https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.46.9.03

Original quantitative research

Examining the grading process for the Government indicator of the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Nicholas Kuzik, PhD (1); Brianne A. Bruijns, PhD (2,3); Christine Cameron, PhD (4); Joe Doiron, BPHE (5); Emily Pope, MSc (1); John C. Spence, PhD (6); Emily Stone, MSc (1); Leigh M. Vanderloo, PhD (1,2,3); Kelly P. Arbour-Nicitopoulos, PhD (7); Valerie Carson, PhD (6); Jean-Philippe Chaput, PhD (1,8); Rachel Colley, PhD (9); Guy Faulkner, PhD (10); Ian Janssen, PhD (11); Eun-Young Lee, PhD (11); Travis Saunders, PhD (12); Patricia Tucker, PhD (3,13); Mark S. Tremblay, PhD (1,8)

This article has been peer reviewed.

Recommended Attribution
Research article by Kuzik N et al. in the HPCDP Journal licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Abstract

Introduction: The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the national assessment of children and youth's physical activity and related behaviours. Traditionally, the Government indicator was graded through a subjective process, but the 2024 Report Card applied a more systematic and objective scoring rubric. This manuscript describes the process and results of using this rubric to grade the Government indicator.

Methods: National, provincial, and territorial physical activity-related policies, budget items, and initiatives from 2022 to 2024 were gathered. This collated document was shared with the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (SPARC), a group of government officials from the public health and sport sectors. After SPARC feedback, a score was calculated for the Government indicator.

Results: A total score of 67.7/100% was calculated, and a B grade was assigned for the Government indicator. The score was based on the number of policies (score: 4/5), breadth of policies (score: 4/5), and identified supporting actions (score: 14.7/20), accountable organizations (score: 15/25), reporting structures (score: 10/15), funding (score: 15/20), and monitoring and evaluation plans (score: 5/10).

Conclusion: The B grade in 2024 is slightly higher than the B− in 2020 and 2022. It is unknown whether this represents true positive change in Canada or a measurement artifact from the new scoring rubric. Canadian Report Card researchers will continue to employ this more objective rubric, and we encourage other Global Report Card leaders to do the same.

Keywords: *physical activity, sedentary behaviour, policy, active healthy kids, assessment*

Highlights

- The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is Canada's national assessment of children and youth's physical activity and related behaviours.
- Traditionally, the Government indicator was graded through a subjective process, but the 2024 Report Card applied a more systematic and objective scoring rubric using the Health Enhancing Physical Activity Policy Audit Tool Version 2.
- A total score of 67.7/100% was calculated, and a B grade was assigned for the Government indicator.
- Canadian Report Card researchers will continue to employ this more objective rubric, and we encourage other Global Report Card leaders to do the same.

Author references:

1. Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
2. ParticipACTION, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
3. School of Occupational Therapy, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
4. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
5. Independent Practitioner, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada
6. Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
7. Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
8. Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
9. Health Analysis and Modelling Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
10. School of Kinesiology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
11. School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
12. Department of Applied Human Sciences, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada
13. Children's Health Research Institute, London, Ontario, Canada

Correspondence: Mark S. Tremblay, Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, 401 Smyth Road, Ottawa, ON K1H 8L1; Tel: 613-254-8482; Email: mtremblay@cheo.on.ca

Introduction

The benefits of physical activity for children and youth are far-reaching, including the promotion of healthy physical, cognitive, and social-emotional health and development.[1] In Canada, the economic burden of physical inactivity on health among adults alone is estimated at $3.9 billion per year. Conversely, the positive economic impact generated by sport, physical activity, and recreation has been estimated at $37.2 billion per year.[2] Thus, many public health efforts have been employed to improve the physical activity levels of children and youth and promote the importance of intervening in early life.[3-6] Despite these efforts, most children and youth in Canada are failing to accumulate adequate levels of physical activity for health benefits. For instance, it is estimated that 48% of children and 79% of youth in Canada are not meeting the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines' physical activity recommendation of ≥60 minutes/day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.[7] Further, gender and age differences in physical activity levels are becoming increasingly evident. From childhood to adolescence, the percentage of boys meeting the physical activity recommendation drops from 66% to 33%, while for girls it drops from 37% to 8%.[7]

