

## Commentary

# Moving forward: ParticipACTION's strategic plan 2015-2020

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As pointed out by Faulkner, Yun, Tremblay and Spence,<sup>1</sup> since 1971, ParticipACTION has been working to encourage Canadians to add more physical activity to their daily lives. To date, ParticipACTION has been largely successful. This special issue provides a basis of evidence which demonstrates ParticipACTION's effectiveness in increasing organizational awareness and capacity as well as readiness and advocacy for promoting physical activity.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

ParticipACTION is recognized by most (83%) Canadian adults. Furthermore, nearly all physical activity sector organizations (87%) agree that ParticipACTION is, and has been, successful in advancing and communicating knowledge about issues associated with physical activity.<sup>5</sup> However, there is more to do. To address ongoing physical inactivity in Canada, ParticipACTION launched a new 5-year strategic plan in 2015.<sup>6</sup> This new strategic plan includes a renewed mandate, and clear objectives to help Canadians move more and sit less. Specifically, ParticipACTION's new mandate is: As Canada's premier physical activity brand, ParticipACTION helps Canadians move more and sit less through innovative engagement initiatives (i.e., novel and compelling opportunities for behavioural changes) and thought leadership activities (i.e., expert-informed and dissemination-based actions) – ParticipACTION's vision remains consistent and is aimed at creating a Canada where physical activity is a vital part of daily life.

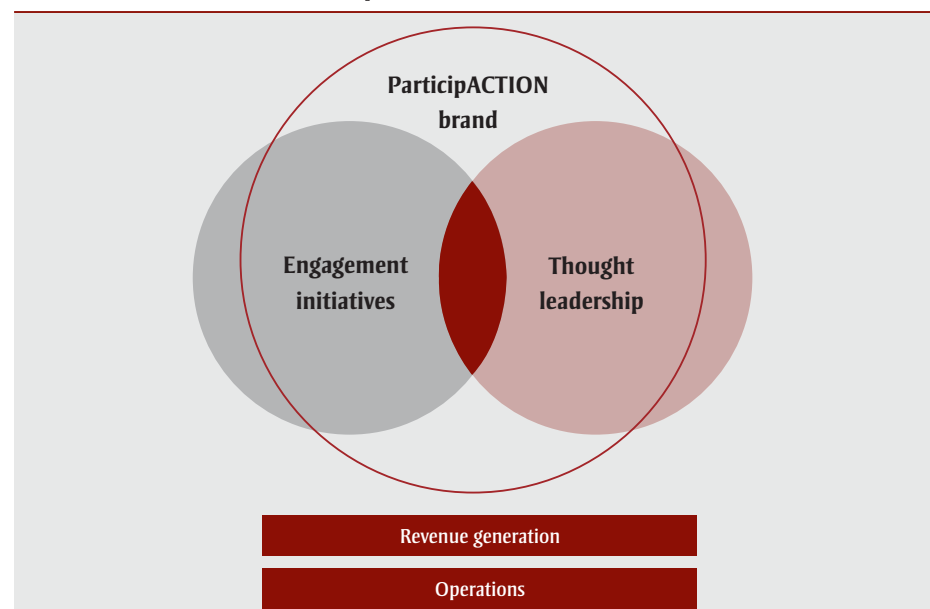
The most important shift in the new strategic plan comprises a renewed mandate which has changed from raising awareness to enabling and measuring behavioural change, from serving organizations

in the physical activity sector to aligning the sector around important issues, and from focussing solely on moving more to including sitting less as well. With this new strategic plan comes a shift in audience. The target public will shift from focussing on parents of school-aged children, to reaching out to generally inactive Canadians of all ages who want help getting started. The focus for children and youth will be to build skills and confidence, and provide opportunities to be active. Among adults, the focus will be to help inactive people increase their physical activity and decrease their sedentary behaviour. Additionally, ParticipACTION will focus on informing and enabling other organizations across the country to mobilize and coordinate action. Targeting Canadians of all ages and in multiple

settings, ParticipACTION works with all levels of government and the private sector, and has a partnership network with national and regional non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and over 7500 physical activity organizations.

