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NEWS RELEASE

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Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Toronto, Ontario - September 28, 2006

MINISTERS CALL FOR ACTION TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES IN CANADIAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH A DESIGNATED NATIONAL SPORT, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

TORONTO , September 28, 2006 - The strain on the healthcare system across Canada is severe as we face an obesity epidemic. The situation will continue to worsen unless all levels of government take action now, in order to offer all Canadians access to sport, physical activity and recreation opportunities, contributing to good health and quality of life.

Speaking to Ministers on the importance of easily accessible and affordable community access to sport, physical activity and recreation facilities from a public health perspective, Dr. Andrew Pipe, University of Ottawa Heart Institute, stated that “It is essential that we address the shortcomings of our present sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure if we are to have any hope of addressing the tsunami of health issues which will wash over our society unless we become more active.”

As a result, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation urge the federal government to work collaboratively, within a shared mandate, to immediately develop a national sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure program. Provincial and territorial Ministers have undertaken a review of sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure in Canada and have estimated a capital deficit of at least \$15B nationally.

Collectively, the recreation, parks and sport sectors are the single largest citizen participation enterprise in the country.

Ministers noted that not since the 1967 Centennial Infrastructure Program has there been a comprehensive program dedicated to the design and construction of sport, physical activity and recreation facilities in Canada. With this in mind, Ministers are urging all levels of government to succeed in addressing the sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure deficit in time for the celebration of Canada’s 150 th anniversary in 2017. Ministers have identified a desire for an investment of \$10 billion towards reducing this deficit over a ten year period.

Ministers also believe that this initiative will require all Canadians working together to recapture community spirit, and a commitment to increase the participation rates in sport, physical activity and recreation.

"We must work now to ensure our communities have sport, physical activity and recreational facilities that serve the needs of this and future generations," said Prince Edward Island Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs Honourable Elmer MacFadyen. "These facilities will provide a place for recreation, a place for sport, and a place for active living. They also will supply future generations with the opportunity to develop their talents and skills as athletes in their home communities."

Dr. Bruce Kidd, Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto indicated that: "The need for a dedicated federal-provincial/territorial sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure program is an essential component of our capacity to realize the goals of the Canadian Sport Policy, both for high performance sport and broadly based opportunities."

Provincial and territorial ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation urged federal Sport Minister Michael Chong and federal Health Minister Tony Clement to continue to raise the issue with their Cabinet colleagues for consideration in the next federal budget. Provincial and territorial Ministers underlined the fact that the lack of access to sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure is now a major hurdle in the promotion of healthy and active living. They will be seeking to meet with federal representatives to set out their plan of action. .

Based on the success of previous bilateral infrastructure programs, Ministers asked for a national sport and recreation program set with financial resources over and above those spent on the existing infrastructure programs, ensuring that the specific sport, physical activity and recreation needs are addressed without competing with other needs. It is the view of Ministers that now is the time to improve sport, physical activity and recreation infrastructure in Canada and that this would be a significant step in improving the well-being and health of the entire population.

The next regular meeting of Federal, Provincial, Territorial Ministers is scheduled for February 21 and 22, 2007, in Whitehorse, Yukon, during the Canada Winter Games.

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