Guiding and facilitating an improvement in physical activity levels requires understanding Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory[8] and physical activity and related behaviours, opportunities, characteristics, and determinants at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels.[9] This need was the impetus for the creation of the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA), a multinational coalition committed to powering the global movement to get children and youth moving through thought leadership, knowledge translation and mobilization, capacity building, and advocacy.[10] The flagship product of this group is the Global Matrix—a comprehensive assessment of global variation in child and youth physical activity and related variables.[10] Modelled after the Canadian Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Youth,[11] the Global Matrix 4.0 included 57 countries,[12] and 69 countries are participating in the next iteration, scheduled to be released in 2026.[13] The Global Matrix includes 10 common indicators across participating countries: Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport and Physical Activity, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviour, Physical Fitness, School, Family and Peers, Community and Environment, and Government.[12] The Global Matrix has led to many successes in powering the momentum to get kids moving across the world.[10,12,14] In Canada, the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the national contribution to the Global Matrix, and has demonstrated impact, especially in the academic and government sectors.[15,16]

Specific to the Government indicator of the Report Card, strategies, policies, investments, and leadership related to physical activity are assessed. Within Canada, assessment of the Government indicator has historically relied on a subjective process informed by expert consensus.[17] However, Ward et al.[18] developed and implemented a more objective Report Card scoring rubric for the Government indicator of the 2018 Wales Report Card, based on the Health Enhancing Physical Activity Policy Audit Tool Version 2 (HEPA PAT V2).[19] The development of this more objective process addressed an important limitation for assessing government influence on physical activity, and for the Global Matrix 4.0 in 2022, 12 participating countries adopted this Report Card scoring rubric. While Canada's general Global Matrix and Report Card did not introduce the use of this Report Card scoring rubric until 2024, it was used in the 2022 Canadian Para Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities.[20] Adopting this Report Card scoring rubric not only provides a more objective assessment of government influence on physical activity in Canada, but it also allows for better global comparisons of government strategies and investments to evaluate variation across countries. Therefore, the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric was adopted with some modifications for the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth.[21] The purpose of this manuscript is to describe the process and results of using the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric to assign a grade to the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card Government indicator. The description and reporting of this process outlines the evidence underlying the Government grade in Canada, highlights the strengths and limitations of the approach, and may help guide other countries considering the adoption of this grading method.

Methods

Scoring the Government indicator within the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth happens as a component of the overall Report Card grading process.[21] Briefly, the ParticipACTION Report Card is a comprehensive assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada that synthesizes multiple data sources across 14 physical activity and related indicators (e.g. Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport, Government).[15,17,21] The synthesis of data and assigning grades to the 14 indicators is based on established benchmarks within a grading scheme.[21] Grading is conducted by the Report Card Research Committee (RCRC), a group comprised of the chief scientific officer, research manager, ParticipACTION staff content experts (2024, n = 2), and Canadian researchers with expertise in children's physical activity (2024, n = 13) across multiple sectors (e.g. academic, government, policy, practice), geographic regions (e.g. Atlantic Canada, Ontario, Prairies), and career stages (e.g. early, mid, senior).[21] Since 2005, 16 Canadian children and youth report cards have been produced.[15]

Development of the Government indicator scoring approach

A non-experimental quantitative, stakeholder-informed study design was adopted. At the first RCRC meeting for the 2024 Report Card, members discussed the idea of moving away from entirely qualitative grading for the Government indicator toward a more quantitative and standardized approach. A subcommittee (n = 9) was formed to explore adopting the scoring rubric developed by Ward et al.[18] based on the Health Enhancing Physical Activity Policy Audit Tool Version 2 (HEPA PAT V2).[19] This approach involves identifying relevant policies, budget items, and initiatives and scoring them using a predefined rubric.[18] The process involved four key stages: (1) policy identification and compilation by the government subcommittee; (2) stakeholder validation with the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (SPARC); (3) scoring using the Report Card rubric; and (4) final grade assignment by the RCRC.

