22nd September, 2017

Submission to World Health Organization on the Draft WHO global action plan on physical activity 2018-2020

From: IHRSA, the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association

Founded in 1981, IHRSA, the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, is the trade association serving the health and fitness club industry worldwide. IHRSA members represent health and fitness facilities, gyms, spas, sports clubs, and industry suppliers worldwide. IHRSA and its members are dedicated to making the world healthier through regular exercise and physical activity promotion.

The IHRSA Foundation was established as a 501(c)3 charitable organization in 2014, to promote health through exercise via research, program development, education, and funding.

IHRSA has members in more than 80 Countries and is the only global association representing the Industry as a whole. The annual convention attracts over 12,000 attendees and in 2017 the international attendees surpassed 50% and 84 Countries were represented.

IHRSA supports a team of lobbyists throughout various USA states and direct advocacy at a federal level in Washington. IHRSA also supports national federations around the world in advocating and promoting physical activity and research to support these efforts. IHRSA Services include providing federations and clubs with regular research reports and education/training materials to improve standards and ultimately increase the levels of physical activity. IHRSA works with a wide range of other organizations at national and international level to research on and promote physical activity.
Some key IHRSA initiatives to increase Physical Activity in the USA:

- became a founding member of the USA National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPPA);
- co-chaired the Business and Industry Sector of the USA National Physical Activity Plan and is an Organization Affiliate of the plan;
- participates on the advisory board of the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (PFCD);
- partnered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in promoting the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines;
- is a network member of the Exercise is Medicine™ initiative;
- has worked with the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition on a number of initiatives, including the President Council’s Funny or Die video that is part of its #0to60 campaign, the launch of the Adult Fitness Test, and the IHRSA Joining Forces Network that provides free gym membership at select clubs to the immediate families of our nation’s deployed Reservists and National Guard members; and
- created The IHRSA Foundation, a 501(c)3 charitable organization aimed at promoting health through exercise.

IHRSA Global Initiatives to increase Physical activity and suggestions for the WHO global action plan:

To increase its Global Public Policy work, in 2016, IHRSA appointed an International Public Policy Advisor, which follows on from IHRSA’s involvement in the UFIT Project to create a Global social change movement to inclusivize sports & fitness (with the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Fitness, Sport & Recreation, PE). This is with the full support of IHRSA HQ based in Boston headed up by Helen Durkin, J.D. Executive VP, Public Policy with support from Public Policy, Research and other Staff across all divisions in both Global HQ in Boston and IHRSA’s European Office in Brussels, Belgium.

IHRSA is working with the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Fitness, Sport & Recreation, PE in a number of projects which will help support the WHO Global Action Plan, linking also with the UN SDG’s (strategic development goals) and the Kazan Action Plan arising from MINEPS VI in Kazan, Russia in July 2017.

Through these projects and other areas of IHRSA’s involvement Internationally both directly and through our National partners, we will endeavor to support as many of the goals from WHO Global action Plan as possible.

We welcome the production of this draft WHO global action plan and IHRSA is pleased to note the references in the draft to some of the SDG’s which help create a “joined up” approach with the UN and UNESCO. The links with transport and inclusive societies is also very welcome in making physical activity more accessible to all, which supports the goals of our UFIT Initiative with the UNESCO Chair.
As can be seen in this submission, IHRSA has adopted a partnership approach in its work and therefore welcomes the multi sectoral approach advocated by the draft plan. We support the statement in point 40 that “there is a clear need for greater advocacy on physical activity within health, other sectors.... and a stronger engagement with non-state actors.” As one of those non state actors, IHRSA is more than willing to work with Governments and others as we have demonstrated in this submission.

Likewise, in the proposed actions in points 48 to 50, IHRSA agrees with the proposed actions and is willing to support implementation where we can.

Financing of actions is always a challenge and therefore IHRSA supports points 164 and 166 to support innovative financing of physical activity programs and investment in research and programs.

