

Service Spotlight: Celebrating a decade of the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance and its Global Matrix Initiative

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Research continues to demonstrate that participating in regular physical activity (PA) is indispensable for maintaining health and fitness across the lifespan. Nevertheless, global trends in child PA show consistent declines¹ especially over the past 30 years.² Currently, the global state of PA surveillance is inadequate and inconsistent. Intercontinental PA initiatives assessing children and adolescents differ greatly, resulting in contradictory inter-nation comparisons.³ Resource-limited countries, younger children, those not attending school, children and adolescents with disabilities or chronic conditions and those from rural areas, are generally under/not represented.³ This continues despite calls to establish systematic PA surveillance from infancy onwards to inform public health policy and practice.⁴ The global transition to the current low levels of habitual PA observed amongst children and adolescents, beginning in the second half of the last century, now limits progress towards several sustainable development goals, undermines non-communicable disease prevention, and increases healthcare costs. Lower childhood PA levels may also increase reliance on motorised transport and can hinder national responses to climate change.⁴

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ACTIVE HEALTHY KIDS GLOBAL ALLIANCE

The Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA) is a registered not-for-profit organization comprising of researchers, health professionals, and stakeholders, who work in collaboration to advance PA engagement in children and adolescents internationally. AHKGA's vision is "a world of active, healthy kids" and its mission is to "power a global movement to get kids moving" through thought leadership, knowledge translation, mobilization, capacity building and advocacy. Thus far, the dominant effort of AHKGA has been its Global Matrix initiative, which began in 2014 with participation from 15 countries, before rapidly expanding to include expected participation rates of >70 jurisdictions for its forthcoming 5th edition.⁵

HARMONISING THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONALLY

The first Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth was launched in 2005, in Toronto, Canada, to “power the movement to get kids moving”. This Report Card summarised the best available evidence regarding PA in Canada and provided a comprehensive assessment of indicators relating to school, family, community and the built environment. It included policies that contributed to the PA levels of children and youth, using an academic “letter grade” approach (i.e., A, B, C, D, F).⁶ This first Report Card was launched at a press event and achieved extensive media coverage, which encouraged establishing a tradition of developing, producing, and publicly releasing an annual Report Card in that country. From 2005 to 2014, the Canadian Report Card was produced annually by Active Healthy Kids Canada in both short- (4-6 page) and long-form (50-100 page) formats; these included detailed explanations of the letter grades and underlying data, in both Canadian official languages (English and French). Meanwhile, momentum was building internationally for the need to better monitor child PA at-scale, and other jurisdictions continued to reach out to the Canadian team in the hopes of reproducing the Canadian Report Card model. For example, in 2007, South Africa produced a “Report Card on Physical Activity, Nutrition and Tobacco Use for South African Children and Youth”, and in 2008, the Report Card model was replicated in the state of Louisiana, USA. Eventually, the time constraints of mentoring the increasing number of interested parties became sufficiently burdensome that the Canadian team opened the process to make these Report Cards an international group effort, with 15 countries preparing Report Cards following a harmonised approach and timeline.⁶

AHKGA INNOVATION AND IMPACT

Over the past decade, the AHKGA, through its Global Matrix initiative, has built an extensive, global network, producing significant, high-quality scientific outputs which includes more than 68 jurisdictions and in excess of 682 PA leaders/child PA experts. Media coverage from its 4th edition launch generated

over 1273 news stories from 24 countries, and its 3rd edition flagship publication by Aubert et al.⁷ exceeds 830 scholarly citations, placing it amongst the top 1% of all articles in its field. Members involved in this global initiative have contributed significantly to knowledge translation, with more than 230 published manuscripts and 370 conference presentations related to the Report Cards or Global Matrices, as AHKGA continues to foster its strong collaborations with international partners (Figure 1). Whilst celebrating its 10th anniversary, AHKGA is also keenly aware of the urgent need to highlight how much improvement remains to be realised when advocating for increasing worldwide PA trends in children and adolescents.

Interested readers are encouraged to consult Tremblay et al.⁵ which summarises the past 10-years' work creating this harmonised, multi-level approach to assessing worldwide childhood PA, and provides readers with the tools necessary to create Report Cards specific to their own jurisdiction. To date, AHKGA represents the only global PA monitoring initiative dedicated to school-aged children and adolescents. No other initiative has been as international, covered as wide an age-range, or has included such varied indicators to assess PA in this population. Notably, AHKGA includes assessment of the influences on PA indicators, not 'just' the population indicators themselves, and is indeed striving to power the movement to get kids moving!

Competing interests

None to declare.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to all aspects of the submitted work, including concept, drafting the manuscript, editing the work, and approving the final manuscript for journal submission.

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Data sharing statement

Any data presented here are freely available from the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance website (www.activehealthykids.org), or upon request to the corresponding author.

Patient involvement

Not applicable.

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Figure 1. The Global Matrix initiative involves the collaboration and cooperation of multiple jurisdictions to produce country report cards on the current state of physical activity in children and adolescents from that particular territory, following a harmonised process that allows for comparability, the cross-fertilization of ideas to improve grades, global networking, and the compilation and aggregation of international data across a series of 10 indicators related to the physical activity of children and adolescents (top right circular chart). Report cards are prepared by national teams of experts using the best available data and information to inform grades following a standardised 7-step approach with benchmarking criteria (top left-side roadmap flowchart). AHKGA Report Cards and Global Matrices are effective and influential documents used across multiple sectors (e.g., academia, research, education, recreation, health, policy, surveillance, fundraising and partnerships) for creating awareness; developing capacity; transferring interventions, policies, and practices; improving surveillance; and advocacy purposes. Over the past ten years, the Global Matrix initiative has undergone continuous growth in the number of participating countries and physical activity experts (bottom left map); this expansion has also included establishing official strategic partnerships with international groups passionate about getting kids around the world moving (bottom right logo matrix).