Policy identification and data sources

Relevant policies, strategies, budget documents, and initiatives were identified through structured searches of publicly available federal, provincial, and territorial government sources. These included ministry and agency websites (e.g. health, sport, recreation, education, transportation,

infrastructure), strategic plans, legislative documents, and budget announcements. Targeted keyword searches (e.g. "physical activity," "sport," "recreation," "active transportation," "parks," "wellness") were used within jurisdictional websites. Grey literature (e.g. government reports and action plans) was included where publicly accessible.

Documents were limited to those published or active between 2022 and 2024. Policies were included if they were government-led (federal, provincial, territorial) and had a direct or indirect relationship to physical activity. Direct relationships explicitly referenced physical activity or related behaviours, while indirect relationships reflected plausible influence (e.g. parks or active transportation infrastructure). Policies were excluded if they were municipal only, not government-led, or focussed exclusively on clinical or therapeutic interventions without population-level relevance.

Data extraction and policy inventory development

Identified policies were extracted into a standardized Excel-based inventory, organized by jurisdiction. Each policy was treated as a single unit of analysis. Extracted fields included policy title, jurisdiction, year, sector (e.g. health, education, transportation), policy type (e.g. strategy, funding initiative, legislation), and target population where specified.

Variables aligned with the scoring rubric were also captured, including the presence or absence of: (1) supporting actions; (2) accountable organizations; (3) reporting structures; (4) identifiable funding; and (5) monitoring and evaluation plans. For the purposes of this scoring process, relevant policies, budget items, and initiatives had to have a direct or indirect link to physical activity (e.g. reference to sport, recreation, active transportation).

To enhance completeness and accuracy, the inventory was shared with the SPARC, a stakeholder group of government officials from the public health and sport sectors representing all jurisdictions. Members reviewed jurisdiction-specific entries for accuracy, omissions, and additional input.

Scoring procedures

The finalized inventory was used to determine a score from 0% to 100%, with higher scores indicating stronger policy support for physical activity. Scoring followed the Report Card rubric by Ward et al.,[18] which includes seven domains: (1) number of policies (5%); (2) breadth across sectors (5%); (3) supporting actions (20%); (4) accountable organizations (25%); (5) reporting structures (15%); (6) funding (20%); and (7) monitoring and evaluation plans (10%).

Domains were assessed based on explicit evidence within policy documents (e.g. named responsible organizations, defined funding, or reporting mechanisms). Domain scores were calculated according to rubric criteria and summed to produce a total score.

To reflect Canada's multilevel governance structure, provincial and territorial scores were weighted by population relative to the national total (Table 1).[22] For example, Alberta's score was multiplied by 0.1152, reflecting 11.52% of the population.

Two researchers (BAB, NK) collaboratively conducted the initial scoring, and this score was reviewed by the government subcommittee for resolution of disagreements and approval. Once approved, the findings were presented to the broader RCRC at a grade-assigning meeting for the full Report Card, where the Government indicator was assigned a letter grade from F (0%–19%) to A+ (94%–100%).[21]

Data availability

The policy inventory was developed using jurisdiction-specific information that was compiled, verified, and, in some cases, supplemented through consultation with government representatives. Due to data-sharing constraints and the inclusion of information stemming from the stakeholder validation that is not currently available in the public domain, the full dataset cannot be shared. However, detailed descriptions of the identification, extraction, and scoring procedures are provided to support transparency and reproducibility.

Results

When seeking feedback from SPARC, the number of representatives who provided input from each federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdiction was 2 out of 2 federally, 9 out of 10 provincially, and 3 out of 3 territorially. One province chose not to participate. A total of 3 provinces returned edited scorecards, highlighting a small number of programs that were missed by the research team in their initial searches. However, the individual scores for the

TABLE 1
Proportional weighting score modifiers based on the percent of the total population in Canada

Region	Percent of population
Ontario	38.45%
Quebec	22.98%
British Columbia	13.52%
Alberta	11.52%
Manitoba	3.63%
Saskatchewan	3.06%
Nova Scotia	2.62%
New Brunswick	2.09%
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.38%
Prince Edward Island	0.42%
Northwest Territories	0.11%
Yukon	0.11%
Nunavut	0.10%
Federal	100.00%

3 provinces as well as the total overall score remained unchanged despite the new programmatic additions.

