



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health

Health Promotion/Noncommunicable Diseases Prevention and Surveillance Department

MEETING OF THE ACTIVE LIVING NATIONAL POLICY NETWORK

*Report of a WHO Meeting
Ottawa, Canada
14-16 September 1998*

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NATIONAL POLICY NETWORK***

*Report of a WHO Meeting
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The World Health Organization and meeting participants wish to extend their thanks and appreciation to the Canadian Federal Ministry of Health (Health Canada), Ottawa for having kindly hosted the meeting in Ottawa.

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Executive Summary and Follow-up

Despite the strong evidence in the world that all forms of physical activity improve the health, functional capacity and well-being of individuals and communities, there is still insufficient action and limited policy orientation for encouraging the adoption and maintenance of physically active lifestyles within supportive political, social and physical environments.

There is a need to develop new multi-sectoral policies on active living/physical activity for health. Such policies could be an integral part of existing relevant socio-economic policies and strategies. Ministries of health should take the lead to ensure that physical activity for health is promoted nationally and internationally in close partnership with other concerned sectors, especially sports education as well as relevant national and local social organizations. Governmental support and involvement is therefore essential for enhancing active living to benefit public health.

This challenge is also highlighted in the WHO Global Initiative on Active Living as a priority action. The above-mentioned meeting was therefore organized for the purpose of developing an international Active Living National Policy Network that will support the development and implementation of active living policies, strategies and programmes worldwide in Member States. The main objectives of the meeting were:

- 1) to share the knowledge gained by concerned founding members of the Network from their experiences in the formulation and promotion of national policies and programmes on active living;
- 2) to define the goal, objectives and role of the Network;
- 3) to agree working methods that will ensure the Network functions efficiently in implementing its objectives and progressively enlarging its membership; and
- 4) to identify selected intersectoral active living partnership initiatives or actions that can be undertaken by and between founding and potential members of the Network.

The meeting was hosted by the Canadian Federal Ministry of Health (Health Canada), Ottawa. Participants included policy-makers and professional staff having responsibilities and actions related to physical activity for health, particularly in the health sector. They represented Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and USA. Bahrain, China, Malaysia and South Africa were also invited but were unable to attend. The International Olympic Committee and concerned WHO Collaborating Centres on Physical Activity for Health were also represented (Centre for Diseases Control in Atlanta, USA; Health Education Authority, London, UK; Tokyo Medical College; UKK Institute for Health Promotion Research, University of Tampere, Finland).

Participants stressed the value and necessity of persuading policy-makers that active living is a viable cost-effective way to improve and maintain the good health and functional capacity of all people regardless of age, gender, physical ability, education level or socio-economic status. It is also a cost-effective way to reduce chronic disease and manage health-care costs. Physical

activity represents a sound investment in public health. It makes an important contribution to a range of other political and social issues, including those related to sport, education, environment, transportation, urban planning and delinquency prevention. The benefits of active living to individuals, communities, schools, work sites and sports programmes are far-reaching.

The Active Living National Policy Network is intended to support and foster policies, strategies and programmes worldwide. Its purpose is to promote health and quality of life through physical activity as part of the WHO Initiative on Active Living. It also aims at reducing sedentary lifestyles, a serious global public health issue. The following objectives are proposed for the Network:

- to advocate the benefits of active living and strengthen political commitment for it worldwide;
- to develop and strengthen intersectoral active living actions and partnerships as well as the sharing of knowledge and experience;
- to stimulate actions for initiating programmes on active living in various settings;
- to increase the number of developing countries with national active living policies.

The Network is composed of developed and developing countries which have identified a policy goal for increasing physical activity and initiated action to implement this policy using intersectoral approaches. The initial membership of the network represents a balanced mixture of countries with well-developed policies or programmes on active living and countries with great potential to develop such policies or programmes in the future.

Participants called on WHO to ensure the coordination and overall international management of the activities of the Network. However, it should be stressed that the Network is owned by the members themselves and its success will depend largely on their individual and collective action.

Among possible areas of action of the Network the following were highlighted: evidence-based advocacy for active living, sharing knowledge and practice, especially regarding policy development, training, research and ongoing initiatives at all levels; setting up systems for communication; identifying and motivating new countries to join the Network; offering support to countries that are developing policies and programmes on active living, “twinning” arrangements.

Introduction

THE ISSUE

Despite the strong evidence that physical activity has the potential to improve the health, functional capacity and well-being of individuals and communities, there is still limited policy orientation and insufficient action to encourage and enable the adoption and maintenance of physically active lifestyles throughout the life span (within supportive political, social and physical environments).

