowledge sharing.

[www.parc.ophea.net](http://www.parc.ophea.net)

## **ParticipACTION**

A great website for Influencers and Participants. Receive physical activity facts, tips and resources. (See folder or a link on [www.activegrand.ca](http://www.activegrand.ca) for a *Lifestyle Tips* issue).

[www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com)



