

Sport Matters Group Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultations August 2016

Executive Summary

Sport Matters Group (SMG) is a coalition of over 80 sport, physical activity and recreation organizations who believe that a values-based, ethical sport experience taking place in safe, inclusive and welcoming environments, along with regular and accessible physical activity and facilities required to participate are integral to Canadian culture and the development of our people, communities and nation. Representatives of high performance sport, proponents of active, healthy living initiatives and sport and recreation infrastructure improvements have all collaborated to bring this submission and its recommendations to your attention.

This submission will highlight the priorities and actions that support Canadians (able-bodied and those with a disability) wanting to be active as well as those pursuing high performance endeavours – with an overall goal of improving health, wellness and excellence through participation in sport and physical activity.

Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Sport approved the Canadian Sport Policy in 2012 as a roadmap that establishes direction and desired outcomes for sport in Canada through 2022. Additionally, *Active Canada 20/20* and the *Framework for Recreation in Canada* are sector-led initiatives that have been acknowledged by Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation over the past 18 months and which look to improve Canadians' physical activity levels as well as their access to recreation.

Sport Matters to Canadians

We are a country strengthened by men and women, boys and girls of sport. As we cheer on our athletes at the Rio Games, a new generation of Canadian children will be inspired by the outstanding performances of those athletes. As participation in sport declines¹ watching our Olympians and Paralympians compete at the highest levels is a key part of the solution to seeing that trend reversed while helping to instill a sense of national pride – in 2010, 90% of Canadians said the performance of our athletes at the Vancouver Games had a positive impact on Canadian pride².

¹ Community Foundations of Canada, True Sport Foundation, *Vital Signs, Sport and Belonging 2015*
<http://communityfoundations.ca/sportandbelonging>

² Sport Matters Group (2011). *Sport 2.0: Towards A New Era in Canadian Sport*

http://sportmatters.ca/sites/default/files/content/sport_2.0_towards_a_new_era_2.0_smg.pdf

Three (3) key elements are required for our athletes to have maximum chance of success – financial support, facilities in which to train and elite level coaching.

As a high performance community we have learned that striving for and achieving a significant ‘stretch goal’ is required to challenge our athletes, coaches and sporting community, and to gain the support from the Canadian public. However, if Canada is to maintain or increase its nation ranking with the rest of the world, additional strategic investments will need to be made in order to keep pace with other nations and advance our position in the world.

Strategic investments

Athlete Assistance Program (AAP)

The most important support we could provide is an increase in direct financial assistance to athletes through the federal Athlete Assistance Program (AAP). AAP provides a monthly stipend and tuition support primarily to those athletes ranked highest in the world in their Olympic or Paralympic sport. This stipend currently ranges from \$900 to \$1500 and has not increased since 2004. Since that time the CPI has increased by a cumulative 23.25%.

In the *Status of the Athlete* survey (2014) of 967 athletes conducted by Sport Canada the following key data emerged:

- Athletes receiving AAP support (carded athletes) reported an average annual income of \$25,616 (15% lower than 2009) with an average of \$11,746 coming from the federal AAP and \$3,513 from provincial assistance
- \$6,850 was derived from employment income and \$4,685 from sport-related sources
- Expenses for athletes increased by 10% from 2009 to \$3,378 per month
- 20% of athletes have incurred some debt as a result of their athletic career - loans from all sources for these athletes average almost \$23,000

Sport Matters, (as is AthletesCAN) is recommending an increase of 24% in the monthly support provided to both able-bodied athletes and athletes with a disability. This would increase the amount provided to senior cards from \$1500 to \$1860 per month and for development cards from \$900 to \$1116 per month. This should be done without reducing the number of athletes funded and would therefore increase the AAP budget from \$28 million to \$34.72 million.

Investment: \$6.72 million

Coaching:

Quality coaches are at the heart of successful high performance systems. In order for Canada to continue to improve our nation's ranking, we must elevate the quality and quantity of Canada's coaches and technical leaders through systematically improving coach education, mentorship, retention and recruitment of coaches for both able-bodied and athletes with a disability.

A strategy to improve Canadian high performance coaching has been developed but requires additional resources to implement. The strategy will include: recruit and retain Canada's best coaches, train/mentor Canada's current and future coaches and re-integrate top Olympic and Paralympic coaches into the sport system.

Investment: \$5 million

Training Facilities:

As a result of significant funding from multiple levels of government, a major building campaign took place between 2005 and 2015 creating dedicated high performance centres known as the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic Sport Institute Network (COPSIN) which are located in seven (7) regions across the country. Multi-sport facilities with priority access for athletes and their coaches are integral to the sport system for our major competitors and in Canada there is an urgent need to ensure adequate financial resources for the continued operation and maintenance of the COPSIN facilities. This dedicated and focused environment allows for optimal preparation leading to stellar and repeated performances for athletes/coaches.

Without new investment in the ongoing operating costs, dedicated access for Canadian athletes and their coaches is in serious jeopardy. Recent years have seen Canadian athletes have access to world leading daily training environments comparable to anywhere in the world. We are at risk of losing this advantage as facilities operators seek revenue from recreational activities and the paying public thereby reducing access for our high performance athletes.