There is a need to develop multi-sectoral policies to promote a physically active lifestyle. Such policies could be an integral part of existing relevant socio-economic policies and strategies. *An intersectoral health-enhancing physical activity strategy needs to be developed and promoted as part of other relevant public health and lifestyle interventions (e.g. non-smoking, appropriate diet...).*

Clear and strong policies and legislation would stimulate advocacy for active lifestyles, motivate institutions and organizations to make a stronger and more sustained commitment to physical activity, provide physical activity facilities that are convenient, affordable and accessible to all; they would also stimulate sport policies health orientation, encourage the sharing of knowledge and foster national, regional and international partnerships for promoting active living.

Political leaders and decision-makers need to be convinced of the importance of physical activity for health through appropriate advocacy strategies.

Ministries of health should take the lead to ensure that physical activity for health is promoted nationally and internationally in close partnership with other concerned sectors especially sports, education, culture,

information, transport, local government and town planning as well as relevant national and local social organizations.

Governmental involvement and support is therefore essential for enhancing active living to benefit public health.

The challenge of developing national policies on active living is highlighted as a priority action in the WHO Global Initiative on Active Living. It was also the theme of the Meeting of the Active Living National Policy Group, hosted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland, (Hämeenlinna, 25-27 August 1997). The principal recommendation of the Hämeenlinna meeting was the recommendation that an international network on active living national policy should be established. *This network would bring together policy and other relevant representatives from a number of countries that have developed or are promoting, policies and programmes on active living around the world.*

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

Purpose and objectives of the Meeting

The meeting in Ottawa, Canada from 14 to 16 September 1998 was therefore organized for the purpose of developing an international Active Living National Policy Network that would support the development and implementation of active living policies, strategies and programmes worldwide in Member States. The main objectives of the meeting were:

- 1) to share the knowledge gained by concerned founding members of the Network from their experiences in the formulation and promotion of national policies and programmes on active living;
- 2) to define the goal, objectives and role of the Network;

3) to agree working methods that will ensure the Network functions efficiently in implementing its objectives and progressively enlarging its membership; and

4) to identify selected intersectoral active living partnership initiatives or actions that can be undertaken by and between founding and potential members of the Network.

Canada Hosts the Meeting

The meeting was hosted by the Canadian Federal Ministry of Health (Health Canada), Ottawa. It was opened and chaired by Mrs Janet Davies, A/Director General, Strategies and System for Health Directorate, Federal Ministry of Health, Ottawa, Canada.

Participants

Participants included policy-makers and professional staff having responsibilities and activities related to physical activity for health, particularly in the health sector. They represented Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and USA. Bahrain, China, Malaysia and South Africa were also invited but were unable to attend. The International Olympic Committee and concerned WHO Collaborating Centres on Physical Activity for Health were also represented (Centre for Diseases Control in Atlanta, USA; Health Education Authority, London, UK; Tokyo Medical College; UKK Institute for Health Promotion Research, Tampere, Finland). The list of participants is reproduced in Annex 2.

Programme of Work

The programme of work is reproduced in Annex 1.

Presentation of Priority Topics Based on Country Experiences

Participants stressed the value and necessity of persuading policy-makers that active living is a viable, cost-effective way to improve and maintain the good health and functional capacity of all people regardless of age, gender, physical ability, education level or socio-economic status. Physical activity is also a cost-effective way to reduce chronic disease and manage health-care costs. Physical activity represents a sound investment in public health. It has the potential to make important contributions to a range of other political and social issues including those related to sport, education, environment, transportation, urban planning and delinquency prevention. The benefits of active living to individuals, communities, schools, work sites and sports programmes are far-reaching.

The following themes were introduced by country representatives and were discussed during the meeting with the purpose of illustrating some components and approaches of active living policies and programmes as well as the urgent need for national policies and programmes:

- national policies on active living: How influential are they?
- partnerships for active living: How can national and local agencies work together effectively?
- physical activity in key settings (e.g. health services, schools, work place);
- transport and the environment: How do we influence the changing of environments to support active living?
- multi-sectoral action: How do we secure the support of new partners and influence other public policy agendas?

Purpose, Goal, Objectives, and Strategies of the Active Living Policy Network

The Active Living National Policy Network is intended to support and foster policies, strategies and programmes for promoting physically active lifestyles worldwide.

PURPOSE OF THE NETWORK

“To promote health and quality of life through physical activity as part of the WHO Initiative on Active Living”.

