

# WellSpring

## Promoting Early Physical Literacy in Alberta

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Regular physical activity is a vital cornerstone in leading a healthy life, for children and adults. This article addresses the importance of helping all children to achieve physical literacy at a young age and provides an update on steps being taken in Alberta by Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) and other key stakeholders to better promote physical literacy to all Albertans.

The CS4L model for physical literacy (see Figure 1) is built upon Dr. Margaret Whitehead's landmark 2001 paper

(Whitehead, 2001) entitled "The Concept of Physical Literacy."

Physical literacy is gaining acceptance across Canada and around the world. The first three phases of the CS4L model (Active Start, FUNdamentals and Learn to Train) are vitally important. They describe developmentally appropriate activities required to establish the foundation for skill acquisition, knowledge and attitudes needed for each individual to lead a life filled with regular physical activity, from early childhood forward.

Infused within the CS4L model is the Long-term Athlete Development (LTAD) model. LTAD also requires the initial development of physical literacy after which the pursuit of athletic excellence may follow, if the individual has the necessary talent, drive and commitment.

CS4L's overall vision is to improve the health, wellness, and sporting experiences of all Canadians by advancing physical literacy, improving performance, and increasing life-long participation in physical activity.



### What's in This Article for You?

- Counteracting the Results of Inactivity
- Early Physical Literacy is Part of the Answer
- Important Benefits of Physical Literacy
- Combined Efforts Towards Physical Literacy
- Developing Fundamental Movement Skills
- Building Support for Early Physical Literacy in Alberta

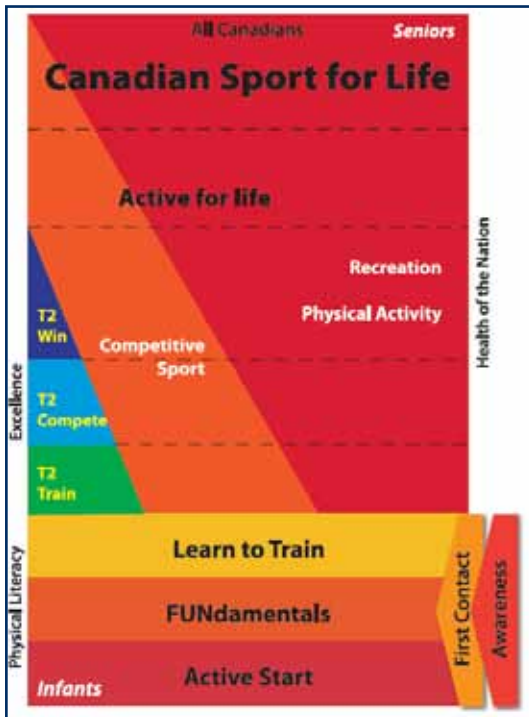


Figure 1 - CS4L model

### Counteracting the Results of Inactivity

Given recent data about today’s all-too-common sedentary lifestyles, the need for early physical literacy is becoming increasingly clear. When it comes to youth and children, the data is alarming.

For example, recent data from the annual Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2010) indicates that only 11% of children and youth in Alberta are meeting Canada’s recommended guidelines of 90 minutes of daily physical activity. With a national average of 12%, physical activity rates among children and youth across the entire country are dangerously low.

Research indicates that without the development of physical literacy, many children and youth withdraw from physical activity and sport, and turn to more inactive and/or unhealthy choices during their leisure time (Burton & Martens, 1986; Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009; Williams et al 2008; Wrotniak, Epstein, Dorn, Jones, & Kondilis, 2006).

Figure 2 offers an illustration of this issue.

### Early Physical Literacy is Part of the Answer

Physical literacy is physical activity and fundamental movement skills performed in different environments.

Physical literacy aims to develop the whole child. This requires more than simply doing the physical activity; it also includes the child’s knowledge and understanding of why physical activity is important and its resulting benefits (Haydn-Davies, 2005; Mandigo, Francis, Lodewyk, & Lopez, 2009).

CS4L defines physical literacy as:

“...the development of fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills that permit a child to move confidently and with control, in a wide range of physical activity, rhythmic (dance) and sport situations. Physical literacy also includes the ability to ‘read’ what is going on around them in an activity setting and react appropriately to those events.” (see Figure 3)

To achieve physical literacy, children should experience movement and sport skills in all kinds of indoor or outdoor environments, such as activities in or on the water, on the ground, on ice or snow, at the gym, or at parks and playgrounds.



