WHO CONSULTATION ON GLOBAL ACTION PLAN ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 2018-2030; FINLAND

The WHO global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030 has been well prepared and it is based on the latest scientific data. Both the vision and the goal of the action plan have a profound base. The goal “One hundred million people more active by 2030” is rather challenging. However, it is possible to reach the goal, if all Member States and other partners succeed in their actions. The chosen cross-cutting guiding principles and the proposed four strategic areas - creating an active society, creating active environments, creating active lives and creating active systems - are surely relevant choices.

The action plan covers all forms of physical activity throughout the life-course. It is important to provide equal opportunities for all citizens to physical activity regardless of gender, age, income, and education, ethnicity or disability. Although the plan aims to activate all people, a special focus should be in those persons, who take too little physical activity for their health and wellbeing. This is important also from reducing health inequalities point of view.

Safe and enabling environments for physical activity in daily life can be the most powerful way to reach all people and to change their behavior in long term. Investments should be done in green spaces and safe streets for walking and cycling. We are pleased that there are many proposals that concern promoting walking and cycling. It should be easier for people to make choices favouring physical activity. At their best, living environments are pleasant and geared towards physical activity.

Sport organisations such as local sport clubs and other sport organisers have an important role and place in the society to get people on the move. The sport sector is in some amount recognized in the action plan, but its role should be strengthened.

The plan takes a comprehensive and multisectoral approach and aims to build and reinforce the interconnections and cross-cutting elements of the proposed actions with all relevant sectors. Opportunities for physically active life are created by different sectors and organizations. In Finland, we
have created a cross-sectoral structure for developing physical activity. Our aim is that the children’s healthcare and day-care, schools, the military, employers and healthcare providers all take the need for physical activity into account in their own decisions. We want the people to be able to be physically active in their everyday environments. We also give a great importance for an increase in daily activity among all age and population groups.

Finnish national strategy and action plan for physical activity and wellbeing “On the move” was prepared together with several ministries and a wide range of expert organizations. Likewise the WHO action plan, our strategy includes an objective and guidelines to reduce the time we spend sitting. We have also prepared national recommendations to reduce sitting. In coming years we will work to integrate these recommendations into different settings such as early childhood education, schools, workplaces, health and social services and care for the elderly.

In Finland the NGO’s, other organizations that enhance health and wellbeing and national physical activity programs have a very significant role in physical activity promotion work. We have national programs for every age group. As an example, Finnish Schools on the Move is a national action programme aiming to establish a physically active culture in Finnish comprehensive schools. This programme is one of the key projects in the field of knowledge and education in the Government Programme of Finland. The goal of the government is that "the Schools on the Move project will be expanded across the country to ensure one hour of physical activity each day".

Physical activity should be a central part of the promotion of health and wellbeing and the prevention and treatment of common illnesses. In order to reach this goal, we need systematic training of medical experts and work processes. Physical activity counselling is a major instrument in the efforts to encourage physically active people to adopt an active lifestyle. We are pleased that the action plan proposes to strengthen the provision of professional development and education of current medical and health professionals on physical activity. It is also necessary to include the importance of physical activity to the education of other relevant sectors, like education, transport and urban planning. It is also important that the chain between health and sport sector works well in physical activity counselling process. People who need more physical activity should be well informed and guided to different possibilities in self-organised, unorganised and organised sport.
The Physical activity action plan can be successfully implemented in Member States if they can build a cross-sectoral structure and ensure high-level leadership by the coordinative sector. It is also necessary that all the important parties in the field of health and physical activity and all the administrative branches and sectors work in accordance with the strategy objectives. Achieving success also requires strong and transparent cooperation and high-quality coordination. Strong support from WHO is needed for this work.

This action plan clearly shows the direction for global physical activity development work and will certainly inspire the Member States in planning and implementing new measures for physical activity. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland support preparing further this WHO global action plan and its implementation in coming years.

Contact person:
Mari Miettinen, Senior Adviser
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
Meritullinkatu 8
P.O Box 33
00023 Government, Finland
e-mail: mari.miettinen@stm.fi
Comments of the Finnish National Sports Council on the WHO draft global action plan on physical activity

The draft document is comprehensive and thorough. It deals with the significance of physical activity participation, the key challenges in the area, and the development of measures to improve the situation in a sustainable manner. The National Sports Council acknowledges that the need for long-term and systematic work for the promotion of physical activity has been recognised in the policies: cross-sectoral cooperation, impact assessment, development of everyday environments, communication, and multisectoral know-how of the professionals in the field of wellbeing, health and physical activity are required. The draft action plan also touches upon the fact that several other programmes and processes are connected to and affect the achievement of the objectives set in the draft.

Societal actors are connected to sports and physical activity primarily through the promotion of the population’s wellbeing, health and physical functional capacity. The effects that physical activity has on the public health and wellbeing at work and, through these, on the national economy, productivity and competitiveness are rather well known today. Sports and physical activity are seen as significant civic activity with impact on the social cohesion, integration of immigrants and the wellbeing of children and young people. Along with the increased emphasis on sustainable development, combating of climate change and the requirement to reduce transport emissions, walking and cycling as forms of active travel have in recent times received ever more attention. Sports and physical activity constitute also a significant field of business. From the perspective of the effectiveness of the efforts to promote physical activity, the ability of the actors in the field to justify the importance of physical activity as part of the large-scale development of society is crucial.

As several strategies and programmes have already addressed the issue of physical inactivity, it would be essential to understand what kind of added value the action plan at hand is capable of producing in addition to the current situation. The National Sports Council is of the opinion that the following questions are crucial for the significance of the action plan: what kind of impacts the document will have on the financial steering of the actions and on the operations of the diverse group of actors in the different countries and at the different levels of action, as well as who will implement the policies defined in the action plan and with what kind of funding. The key objective shall be to pay more attention to physical inactivity in the general health promotion work.

The National Sports Council particularly wishes to emphasise the following two issues:

1) **By adopting an approach that emphasises effectiveness, the resources allocated for physical activity will produce the best possible benefits.** The objectives, progress indicators, impacts of the actions, and indicators of success presented in the action plan do not seem to form a logical entity quite yet. It is essential to be able to describe what is the role and significance of the action plan in the achievement of certain performance targets in comparison to the possible situation without the effects of the action plan.

2) **Equal access to sports and physical activity shall be promoted by applying a double strategy.** When it comes to actions promoting physical activity participation, certain target groups must be separately examined and the approach that takes account of equality and non-discrimination must be mainstreamed in all decision-making and preparation of decisions concerning physical activity. The key
questions in the mainstreaming efforts are, among others, how we can learn to identify societal structures that exclude certain groups from engaging in physical activity and how we can learn to tolerate diversity in all its forms. In addition, organisers of sports and physical activity shall consult residents in their area when making the most important decisions.

Furthermore, we propose that the following actions be added to the action plan:

- Proposed Action 3.1: We propose that physical activity during school days be enhanced, both quantitatively and qualitatively (cf. Finnish Schools on the Move, https://liikkuvakoulu.fi/english)

- We propose the establishment of a separate programme intended for older people with reduced functional capacity (cf. Strength in Old Age Programme, http://www.voimaavanhuuteen.fi/en/)

Tapio Korjus  
Chair  
National Sports Council

Minna Paajanen  
Secretary-General  
National Sports Council