GOAL OF THE NETWORK

“To support the development and implementation of active living policies, strategies and programmes and to encourage and strengthen political commitment to active living of developed and developing countries worldwide”.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NETWORK

- 1) *to advocate the health, social and economic benefits of active living worldwide;*
- 2) *to develop and strengthen intersectoral active living activities and partnerships as well as the sharing of knowledge and experience;*
- 3) *to stimulate action for initiating programmes on active living in various settings;*
- 4) *to increase the number of developing countries with national active living policies.*

STRATEGIES

- dissemination of guidelines for policy development on active living;
- sharing current knowledge and practical experience related to the development, promotion and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes on active living, particularly with and among developing countries;
- identification of successful key strategies, facilitating factors and major constraints in developing, promoting and implementing national policies and programmes on active living, in developed and developing countries;
- sustained interaction among the network members and continuous identification of new ones;
- provision of international support to countries wishing to develop or strengthen their policies and programmes on active living (potential network members);
- promotion of joint actions/projects on physical activity for health among countries and communities of the Network.

Criteria for Joining the Network

Potential members of the network are assumed to have agreed on the purpose, goal, objectives, criteria and role of the Network.

Criteria for joining the Network will necessarily take into account the differences in political, social, cultural and economic contexts between countries. In principle, however, a country should have:

- identified a policy goal of increasing participation in physical activity to enhance health and well-being, at national and local levels;
- agreed to implement the policy goal and actions through health and other appropriate sectors;
- expressed officially the intent to participate in the Network and designated the “focal point” responsible for the co-ordination of information about relevant activity within the country and reporting back to the network.

The initial membership of the Network represents a balanced mixture of countries, developed and developing, with well-developed policies or programmes on active living and with great willingness, intention and potential to develop such policies or programmes in the future.

Partner Roles and Commitment

A strong global network can offer a number of benefits to the partners involved. As well as benefiting from collective learning and experiences, members will be able to seek support for the development of their policies and gain recognition as active partners in a worldwide movement to promote active living (particularly in developing countries).

ROLE OF THE NETWORK MEMBERS

1. To monitor and review their policies within the framework of the Guidelines for national policies on active living as developed by WHO (see also paragraph 5).
2. To assist other members in the development of their own policies and programmes, perhaps through more formal “twinning” arrangements.
3. To set up an intersectoral support network within their country that fosters the development of active living policies and programmes between sectors and facilitates communication.
4. To document and share lessons learned relating to the above three points.

ROLE OF WHO

WHO has an important role to play in helping to coordinate the overall activities of the International Active Living Policy Network. However, it should be stressed that the Network is owned by the members themselves, and its success will depend largely on their individual and collective action. Member States represented at the meeting expect WHO to seek formal approval for founding membership of the Network.

It is also recommended that WHO undertake the following:

1. to champion physical activity and act as a catalyst, an advocate and a legitimator in promoting policies and programmes on active living;
2. to provide evidence on the importance of physical activity to health and well being;
3. to convene regular network meetings, and other opportunities;
4. to disseminate existing knowledge, practice and lessons learned among network members and from the network to others;
5. to identify and recruit suitable new members through WHO Regional Offices and Country Offices and other partner agencies and networks;
6. to provide/support a secretariat to coordinate and manage the network and its activities and to develop an action plan and budget and help identify sources of funding. In this endeavour, WHO is expected to designate focal points for active living/physical activity for health in its Regional Offices. It will also seek support from the Network members and from Collaborating Centres (e.g. hosting the Network Secretariat, provision of temporary staff, funding of a specific activity, etc.);
7. to ensure effective linkage with other partners involved in the Global Initiative on Active Living including links to the International Consultative Group on Active Living.

Major Lessons Learned and Constraints

Some lessons learned for the successful development and implementation of active living policies and programmes:

- use of a broader understanding of physical activity within a population-based and public health perspective;
- sound scientific basis leading to policy support and action programmes;
- effective advocacy, as well as dissemination and sharing of information/knowledge/experience;
- realistic planning and the judicious mobilization and use of local resources;
- availability of at least a minimum of supportive environments and intersectoral partnerships;
- use of life settings (family, school, workplace, health and socio-cultural settings...);
- involvement of communities, as well as concerned sectors and target population groups, in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of physical activity programmes.

Some major constraints to the development of active living policies and programmes:

- Lack of awareness by a large proportion of the world population of the health, social and economic benefits of physical activity.
- Absence of data on levels, trends and determinants of physical activity in most countries of the world.

- Lack of political commitment and support for the promotion and organization of regular physical activity programmes.
- Insufficient cooperation between concerned sectors and actors, especially between the health and the sport sectors.
- Inaccessibility to the community of locally available sport facilities.

