

August 6, 2014

Ms. Christine Lafrance
Clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
FINA@parl.gc.ca

Re: Pre-budget Consultation Submission

Dear Ms. Lafrance,

Swimming Canada has joined together with a coalition of health and public safety partners on an initiative to reduce the alarming and growing incidence of drowning in Canada. The CANswim coalition includes the Canadian Red Cross, the Canadian Medical Association, Lifesaving Canada as well as private sector funders such as RBC and the Chicken Farmers of Canada.

On behalf of the CANswim partners, Swimming Canada is pleased to submit our recommendations on budget priorities to the Standing Committee on Finance.

We would also like to request the opportunity to appear in front of the committee when it hears from witnesses either in Ottawa or Toronto.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ahmed El-Awadi'.

Ahmed El-Awadi
Chief Executive Officer
Swimming Canada

CC: James Rajotte, M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Finance

Executive Summary

Swimming is the only sport that can save your life. Hundreds of Canadians die tragically each year due to preventable drowning incidents. Simply put, swimming skills - combined with water safety knowledge and practices - save lives.

Swimming Canada is the national governing body of competitive swimming in Canada. We inspire Canadians through world leading performances to embrace a lifestyle of swimming, sport, fitness, health and safety through our 75,000 members and 400 swim clubs across Canada.

No parent enrolls children in swimming lessons thinking they will end up as Olympic swimmers. They do it because they want their kids to be safe and enjoy all the fun that is possible around water. That's why Swimming Canada joined forces with the Canadian Red Cross, the Lifesaving Society of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association and the private sector to form the CANswim movement – a coalition of partners working together to achieve our shared goal of teaching all Canadian kids to swim.

Swimming Canada is a national sport organization but our budget recommendations are not sports related. We strongly believe that Canada must take steps to address the public safety epidemic of preventable drownings as well as the looming health crisis due to inactivity.

Drowning is the 2nd leading killer of kids under 14 years of age and the second highest age category for drowning is children aged 1-4 years old. Virtually every child drowning incident is preventable.

Working together, we can reduce the preventable drownings that occur each year and dramatically increase the fitness level of our children.

All Canadians deserve the opportunity to learn to swim, so CANswim launched a national program called *Canada's Swim Team*, with the goal of teaching all Canadian kids to swim 25 metres by age 12. With the support of public and private sector partners, we are confident that we can substantially decrease drownings in Canada while at the same time improving the activity levels of Canadian youth.

Recommendation:

That the 2015 federal budget provide an investment of \$5 million over two years to CANswim to make *Canada's Swim Team* a truly national program by bringing its portable swimming pools to rural, remote and underserved communities in Canada. This investment will also support a national awareness campaign targeting children under the age of 12 and their parents.

Budget Themes:

This recommendation strongly aligns with the Committee's pre-budget consultation theme of **"Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education and training"**.

Through a modest investment in the CANswim movement, the Government of Canada will be supporting families with children who don't know how to swim or do not have access to swimming pools and lessons. This investment will specifically go to expanding CANswim programming to reach those

vulnerable Canadians who live in communities that don't have access to swimming lessons, as well as new Canadians who are much more likely to be unable to swim than those born in Canada.

Drownings in Canada

According to the latest Coroners' data, Canada has experienced six consecutive years of 470 or more drownings. The Lifesaving Society estimates that drownings are up 7% during the most recent five years studied (2006-2010) versus the previous five year average (2001-2005).

Canadian attitudes on swimming

Canadians recognize the importance of swimming lessons. According to public opinion research from Abacus Data, when Canadians were asked how important it is for children to learn a number of skills before they turn 12, swimming came second only to learning how to read.

Overall, 85% of Canadians surveyed said it was either extremely or very important for children to learn how to swim by the age of 12. This is higher than learning to ride a bike (71%), learning how to cook (61%), to speak another language (46%), or to ski (13%).

The importance of learning how to swim was even more pronounced among Canadians with children aged 15 or younger. Almost nine in ten parents (89%) thought it was either extremely or very important for children to learn how to swim with 61% considering it extremely important.

In 2010, the Lifesaving Society commissioned an Ipsos Reid research study to gain insight into the influence ethnicity has on attitudes and behaviours around water safety. Despite plans by more than 79% of new Canadians to be in and around the water during the summer, they are 4 times more likely to be unable to swim than those born in Canada and 3 times more likely to be a victim of drowning.

Swim to survive

Basic swimming ability is a fundamental requirement for any meaningful attempt to eliminate drowning in Canada. The Life Saving Society of Canada believes swimming is a life skill that all children need to learn, just like fire safety or street-proofing.

The Society estimates half of Canadian children never take traditional swimming lessons - even though "swimming" is the second most popular activity (after bicycling) in Canada among school-age children between 5 and 12 years old. The CANswim partners want to ensure every child has the basic skills to survive.

Swim skills are not innate - they need to be taught - and all children deserve the chance to learn.

If every child in Canada could pass the Society's Swim to Survive standard, it could reduce the number of drownings by half.

More kids take swimming lessons each year than play hockey and soccer combined, but it is estimated that even this is only about 30-40% of all elementary school kids.

Current CANswim Initiatives

1. Canada's Swim Team

Canada's Swim Team is an exciting initiative to teach every Canadian child how to swim.