IHRSA links very closely with design professionals and we would welcome even more focus in the draft plan on inclusive design to cater for people of ALL abilities.

Having participated as a member of one of the UNESCO official working committees in preparing the agenda and documents for MINEPS VI and participating in both the experts Conference and Ministerial Meetings and conference in Kazan in July 2017, IHRSA would welcome direct references and links to the Kazan action plan in point 7 on page 2 to further enhance this “joined up” approach and better consolidate efforts to all work towards the same ultimate goals.

IHRSA is also a member of Business at OECD and also the OECD Experts group on Public Health and is a founding member of the Global Forum on Health, Growth & Productivity which will have its second forum in October 2017. In this light and with similar work being carried out by the BIAC and OECD Health Committees, IHRSA would welcome inclusion in the WHO Global plan of links to and references to policy papers and work being carried out by both BIAC and OECD.

Some International work and Projects which will support the WHO Action Plan include:

1. The IHRSA Foundation as the lead body for the USA, establishing UFIT to promote inclusive fitness in the USA in partnership with the Global UFIT team from IHRSA and the UNESCO Chair.
2. Setting up UFIT in other countries and facilitating partnerships and networks internationally again in partnership with the UNESCO Chair.
3. A joint IHRSA/UNESCO Chair 2 year Masters Scholarship established in the Institute of Technology Tralee from 2016 -2018 on research in Physical activity focused on inclusion.
4. Working committee member and participation in MINEPS VI and linking with UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair to support the implementation of the Kazan.
Action plan (agreed unanimously by all member Countries)

5. ESSA (European Sector Skills Alliance) Sport European Expert Advisory Board. This group was set up in Brussels in June 2017 with the European Commission represented and IHRSA were represented as one of the 14 Organizations as founding members, to support research and actions on workforce development for the sport sector, which in turn will help deliver improved physical activity programs.

6. As an active member of the Business at OECD Health Committee and OECD Experts Group on Public Health to continue advocating for the contribution and added value that the Sports & Fitness Industry can bring to improving health.

7. Supporting and advocating for the salutogenic approach to Health by the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Fitness, Sport & Recreation, PE in their SHS-Sustainable Health Spectrum. This has already been introduced at BIAC and OECD meetings and will be further promoted and discussed at the upcoming BIAC Global Forum on Health, Growth & Productivity (supported by IHRSA) which will include Government Health and other ministries, Multi-national corporations, Policy Makers, Trade Associations and others.

What the Sports & Fitness Industry represented Globally by IHRSA can offer to help reverse the growing Physical inactivity and Obesity epidemic and contribute to WHO global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030:

- Hundreds of studies have shown that supervised exercise programs work, but few have been conducted in a setting many turn to for physical activity – sports, fitness & health clubs
- Support for accessible, effective health programs where people live, work, and spend time is essential - and health clubs fit the bill
- Research is needed to document the feasibility and efficacy of club-based health programs
- The IHRSA Foundation promotes programs that support health through exercise. It helps deliver health club based programs to those who may not otherwise have access to effective health and wellness programming
- The IHRSA Foundation is young, but it has big, long-term goals
- Ideally, IHRSA would like to have a scientifically proven study involving every major chronic disease
- By 2020, IHRSA Foundation aims help more people with chronic diseases achieve better health, while making these programs available to replicate worldwide
- The Foundation’s goal is to make outcome-based wellness programs available at more clubs around the US and world. Building the capacity of health clubs to offer evidence based programming enables more people to realize health through exercise.
There are in excess of 200,000 Health clubs worldwide with additional community facilities where sports and fitness activities can take place. This highlights the opportunities that already exist for the Health sector to avail of these opportunities to reverse the growing physical inactivity and obesity epidemic.

We include some slides on the IHRSA Foundation to demonstrate the commitment from IHRSA to carry out further research and find solutions to the Global Challenges.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact myself or my Global Public Policy Division colleagues headed up by Helen Durkin, Executive Vice President.

Submitted On behalf of IHRSA:

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