Guidelines for Policy Development

As highlighted in paragraph 5 above and discussed during the meeting of the “Active Living National Policy Group” (Hämeenlinna, Finland, 25-27 August 1997), the review of a set of **Guidelines for National Policies on Active Living**, based on country experiences, stresses in particular the need:

- to use WHO’s understanding of health promotion and noncommunicable disease prevention and control as the framework for developing strategies and actions;
- to work towards a broader understanding of physical activity within a population-based and public health perspective;
- to develop appropriate intersectoral partnerships, with the public and private sectors, governmental and non-governmental;
- to create/strengthen supportive environments and cultures;
- to reduce inequalities (socio-economic, gender...), particularly regarding access to knowledge on active living and to physical activity facilities;
- to use settings to promote health (e.g. family, school, workplace, primary health care);
- to involve communities in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of physical activity programmes;
- to foster the training of human resources for health from the health, sport, education and other relevant sectors in physical activity;

Method of Work and Outline of an Action Plan

- to develop personal resources through development of skills and dissemination of knowledge;
- to identify and evaluate models of good practice for physical activity, and identify critical areas for action-oriented research;
- to set targets, survey and assess levels of physical activity; and
- to develop processes for building and implementing policies on active living/physical activity for health.

Among possible areas of action of the Network, the following were highlighted: evidence-based advocacy for active living, sharing knowledge and practice, especially regarding policy development, training, research and on-going initiatives at all levels; setting up systems for communication; identifying and motivating new countries to join the Network; offering support to countries that are developing policies and programmes on active living,

1. Evidence-based Advocacy for Active Living: A Core Action of the Network

- Collect and disseminate key data and arguments in support of the health, social and economic benefits of physical activity.
- Finalize and publish the advocacy statement (e.g. a brochure giving the key arguments and evidence) to be used by Network members and various partners.
- Strengthen existing partnerships and/or create new ones that can increase opportunities for advocacy and support to countries.
- Develop advocacy plans for active living at global, regional and national levels.

Policy development must be supported wherever possible by evidence of effectiveness. It would greatly facilitate the advocacy process if network members could be persuaded to collect and publish data on the effectiveness of their policies and programmes.

2. Sharing Knowledge and Practice. Ongoing System for Communication.

- Network members could meet periodically, annually if possible, to

exchange information on progress and constraints in their own countries and report back on any collaboration with other countries. Network members could host these meetings in rotation.

- Interim meetings: consultations, workshops, training courses... could be arranged at various levels (global, regional or sub-regional) to examine specific priority topics such as policy and programme development, promotion of active living in key settings (e.g. school, workplace, community...), promotion of active ageing, organization of training and action-oriented research. These meetings could be linked to other meetings to reduce costs.
- Network members should agree to make themselves available for one-to-one communication and cooperation between network members on an ad-hoc basis to support their policy development process.
- An e-mail communication system could be used to link members on a more regular and informal basis. This is already in existence between some members and leads to rapid exchange of information. A broadcast e-mail list can also facilitate communication on a more regular basis, e.g. on a monthly basis, between Network members as well as between WHO and Network members.
- A website could be set up to showcase examples of physical activity policy and programmes from around the world. This could be part of the existing WHO site or a separate development, such as the “Europe on the Move” site (www.noc-nsf.nl) and many other national sites. Rapid success of active living action in different countries would show the value of the network.
- In cooperation with WHO, Network members and other partners, a suitable

collaborating centre could prepare a special newsletter dedicated to spreading examples of physical activity policy and programmes from around the world.

- Network members should share experience and information on their policy initiatives, on patterns/trends of physical activity, on guidelines for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of active living policies and programmes. One possible means is through a special meeting on planning and evaluation.
- Members should inform WHO of the most recent and pertinent key data, publications, research findings and reports related to active living and, where possible, make copies available for the WHO/HQ Library.

3. Identifying and Motivating New Countries to Join

New countries need to be encouraged to join the network, as they express their commitment to physical activity and begin taking action towards developing a national policy/programme. The network can then offer them the necessary support. Activities in this area include:

- using informal contacts and existing networks, e.g. the European Network for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) as well as networks related to health promotion and/or sport for all, sports science/medicine to identify new countries interested in joining the network;
- through its Regional Offices, Country Offices and other partner agencies, WHO should identify suitable new member countries. Existing global projects on health promotion and on the prevention

of cardiovascular diseases could serve as entry points to identify potential network members;

- providing support to facilitate the assessment of active living programmes in interested developing countries;
- allowing countries to join at any time provided that they have performed some significant action towards developing a national policy.