A total of 61 policy items (i.e. documented policies, budget items, initiatives) were identified: 13 at the federal level, 42 at the provincial level (range: 2–8), and 6 at the territorial level (range: 2). Additionally, 16/61 policies mentioned children and youth, 4/61 policies mentioned those with disabilities, and 3/61 policies overlapped by mentioning children and youth with disabilities. When comparing the proportion of direct versus indirect policies, 69% were direct at the federal level, 77% at the provincial level, and 100% at the territorial level. The breadth of policies spanned the following sectors: community wellness, culture and recreation, education, environment, health, heritage, Indigenous relations and reconciliation, Indigenous sports and recreation, infrastructure and communities, media and advertising, parks, physical activity, recreation, sport, sustainability, transportation, and urban and rural planning. The mean number of sectors was 5 at the federal level, 4 at the provincial level (range: 2–10), and 3 at the territorial level (range: 2–4).

The proportion of policies with specific actions to support physical activity, accountable organization(s), reporting structures, funding, and monitoring and evaluation plans ranged from an average of 16.7% (1 of 6 territorial-level policies) to 84.6% (11 of 13 federal-level policies; Table 2). The proportions were higher in all categories at the federal level, except for monitoring and evaluation, which was highest at the provincial level. Overall, the cumulative score for the Government indicator was 68% (Table 3), which equates to a B grade (67%–73%).[21]

Discussion

Canada received a grade of B (68%) when scoring the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card Government indicator using the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric,[18] which is slightly higher than the B− assigned in 2020 and 2022, and the median B− assigned from 2014 to 2024.[17] It is not possible to say whether this represents progress in policy or funding of physical activity in Canada, or is simply a measurement artifact from using a different scoring technique. Further, it would not be feasible to examine changes in Report Cards by rescoring old timepoints with the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric, especially considering the addition of consulting the SPARC. Nonetheless, using a more objective Report Card scoring rubric will standardize the Government indicator scoring in future Report Cards and will facilitate the analysis of trends over time. This is particularly important as RCRC member turnover can result in a loss of continuity when key individuals who previously guided the subjective Government indicator scoring are no longer involved. Onboarding new members of the RCRC tasked with scoring the Government indicator could be enhanced if they accessed the data from the present study to calibrate their scoring. Adopting and documenting a more quantitative approach may facilitate the accurate assessment of changes in government policy and funding over time. Implementing this methodology within the 2025 Canadian Adult Report Card[23] was an important step toward assessing policy influences across the lifespan. Further, the updated approach to scoring the Government indicator could be a useful tool for assessing progress on national strategies such as the Common Vision for Increasing Physical Activity and Reducing Sedentary Living in Canada,[24] Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015,[25] 2025–2035 Canadian Sport Policy,[26] National Active Transportation Strategy,[27] and Canada's efforts to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goals via sport, physical activity, and recreation promotion.[28] Nevertheless, it is notable that the previous qualitative/subjective scoring method resulted in very similar results, suggesting that the expert consensus for interpreting the evidence gathered was reasonably accurate.

Interestingly, the B grade from the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card differs when compared to the C− in the 2022 Canadian Para Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities.[20] While both assessments examined the federal, provincial, and territorial policy influence on physical activity in Canada in a relatively similar time frame, the Para Report Card made concerted efforts to examine disability-specific physical activity policies and funding initiatives. To that point, only 4/61 policies in this study mentioned those with disabilities. Clearly, efforts are needed to bridge the gap between these two grades by creating more accessibility policies and disability-specific funding at the national, provincial, and territorial levels. Outside the intra-Canadian comparison, the Canadian ParticipACTION Report Card had a higher

TABLE 2
Federal, provincial and territorial proportion of policies meeting specific domains