ParticipACTION hopes to achieve its strategic priorities by leveraging its brand as an iconic representation of physical activity in Canada. Over the next five years, most engagement initiatives and thought leadership activities will concentrate on promoting the ParticipACTION brand and increasing visibility among Canadians (Figure 1). Revenue generation and operations will support all areas of business. Specific examples of each business sector will be described in the following sections.

**FIGURE 1**  
ParticipACTION's areas of business



Source: ParticipACTION, 2015<sup>6</sup>, p. 8.

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## Engagement initiatives

ParticipACTION will engage Canadians through measurable, relevant and compelling initiatives that support and encourage them to move more and sit less in all aspects of their lives. To support this, ParticipACTION is continually developing and implementing new initiatives based on the best available scientific evidence; securing partnerships to develop and implement new initiatives; and, developing or winding down existing projects that do, or do not align with our new mandate and/or current scientific research. Recent ParticipACTION initiatives include: RBC Learn to Play – a community based initiative to enhance physical literacy skills in school-aged childcare; 150 Play List – a national initiative to encourage Canadians to become more active and carry out as many activities listed on the playlist as possible; and, Teen Challenge – a community initiative to improve physical activity levels among adolescents. ParticipACTION also has a proprietary branded behavioural change initiative, UPnGO, providing office-based, desk-bound employees with opportunities to break up their sedentary time and increase their regular physical activity.

## Thought leadership

Thought leadership, which centres on being at the forefront of science and which embraces the adoption and willingness to inform others of new ideas, is an important knowledge translation and dissemination component.<sup>7</sup> Over the next five years, ParticipACTION's goal is to be an informed thought leader and an authoritative source for information on physical activity and sedentary behaviour knowledge for the sport, recreational and physical activity sectors as well as for the general public. Moving forward, ParticipACTION is committed to developing and distributing evidence-based knowledge products (e.g., evidence-informed position papers and guidelines); be up-to-date on information about physical activity, sport participation and sedentary behaviour; provide issue representation and act as a spokesperson for media and other stakeholders; and help align the sector on key issues of importance, including advocating for policies

and supports that facilitate moving more and sitting less. Currently, ParticipACTION is working with partners like the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology, and the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario to create and distribute resources for Canadians that reflect the most up-to-date scientific evidence in the fields of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep research.

## Brand

ParticipACTION is the number one physical activity brand in Canada\*, and Canadians recognize it for “providing resources and easy ways for Canadians to be active,” and “helping overcome barriers to physical activity”.<sup>8</sup> Moving forward, ParticipACTION will ensure a consistent voice and brand identity across all initiatives and activities; and develop core corporate communications that provide relevant and meaningful information to Canadians and stakeholders that are attributable to ParticipACTION.

## Revenue generation and operations

To implement ParticipACTION's longer term plans, it is important to secure partnerships and multiple streams of revenue. As such, ParticipACTION draws heavily on partnerships and support (funding, personnel, and branding, distribution channels) from various partners from the educational, sports and recreational, government (national and provincial/territorial), corporate and private sectors. In recent years, ParticipACTION has been successful in building new partnerships and securing novel funding (e.g. the 150 Play List). ParticipACTION remains committed to making evidence-based decisions and operating by applying the highest standards of good governance, efficiency and professionalism. To support this goal, ParticipACTION is led by a volunteer Board of Directors made up of prominent Canadians from a sectorial cross-section. Furthermore, a *Research Advisory Group*, comprising eight national physical activity experts from major research institutions, as well as an

*Advisory Network*, which consists of a large multi-disciplinary group of representatives (n = 25) from the public health, urban planning, sport and recreational and educational sectors from each of Canada's provinces/territories, has been established. ParticipACTION strives to be results-oriented, is guided by a continuous improvement philosophy, and approaches its work by deploying a client-service focus.

## Measuring success

ParticipACTION's main goal is to target 10% of Canadians so they move more and sit less by 2020. This focus is aligned with work from the Conference Board of Canada,<sup>9</sup> and the World Health Organization.<sup>10</sup> By directly influencing individuals' awareness of, and participation in, physical activity through its programs and thought leadership activities, it will indirectly influence social norms. This conceptual framework is supported by the Socio-Ecological Model,<sup>11</sup> the Results Chain Model<sup>12</sup> and the Theory of Planned Behaviour,<sup>13</sup> and measured annually against organizational metrics, which are quantifiable measures used to track, monitor and assess the success or failure of various business processes. ParticipACTION will help Canadians move towards positive and sustainable changes in their usual levels of physical activity and/or sedentary behaviour, moving from worst health to sub-optimal health, and eventually to optimal health levels (Figure 2).