4. Support to Other Countries

- Network members can volunteer to offer their services for helping to build capacities for promoting physical activity within countries that request support, especially developing countries.
- “Twinning” arrangements could be organized between Network members. These would formalize links and allow more detailed cooperation programmes between countries with national policies on active living and those with potential to develop them.

5. Involvement of the Network in Ongoing Initiatives

- It is essential that the activities of the Network and the contributions of network members be within the priority areas of the Global Active Living Initiative such as active living in and through schools, active living at the workplace, active ageing, active living for persons with disabilities, programme planning and evaluation, training and research.
- The activities of the network should be made adequately known within the member countries and in international forums, by members reporting back and promoting the work of the network as and when appropriate.

Summary of Possible Selected Short-Term Activities of the Network

Relevant selected concrete active living activities are of paramount importance for improving the Network visibility and for demonstrating its added value to its present and potential members. Initial activities would include in particular:

- 1) an official expression by countries participating in this meeting of their desire to become founding members of the Network;
- 2) setting-up of a core secretariat for the Network. It was strongly recommended that such a secretariat be at WHO/HQ so the Network and the Global Initiative on Active Living can benefit from WHO worldwide credibility and from its support and legitimating role in the promotion of physical activity as a pertinent, viable and highly cost-effective public health intervention. Implementation of this action will depend on the availability of funds, especially from extra-budgetary sources;
- 3) establishment of appropriate communication systems (e-mail, Website, teleconferences..) between participating countries;
- 4) periodic information by WHO about the work of the Network and about the implementation of the Global Initiative on Active Living;
- 5) exchange of latest documents and research findings about the essential health, social and economic benefits of active living;
- 6) finalization of a succinct advocacy document (e.g. advocacy brochure) targeting essentially decision-makers. It will be part of the global advocacy strategy on active living;

7) preparation by volunteer Network members of fact sheets on the role of some development sectors in active living and on how to market active living to the respective concerned sectors. The following sectors will be dealt with at this stage: Health (Mrs H. Subiratis, Mexico); Education (Dr F. Berggren, Denmark); Sports and Recreation (Mrs Fidelma Rogers, Australia); Environment (Dr M. Pratt, CDC/USA); Transport (Mr N. Cavill, HEA/UK, and Mr D. Harris, Australia) and the Workplace (Mr Joe Doiron, Health Canada);

8) compiling and sharing a list of conferences, meetings and training opportunities related to physical activity for health/active living;

The Next Meeting of the Network

It is proposed to hold the next meeting of the Network in 2000. Some participants are exploring the possibility of hosting it in their country.

The following topics have already been suggested for consideration during the next meeting: research gaps; review (and update) of arguments in support of active living; training opportunities; communication update; reporting from WHO Regions and briefing new Network members.

Annex 1 Programme of Work

Sunday, 13 September 1998

- 15:00 Registration of participants.
- 16:00 Opening session. Introduction of delegates and opening addresses.
- 17:00 Welcome reception.

Monday, 14 September 1998

- 09:00 Introduction - The need for active living policies and programmes (WHO)
- 09:30 Discussion of objectives of the meeting, agenda and working methods
- 10:30 Break
- 11:00 **Theme session 1. Presentation and discussion: National policies on active living. How influential are they?**
- 12:00 Discussion - National policies on active living - the contribution of the network.
- 12:30 Lunch
- 14:00 **Theme session 2. Presentation and discussion: Partnerships for Active Living. How can national and local agencies work together effectively?**
- 15:00 Discussion - Partnerships for active living - the contribution of the network.
- 15:30 Break
- 16:00 Discussion of background document (Part 1):
1) purpose, goal, objectives and criteria for selection to network
2) roles of partners and range of possible commitments to the network.
- 17:00 Meeting with Canadian organizations working on active living.

Tuesday, 15 September 1998

- 09:00 **Theme session 3. Presentation and discussion: Physical activity in key settings (e.g. health services, schools)**

10:00	Discussion - Physical activity in key settings - the role of the Network
10:30	Coffee
11:00	Draft Action Plan. Discussion of action points from background document (part 2)
12:30	Lunch
14:00	Theme session 4. Presentation and discussion: Transport and the environment: How do we influence the changing of environments to support active living?
15:00	Discussion - Transport and the environment - the role of the Network
15:30	Break
16:00	Theme session 5. Presentation and discussion: Multi-sectoral action - how do we secure the support of new partners and influence other public policy agendas?
17:00	Discussion - multi- sectoral action - the role of the Network
17:45	End of session

Wednesday, 16 September 1998

How will an International Network on Active Living National Policy make a difference?

09:00	Agree final action plan and next steps
11:00	Formal launch of the Network.
12:30	Closure of the meeting and lunch

Annex 2: List of Participants

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