Policies with…	Region		
	Federal (n = 13 policies)	Provincial (n = 42 total policies across 10 provinces)	Territorial (n = 6 total policies across 3 territories)
Supporting actions	84.6%[a]	60.9% (0.0–100.0%)	50.0% (50.0–50.0%)
Accountable organizations	76.9%[a]	51.7% (0.0–100.0%)	33.3% (0.0–50.0%)
Reporting structures	69.2%[a]	59.8% (0.0–100.0%)	16.7% (0.0–50.0%)
Funding	84.6%[a]	68.1% (0.0–100.0%)	66.7% (50.0–100.0%)
Monitoring and evaluation	46.2%[a]	59.8% (25.0–100.0%)	33.3% (0.0–50.0%)

Note: Values represent the mean (min-max) proportion of policies with specific aspects that could improve the likelihood of successfully implementing a policy and, by extension, improving physical activity.

[a] No range presented as only one jurisdiction is represented.

TABLE 3
Overall and domain scores for the Government indicator

Domain	Narrative	Score/Total (%)
Number of policies	In Canada, 13 policies were identified at the federal level and a proportional average of 4.2 policies were identified at the provincial/territorial level (range: 2–8) for a total of 17.2 (15 to 19 category).	4/5%
Breadth of policies – number of sectors	Among the identified policies, the number of sectors was 5 at the federal level and a proportional average of 3.6 at the provincial/territorial level (range: 2–10) for a total of 8.6 (8 to 9 category). Six provinces'/territories' policies stayed within the sport, physical activity and recreation sectors, while others extended beyond these sectors (e.g. urban and rural planning, heritage).	4/5%
Identified supporting actions	A total of 11 of the 13 federal policies and 30 of 48 provincial/territorial policies (proportional average 87.0%) identified supporting actions for a total of 14.7. Some policy initiatives included comprehensive action plans nested within key initiative goals, while others only included broad statements with limited accountability.	15/20%
Identified accountable organization(s)	A total of 10 of the 13 federal policies (76.9%) and 29 of 48 provincial/territorial policies (proportional average 74.6%) identified lead organizations who were responsible for the delivery of the policies (total score of 76.4%). Some policy initiatives included specific groups (e.g. community groups, non-profits) responsible for the delivery of actions, while others simply referenced the government ministries/departments responsible for enacting policy actions.	15/25%
Identified reporting structures	A total of 9 of the 13 federal policies (69.2%) and 26 of 48 provincial/territorial policies (proportional average 74.1%) referenced reporting structures (total score of 70.5%).	10/15%
Identified funding	A total of 11 of the 13 federal policies (84.6%) and 32 of 48 provincial/territorial policies (49.8%) included specific references to funding (total score of 76.2%). The proportional difference in federal and provincial/territorial policies with funding structures is worth noting; most federal government policy initiatives were line items in the federal budget, whereas provincial and territorial policy initiatives often included references to funding by way of grant programs and tax incentives.[a]	15/20%
Monitoring and evaluation plan	A total of 6 of the 13 federal policies (46.2%) and 27 of 48 provincial/territorial policies (proportional average 72.9%) included reference to monitoring and evaluation plans (total score of 52.7%). At the provincial/territorial level, most policies that included reporting structures also included monitoring and evaluation plans; however, fewer policies had both at the federal level.	5/10%
Total score		68/100%

Notes: Benchmark scores were weighted proportionally as recommended by Ward et al.;[18] proportional average refers to the process of proportionally weighting scores for each province/territory by the population size in comparison to the total Canadian population (see Table 1).

[a] It is possible that policy initiatives without explicit reference to funding will work within their existing departmental budgets to carry out policy actions.

grade for the Government indicator (B; 68%) when compared to the 2018 Welsh Report Card (C+; 54%).[18] The areas where Canada appeared to outperform Wales were in the Identified Reporting Structures (Canada: 10/15, Wales: 5/15) and Identified Funding (Canada: 15/20, Wales: 8/20). Direct comparisons, such as those between Canada and Wales, are a core aspect of the Global Matrix ethos, where countries learn from one another as a means of working toward improving global levels of children's physical activity.[10]