Investment: \$1.5 million

Team Sports: At the recent 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games, Canada won medals in 13 of the 16 team sports on the program. At the 2012 Summer Olympics Canada qualified 2 team sports which has now increased to 5 for 2016. On the Paralympic side the number of qualified summer team sports has gone from 3 in London to 4 in Rio. If Canada is to compete with the rest of the world on the Olympic and Paralympic stage at future Games (men's baseball and women's softball have been added to the Tokyo 2020 program) additional support will be required to continue to improve our team sport medal prospects which has the potential to also affect team sport participation at the grassroots level.

Investment: \$3 million

The key partners involved in high performance sport in Canada, including the Canadian Olympic Committee, Canadian Paralympic Committee, Coaching Association of Canada, Commonwealth Games Canada, The COPSI Network, AthletesCAN, Sport Canada and Own the Podium are focused on creating winning conditions for Canada's athletes, coaches and national sport organizations. Sport can be a powerful force for positive change, can contribute to nation building and inspire us all to live better lives. **Sport Matters!**

Recommendation 1

That the federal government reinforce its support for high performance sport in Canada by sustaining current funding levels and consider the above additional strategic investments to able-bodied and para high performance sport. Total investment for these recommendations: \$16.22 million per year

Physical Activity

Physical activity is key to a healthier, more prosperous Canada while physical inactivity costs Canadian taxpayers 3.7 percent of health care costs.¹

Recent research from the Conference Board of Canada shows that even a modest increase in Canadians' movement over the next 25 years would dramatically reduce the incidence of debilitating chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Premature mortality would be reduced by 2.4 per cent by 2020, representing more than 6,600 lives saved.¹

Participation rates in sports are on the decline - 17% fewer Canadians age 15+ participated regularly in sport in 2010 vs 1992. Even though 75% of children and youth ages 5-17 are active in sport, participation rates peak at age 10-13 then decline steadily with age.³

More Canadians becoming more active is part of the solution to all of the above.

With the phasing out of the Children's Fitness Tax Credit there is an opportunity for the government of Canada to show leadership **and** bring real change to physical activity in this country.

The Sport Matters Group recommends the following:

Recommendation 2

That the federal government work with the provinces and territories to establish a **coordinated national physical activity plan** based on Active Canada 20/20 and aligned with the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy and the 2015 Framework for Recreation in Canada. Active Canada 20/20 is an excellent starting point for this plan. What is needed now is implementation. This plan would establish measurable goals for the nation, identify actions based on evidence, build on current strengths, identify strategies to address gaps and provide focus and opportunity for coordinated action and evaluation.

Investment: TBD

¹ Fares Bounajm, Thy Dinh, Louis Theriault *Moving Ahead: The Economic Impact of Reducing Physical Inactivity and Sedentary Behaviour*. The Conference Board of Canada, October 24, 2014

³ Community Foundations of Canada, True Sport Foundation, *Vital Signs, Sport and Belonging 2015*
<http://communityfoundations.ca/sportandbelonging>

Infrastructure

If we are going to provide opportunities for Canadians to participate in sport, physical activity and recreation in order to help meet health and fitness goals and partially offset the decline in sport participation discussed above we also need to ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place in order to allow them to do so.

This government has made a commitment to increased investment in social infrastructure with a priority being placed on recreational infrastructure among other areas. Changes have also been made to the New Building Canada Fund to include recreational infrastructure as a qualified category. These commitments are welcomed and necessary. However there is more that needs to be done.

Existing infrastructure has deteriorated to the point where it is a barrier to many Canadians being able to take part in activities that can help with the above.

The *2016 Canadian Infrastructure Report Card (CIRC)* reinforces the acute need for investments into sport and recreation facilities across Canadian communities. It demonstrates that of all infrastructure categories sport and recreation infrastructure faces the most immediate and critical need for repair and refurbishment.

What is also needed is a national inventory of sport and recreation facilities. This would ensure governments at all three levels have a long-term and sustainable database with which to make strategic, evidence-based decisions concerning sport and recreation infrastructure investments.

In addition to this inventory, investment is also needed in the repair and construction of facilities.

We also ask the federal government to make a significant investment into two separate, dedicated infrastructure funds specifically for sports and recreation facilities and which would be shared with provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

Recommendation #3

That the federal government follow the recommendations of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and the Canadian Recreational Facilities Council as follows:

- To provide \$1 million to create a **national, comprehensive inventory of sport and recreation facilities** in Canada.
- To create a **dedicated sport and recreation infrastructure ‘repair’ fund** that would include a **reserved envelope for small communities**.
- To create a **dedicated sport and recreation infrastructure ‘new build’ fund** that would include a **reserved envelope for urban communities with large ethnic populations**. This fund would address the growing, aging and diversifying demographic in Canadian communities.

We call upon the federal government to commit a total of **\$1.2 billion per annum for the next ten years to these two dedicated sport and recreation infrastructure funds**. This request represents only **10% of the total \$120 billion in infrastructure spending over 10 years** – a small investment to help secure the health of its citizens and communities and the sustainability of the health care system.