It is for Canadians young and old, able-bodied or with a disability. The goal is for every Canadian child to swim at least 25 metres non-stop by the age of 12. This will have a monumental impact on both the safety and fitness levels of Canadian kids. Joining Canada's Swim Team is free, and participants join the World's Largest Swim Team!

Every summer, Canadians flock to lakes, rivers, beaches and swimming pools to enjoy all the fun that comes with being around the water. We are a swimming nation. In fact, more Canadian children take swimming lessons each year than play hockey and soccer combined.

In 2013, the CANswim partners launched Canada's Swim Team online at www.getswimming.ca and www.alonsnager.ca as a digital platform for the campaign. CANswim has also partnered with the private sector with a number of initiatives to raise awareness and educate families about the vital importance of swimming and water safety skills.

2. 25 metre incentive program

RBC Insurance is the presenting partner of SwimCan's 25M Incentive Program. This summer 150,000 membership cards will be handed out to children across Canada when they have successfully completed 25 metres of non-stop swimming. Facilities across the country sign up to offer the program at getswimming.ca and can order materials for free with no additional training for staff required. RBC Insurance will hand out a minimum of 700,000 membership cards over the next three years.

3. Red Cross Designated Water Watcher

RBC Insurance, Canada's Swim Team and the Canadian Red Cross have partnered to raise the awareness of parents and caregivers on the importance of being aware when children are around water of any depth. Designated Water Watcher kits are being handed out this summer through RBC Insurance stores. The kit includes valuable information on the importance of being aware, a wrist coil and a whistle. Approximately 7,000 are being handed out this summer.

The Government of Canada's role

With a strategic investment from the Government of Canada, the CANswim coalition will reduce incidents of drowning and near drowning as well as deliver effective health promotion programming to combat inactivity and obesity. This will be achieved through the launch of CANswim public awareness education campaign and its portable pool program, which will deliver accessible swimming lessons for vulnerable Canadian children without reasonable access to pools.

Portable Pool Program

One of the most difficult barriers for families to overcome is a lack of access to swimming lessons due to an absence of indoor pools in many rural and remote communities. CANswim has a plan to literally bring the water to these communities through a portable pool program.

With a strategic investment from the Government of Canada, CANswim can leverage its relationships with private sector sponsors to launch a truly national program to bring commercial grade swimming pools to communities that do not currently have reasonable access to one. Swim lessons are provided to local residents to increase their level of safety, confidence, knowledge and fitness.

These pools are steel frames with commercial filtration measuring approximately 1 metre in depth, 8-10 metres wide and 20-25 metres in length. The pool is shipped in component pieces, and then assembled on-site in approximately one week. The pool would remain on site for 3-4 weeks.

These pools are easily assembled in hockey arenas, ice pads, tennis courts or bubbles, community centres, school gymnasiums or on playing fields. It is an efficient way for a community to utilize existing recreational infrastructure for year-round benefit.

These pools would be provided and assembled by Myrtha Pools, one of the finest pool manufacturers in the world and a partner of the CANswim coalition. Myrtha pools is already providing their pools for temporary installment for highly successful public sector programs in Britain and Australia.

Eligible communities must commit:

- Space for pool installation.
- Water supply.
- Electricity for heat and filtration.
- Rider coverage for liability insurance.
- Partial transportation costs (TBD).

Organized activities would include:

- Swim to survive lessons for all grade 3 students.
- Structured swimming lessons for other children in the community.
- A community splash bash to celebrate the opening of the pool with community leaders and Government of Canada representatives to raise awareness and educate residents.
- Adult lessons (space and time permitting).
- Optional lifeguard/teacher training to provide a legacy benefit of trained community leaders.

Can Swim's Public Awareness Campaign

While more Canadian children learn to swim every year than play hockey and soccer combined, there are still 2-3 million children that need to learn this important, life-saving skill. CANswim has developed a communications plan to educate Canadian families about the lifelong benefits a child receives when they learn to swim.

CANswim has produced a high quality Public Service Announcement (PSA) promoting the *Canada's Swim Team* initiative.

Unfortunately, with limited financial resources, CANswim simply does not have the ability to effectively deliver this asset to sufficient number of Canadians.

With support from the Government of Canada, CANswim can activate a two-year campaign with a media purchase plan to successfully reach millions of Canadians with this important message.

The Government of Canada would gain high visibility and would be omnipresent throughout this campaign.

Campaign timing:

Certain elements of the campaign would be year round since swimming lessons are offered in all seasons and are more easily available in non-peak times.

The major media buy for this annual campaign would take place from May through August. This coordinated effort from the CANswim coalition would reinforce the importance of all Canadian kids learning to swim in an entertaining and thought provoking way.

The CANswim 30 second PSAs are airing during the Commonwealth Games on CBC as well as on Sportsnet throughout the summer.

The 50 second PSA will be featured online on a variety of platforms. Without additional support from the Government of Canada, the reach of these important public safety and health promotion messages will be limited.

Conclusion

The federal government has already made a significant contribution to the health and well-being of Canada's children through the child fitness tax credit, funding for ParticipACTION and its safer communities legislation.

By making a small investment of \$5 million over two years in the CANswim initiatives outlined above, the Government of Canada can save hundreds of this country's children from needlessly dying – especially kids who are new to Canada or live in rural and remote areas.

Almost all drowning are preventable and, unlike most public health issues, the solution is pretty simple. If you teach children how to swim, you improve their odds of surviving many times over. Canada's children, regardless of where they live, all deserve the chance to learn this vital life-saving skill.