An alternative explanation for the ParticipACTION Report Card scoring the Government indicator higher when compared to the Canadian Para Report Card and Welsh Report Card could be attributed to the additional step of collaborating with the SPARC. While the SPARC was not involved in grading the indicator, their review and confirmation of included jurisdiction-specific policy and funding initiatives helped ensure that our data were complete, current, and accurate. Thus, our collaborative process likely enhanced our ability to identify reporting structures and funding, ultimately contributing to a higher grade. Beyond methodological improvements, engaging with groups like the SPARC throughout the grading process may yield broad and unintended benefits. Collaborating with government officials could create a sense of shared ownership with the Report Card, leading to enhanced legitimacy, buy-in, trust, and promotion of physical activity at various levels of government. Additionally, this collaboration could help build key relationships between researchers and government officials, strengthening policy-research feedback loops. Alternatively, familiarization with a Report Card scoring rubric could help government officials alter policy language to maximize the scores while taking no concrete steps to genuinely improve physical activity in Canada. Further, there were some concerns that this activity created inter-jurisdictional comparisons that could be conceived as shaming and unmotivating, potentially undermining relationship building. Thus, future Report Cards will need to continue balancing the benefits of governmental collaboration with the need for critical independence, ultimately ensuring that improvements in grades reflect meaningful actions rather than superficial policy language.

Strengths and limitations

The primary holistic strength of this process, for Canada and other Global Matrix countries adopting the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric, is the shift from a

consensus-based approach toward a quantitative, stakeholder-informed assessment of the Government indicator. Moving to a more objective approach enhances transparency and replicability of scoring for year-to-year comparisons within a country, and consistency of scoring when different countries compare scores with one another. The main strength of the current project was including the SPARC to ensure the full and accurate scope of policies and funding were evaluated. While it is important that government collaboration does not influence the critical appraisal necessary to remain objective, the potential intended and unintended benefits remain a major strength. Future applications of this approach could consider engaging non-government stakeholders (e.g. researchers, practitioners, or civil society organizations) to complement government input, broaden interpretation of policy context, and strengthen accountability.

Some important limitations also need to be considered. First, the previous subjective scoring of the Government indicator included the benchmark evidence of leadership and commitment in providing physical activity opportunities for all children and youth,[17] which is absent in the updated Report Card scoring rubric. While evidence of leadership may be a difficult concept to objectively score, it may be an important contributor to children's physical activity in Canada. Further, despite the rigour and comprehensiveness of adopting a more objective process, the resulting grades in Canada for 2020 and 2022 were similar to those produced using the subjective process. Thus, some may question if the additional time and resources are worth the effort. Future initiatives should evaluate the costs and benefits of the objective scoring from an international perspective. If the benefits outweigh the costs, an international consensus should be reached to determine which aspects of the Report Card scoring rubric should be added or subtracted. For instance, the Global Observatory for Physical Activity (GoPA) employs a less involved process for assessing the policy context for countries.[29] Finally, due to the multilevel government structure in Canada, the final score produced may not be an accurate reflection of what government policies each child in Canada benefits from. Although measures were taken, such as weighting policies proportionally by province or territory population size, to reflect what the average child in Canada would experience, some provinces and territories have more or fewer policies that would explicitly benefit children compared to what was represented in the scoring framework.

In undertaking this objective scoring process for the Government indicator for the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, adjustments to the process must be considered for future applications of the Report Card scoring rubric. First, engaging with the SPARC earlier in the process is recommended to ensure all provincial, territorial, and federal officials have sufficient time to review and contribute to the policy audit. Second, given the current Report Card scoring rubric does not assess policies specific to certain age or population groups, the addition of contextual information regarding each policy's target population would be beneficial to provide a more robust assessment of who benefits from each policy's actions (e.g. age range [i.e. children, youth, adults, older adults], equity-denied groups). This would be particularly useful in repurposing the scoring framework for other age groups (e.g. for the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults) and for advocating for increased, targeted supports for specific equity-denied groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, racialized groups). Finally, future RCRC members tasked with scoring the Government indicator should access data from the present study to calibrate their scoring to ensure consistency from year to year. While some aspects of the rubric may change over time, it could still provide some key reliability from year to year that would be essential to determining changes in the Government indicator.