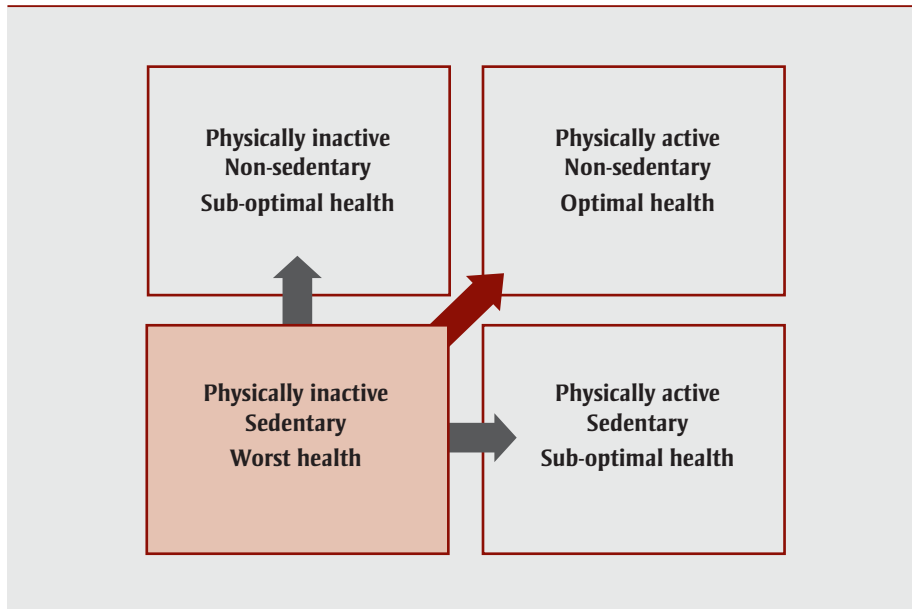
To assess ParticipACTION's contributions and efforts in improving the nation's activity behaviours, the organization will draw on data from the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS), the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) as well as customized surveys which have been developed/deployed by the organization itself, to assess the desired 10% change in physical activity and sedentary behaviours among Canadian adults and children. Guidance and expertise from the *Advisory Network* and *Research Advisory Group* will also be sought.

## Moving forward

To make physical activity a more desirable, accessible and vital part of daily life in Canada, it is important that people are

\* From April 19-22, 2016, an online survey was conducted by Maru/Matchbox on the Angus Reid Forum, on behalf of ParticipACTION. A sample of 1036 adult Canadians was weighted by age, gender, and region to ensure it was representative of the population. For comparison purposes, in a probability sample of this type, the margin of error would be +/-3.1%, 19 times out of 20. Specific question: *Can you name any organizations that promote physical activity in Canada? Please name as many organizations as you can (up to 10) and be as specific as possible.* This was a completely unaided question.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Activity habits and areas of impact**



Source: ParticipACTION, 2015<sup>6</sup>, p. 16.

provided with opportunities to move more, and are supported to make the necessary behavioural changes to make this happen. While limited financial resources continue to restrict health promotion, ParticipACTION's efforts have contributed to the growing acknowledgement of the importance of physical activity in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, based on identified education- and income-related knowledge awareness gaps,<sup>4</sup> future health promotion efforts – whether they comprise policy changes, programs or campaigns – should be mindful of the need to tailor initiatives to various target populations to increase their uptake and impact.

Moving forward and based on these many studies, ParticipACTION's strategic focus on evidence-based engagement initiatives, combined with thought leadership, will allow it to help Canadians move more and sit less. ParticipACTION, as shown in the findings of this special issue, hopes that being active will eventually become an integral part of what it means to be Canadian.

## Acknowledgements

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partners, agency partners and donors for their hard work. Please visit the ParticipACTION website for a complete and up-to-date listing of all those involved in ParticipACTION's engagement initiatives and thought leadership activities: [www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com).

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