



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Abilities Centre encourages kids to move more to boost brain health**

***Abilities Centre supports findings in the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth that links brain health with regular physical activity***

**Whitby (Ontario) June 19, 2018** – Abilities Centre supports findings in the 2018 *ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*. Released today, the Report Card gave Canadian kids a score of D+ for Overall Physical Activity. This grade is particularly alarming considering that this year's Report Card also highlights important connections between physical activity and kids' brain health.

Only 35 per cent of 5- to 17-year-olds and 62 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds are getting the recommended physical activity levels for their age group, the report card found, and may be having an impact on the health of their brains – kids may be less attentive, moody and not meeting their full potential both in and out of the classroom.

“Regular physical activity, even in short bursts, can help kids’ brains on many levels,” said Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, ParticipACTION Report Card and Director of the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO). “Kids who are more active have increased self-esteem and are generally more focused and less stressed compared to their less active peers. For example, students who exercise before a test show stronger brain function than those who don’t. Furthermore, kids with brain-based disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder or ADHD, may experience even greater improvements in learning and thinking as a result of regular physical activity.”

This year’s Report Card was released in concert for the first time with an evidence-informed *Expert Statement on Physical Activity and Brain Health in Children and Youth*. The Expert Statement was developed by a team of pediatric neuroscientists, exercise scientists, clinicians and practitioners. It finds that for better brain health – including cognition, brain function and mental health – all children and youth should be physically active on a regular basis.

We know that children and youth across the country are not active enough. Abilities Centre strives to address this issue by providing inclusive physical activity opportunities for children and youth with and without disabilities that are focused on developing physical literacy. We hope that the evidence provided in the Expert Statement will encourage more families including children and youth with disabilities to access community-based physical activity programs, such as those offered by Abilities Centre. We also hope that more educators and healthcare professionals will encourage all children to be more active. Specifically, by fostering a sense of belongingness through meaningful participation in physical activity and play programs, children and youth, especially those with disabilities stand to improve their health and well-being, especially when it comes to better brain health.

“The evidence in the Expert Statement is a call to action to communities to be more inclusive so that all children and youth have access to meaningful physical activity and play opportunities.

Abilities Centre is pleased to support communities looking to be more inclusive. We can provide professional development and training for key stakeholders and deliver physical literacy programs so that all families have access to the physical activity opportunities they need to be more active, more often.” Dr. Jennifer Leo, Director, Research, Education, & Innovation, Abilities Centre Durham, and Member of Expert Statement Team

“Abilities Centre Ottawa is committed to continuing our work within our community to increase opportunities for physical activity and sport for ALL! We are delighted to provide education and experiential learning opportunities to key stakeholders within our community, and are excited to welcome the Abilities Centre Ottawa facility to the community in the near future. We hope that this Expert Statement motivates us all to commit to participating in physical activity and to ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, can participate in a fully inclusive and accessible environment.” Emily Glossop, Chairperson, Abilities Centre Ottawa, and Member of Expert Statement Team.

The lowest grades in this year’s Report Card are a D+ for Overall Physical Activity, D for Sedentary Behaviours and F for the [24-Hour Movement Behaviours](#). Despite common knowledge of the health benefits of kids moving more, turning away from screens, getting off the couch and breaking a sweat, most of them aren’t, but now they have another pressing reason to do so – for their brain health.

“In order to help support the development of strong, healthy brains we need to encourage kids to get enough daily heart-pumping physical activity,” said Elio Antunes, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “Research shows that active kids perform better in school and are generally happier. We need to be active role models and set kids up to succeed. I understand that modern life can get in the way of making the time to get active, but I encourage all families to try. And, get outdoors more because it is a powerful antidote for kids facing stress.”

Other grades assigned in the Report Card include:

- “D” for Active Play & Leisure Activities
- “D-” for Active Transportation
- “B” for Organized Sport Participation
- “C-” for Physical Education
- “B+” for Sleep
- “D+” for Physical Literacy
- “D” for Physical Fitness
- “C+” for Family & Peers
- “B-” for School
- “B+” for Community & Environment
- “C+” for Government

Recommendations on how to increase opportunities for physical activity and improve kids’ brain health, including those with brain-based disabilities, can be found within the Expert Statement.

To download the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card Highlight Report, including the Expert Statement, or Full Report, please visit [www.participACTION.com/reportcard](http://www.participACTION.com/reportcard).

Abilities Centre is an internationally renowned, innovative community hub where people of all ages and abilities enrich their lives by engaging in social, health and cultural programs. Abilities Centre delivers sports, health and fitness, arts and culture, leading-edge research, education and life skills programming in a welcoming, positive and energetic environment focused on bringing together families, friends and neighbours in a spirit of inclusion and opportunity.

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