Figure 2 - Fundamental Skills Needed First

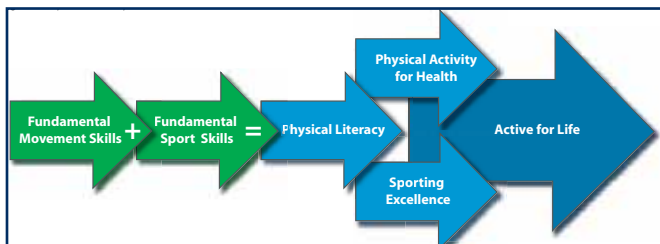


Figure 3 - Skills and Literacy Towards Active Lifestyles

### Important Benefits of Physical Literacy

Physically literate individuals not only move efficiently, but they also move creatively, competently, ethically, enthusiastically, and in socially responsible ways.

Individuals who are physically literate have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to lead healthy lifestyles for themselves, and to assist others in acquiring these skills (Fisher et al 2005; Killingbeck, Bowler, Golding, & Sammon, 2007).

The benefits of regular physical activity are enormous, for individuals and society.

- Individuals profit from improved physical fitness, improved immune function, strengthened bone health, reduced risk of various chronic diseases and improved psychological health (Bailey, 2006).
- When more of the overall population is physically active, society can experience benefits such as reduced crime rates, lower health care costs, stronger academic performance and better community connections (Kental & Dobson, 2007).

### Combined Efforts Towards Physical Literacy

Developing physical literacy requires the combined efforts of many, including parents/guardians, day care providers, teachers, community recreation leaders, coaches and others.

Figure 4 shows a matrix developed by CS4L which outlines the many types of leaders and organizations that can support and implement physical literacy.

### Developing Fundamental Movement Skills

CS4L and other organizations have many resources for parents, educators and others which outline the

most important fundamental movement skills each child needs to master, in order to experience fun and success in different physical activities as they grow.

For example, the National Coaching Certification Program’s Fundamental Movement Skills (NCCP – FMS) Community Leader module has been presented to many groups in Alberta and other parts of the country.

### Building Support for Early Physical Literacy in Alberta

In Alberta, it’s fair to say that the underlying principles of CS4L and the evidence-based concepts of the LTAD Model are receiving significant support from sport, recreation, physical activity and health leaders, government bodies, and many other organizations.

There is a reasonable degree of recognition from key stakeholders that:

- physical literacy helps to pave the way for a lifetime of involvement in sport and physical activity; and
- all Albertans should be introduced to basic motor and sport skills in the formative stages of their growth and development.

The challenge now is to reach more people who are able to apply these principles and models “on the

	Where?	Physical Literacy	Who?
LTAD Stage	Schools Sport clubs Community recreation Sport programs Home	Learn to Train Girls 8-11, Boys 9-12	Parents/Guardians Coaches Teachers Recreation leaders Youth leaders
	Schools Sport clubs Community recreation Sport programs Home	FUNDamental Girls 6-8, Boys 6-9	Parents/Guardians Coaches Teachers Recreation leaders Youth leaders
	Home Pre-schools Day care Sport programs Community recreation	Active Start Girls and Boys 0-6	Parents/Guardians Day care providers Pre-school teachers Kindergarten teachers

\*Where specialist physical education teachers are employed at the primary/elementary level

Figure 4 - Matrix of Physical Literacy Responsibilities

ground,” whether in schools, daycares, fitness centres, the healthcare system or other organizations.

To meet this challenge, one key initiative in 2010 is the development of a six-person “Ambassador Network” in Alberta, representing a range of sectors, such as early childhood education, education (K-12 and post-secondary), health services, physical activity organizations and services, recreation groups, municipalities, community groups and others.

In 2010, a Master CS4L Advisor for Alberta was designated. This position was created to coordinate communications and linkages among the sector leaders (ambassadors), provincial government bodies and the National CS4L Expert Group.

The “Ambassador Network” is supported, in part, by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation (ASRPWF), a non-profit Crown corporation which reports to the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

In addition to supporting this network, the ASRPWF has shown earlier support for CS4L concepts, through such means as:

- establishing online content about CS4L on the Foundation’s website;
- establishing a CS4L grant program, which offers grants to organization’s that are dedicated to CS4L principles; and
- supporting seven Sport Development Centres in Alberta, which serve to coordinate services for Alberta’s emerging athletes and coaches.

As the CS4L “movement” goes forward, it continues to be rooted in evidence-based research, while actively promoting early physical literacy to decision-makers, organizations and all levels of government, and to people and communities throughout Alberta and across Canada.

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## Mission Statement of the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Working with practitioners, organizations, and communities to improve the health and quality of life of all people through physical activity.

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IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR  
QUESTIONS, WE’D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

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