Conclusion

The adoption of a non-experimental quantitative data collection process, utilizing the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric and supported by stakeholder engagement, for the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth represents a meaningful step toward a more consistent, transparent, and objective approach to evaluating the government's influence on children's physical activity in Canada. Collaborating with the SPARC was a meaningful expansion to the Welsh approach that introduced direct benefits to data quality and quantity and may produce some indirect benefits that improve physical activity participation in Canada. Despite the benefits of adopting this more objective scoring approach, future research is needed to ensure international consensus on the key aspects of the Report Card scoring rubric. For now, the benefits of employing a more objective scoring approach appear to outweigh the limitations. Canadian Report Card researchers will continue to employ the Welsh Report Card scoring rubric, and we encourage other Report Card leaders to do the same.

Acknowledgements

Funding from the Public Health Agency helped support the development of the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Special thanks are extended to Justin Lang, Malcolm Ward, Gareth Stratton, and the Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (SPARC) in Canada for their feedback and consultations.

Conflicts of interest

All authors are members of the ParticipACTION Report Card Research Committee. LMV and BAB are employees of ParticipACTION. Mark Tremblay is an editorial board member of the HPCDP Journal.

The work was not undertaken under the auspices of employment with the Government of Canada.

Authors' contributions and statement

NK, BAB: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing—original draft.

CC, JD, EP, JCS, ES, LMV, MST: conceptualization, writing—original draft.

KAN, VC, JPC, RC, GF, IJ, EYL, TS, PT: conceptualization, writing—review and editing.

The content and views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

References

1. Poitras VJ, Gray CE, Borghese MM, Carson V, Chaput JP, Janssen I, et al. Systematic review of the relationships between objectively measured physical activity and health indicators in school-aged children and youth. Appl Physiol Nutr Metab. 2016;41(6):S197-239. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2015-0663

2. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) and Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA). The price of inactivity: measuring the powerful impact of sport, physical activity, and recreation in Canada. Ottawa (ON): CFLRI & CPRA; 2023.

3. Keadle SK, Bustamante EE, Buman MP. Physical activity and public health: four decades of progress. Kinesiology Review. 2021;10(3):319-30. https://doi.org/10.1123/kr.2021-0028

4. Public Health Agency of Canada. A common vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: let's get moving. Ottawa (ON): Public Health Agency of Canada; 2018. Available from: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/lets-get-moving.html

5. Milton K, Cavill N, Chalkley A, Foster C, Gomersall S, Hagstromer M, et al. Eight investments that work for physical activity. J Phys Act Health. 2021;18(6):625-30. https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2021-0112

6. International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH). The Bangkok declaration on physical activity for global health and sustainable development. Br J Sports Med. 2017;51(19):1389-91. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2017-098063

7. Statistics Canada. Directly measured physical activity and sedentary time in Canada: new results from the Canadian Health Measures Survey 2022 to 2024 [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Statistics Canada; 2025 [cited 2025 Dec 9]. Available from: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/251017/dq251017b-eng.htm

8. Bronfenbrenner U. Ecological systems theory. In: Kazdin AE, editor. Encyclopedia of Psychology, Vol. 3. Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press; 2000. p. 129-133.

9. Spence JC, Lee RE. Toward a comprehensive model of physical activity. J Sport Exerc Psychol. 2003;4(1):7-24. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00014-6

10. Morrison SA, Aubert S, Brazo-Sayavera J, Demchenko I, Reilly JJ, Tremblay MS. Celebrating a decade of the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance and its Global Matrix initiative. Br J Sports Med. 2025;59(3):198-9. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2024-108984

11. Colley RC, Brownrigg M, Tremblay MS. A model of knowledge translation in health: the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Health Promot Pract. 2012;13(3):320-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839911432929

12. Aubert S, Barnes JD, Demchenko I, Hawthorne M, Abdeta C, Abi Nader P, et al. Global Matrix 4.0 physical activity report card grades for children and adolescents: results and analyses from 57 countries. J Phys Act Health. 2022;19(11):700-28. https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2022-0456

13. Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance. Global Matrix 5.0 [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance; [cited 2025 Dec 9]. Available from: https://www.activehealthykids.org/5-0/

14. Tremblay MS, Barnes JD, Demchenko I, Gonzalez SA, Brazo-Sayavera J, Kalinowski J, et al. Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance Global Matrix 4.0—a resource for physical activity researchers. J Phys Act Health. 2022;19(11):693-9. https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2022-0257

15. Vanderloo LM, Bruijns BA, Kuzik N, Stone E, Tremblay MS. Impact of the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth in Canada: 2015–2024. J Exerc Sci Fit. 2025;23(2):102-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesf.2025.01.005

16. Tremblay MS, Barnes JD, Bonne JC. Impact of the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card: a 10-year analysis. J Phys Act Health. 2014;11(s1):S3-20. https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2014-0167

17. Kuzik N, Cameron C, Carson V, Chaput JP, Colley R, Doiron J, et al. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth: focus on the COVID-19 pandemic impact and equity-deserving groups. Front Public Health. 2023;11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1172168

18. Ward MR, Tyler R, Edwards LC, Miller MC, Williams S, Stratton G. The AHK-Wales Report Card 2018: policy measures - is it possible to "score" qualitative data? Health Promot Int. 2021;36(4):1151-9. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa118

19. Bull F, Milton K, Kahlmeier S. Health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) policy audit tool (PAT): version 2. Geneva (CH): World Health Organization; 2015. Available from: https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/3635029f-e62c-48d2-947e-6b5b2cd71396/content

20. Arbour-Nicitopoulos KP, Kuzik N, Vanderloo LM, Martin Ginis KA, James ME, Bassett-Gunter RL, et al. Expert appraisal of the 2022 Canadian Para Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities. Adapted Adapt Phys Activ Q. 2023;40(3):465-74. https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2022-0050

21. ParticipACTION. Rallying for resilience: keeping children and youth active in a changing climate. The 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto (ON): ParticipACTION; 2024. Available from: https://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-Children-and-Youth-Report-Card-Technical-Report.pdf

22. Statistics Canada. Population and dwelling counts: Canada, provinces and territories. Table 98-10-0001-01 [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Statistics Canada; 2022 [cited 2025 Dec 3]. Available from: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810000101

23. ParticipACTION. Moving beyond stagnation: elevating physical activity in Canada. The 2025 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults. Toronto (ON): ParticipACTION; 2025. Available from: https://www.participaction.com/the-science/adult-report-card

24. Public Health Agency of Canada. A common vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: let's get moving [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Statistics Canada; 2018. Available from: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/lets-get-moving.html

25. Canadian Parks and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council. A framework for recreation in Canada 2015: pathways to wellbeing. Ottawa (ON): Canadian Recreation and Parks Association; 2015. Available from: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/cpra/pages/1532/attachments/original/1719875874/FrameworkForRecreationInCanada_2016wcitation.pdf?1719875874

26. Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council, Canadian Sport Policy Renewal Work Group, Canadian Sport Policy Writing Team. 2025-2035 Canadian sport policy. 2025. Available from: https://csp.sirc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Canadian-Sport-Policy-2025-2035-EN-FINAL.pdf

27. Cathro A, Spence JC, Cameron C, Varela AR, Morales D, Kohn ER, et al. Progress in physical activity research, policy, and surveillance in Canada: the global observatory for physical activity—GoPA! BMC Public Health. 2024;24(1):2866. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20322-1

28. Spence JC, Kim Y-B, Lee E-Y, Vanderloo LM, Faulkner G, Tremblay MS, et al. The relevance of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in the promotion of sport, physical activity, and recreation in Canada. C J Public Health. 2025;116(2):321-6. https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-024-00964-9

29. Varela AR, Hallal PC, Grueso JM, Pedišić Ž, Salvo D, Nguyen A, et al. Status and trends of physical activity surveillance, policy, and research in 164 countries: findings from the global observatory for physical activity—GoPA! 2015 and 2020 surveys. J Phys Act Health. 2022;20(2):112-28. https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2022-0464