

Commentary

Let's get moving: The Global Status Report on Physical Activity 2022 calls for urgent action

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Physical activity has many benefits for individual health and well-being, including a reduced risk of noncommunicable diseases, as well as improved mental health, sleep, and cognitive function.¹ Being physically active also has broader social and environmental benefits and has a key role to play in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.^{2,3} However, over 80% of adolescents and around a quarter of adults are insufficiently active and these figures have remained largely unchanged for the past 20 years.^{4,5} A recent economic analysis estimated that the total cost of inactive lifestyles equates to USD 27 billion (INT 48 billion) annually.⁶

To address high levels of physical inactivity and its associated consequences, the World Health Organization published the first Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA) in 2018.⁷ This document recommends implementation of 20 policy actions that are universally applicable to all countries and structured within 4 strategic objectives—active societies, active environments, active people, and active systems. GAPPA set a target of a 15% relative reduction in population levels of physical inactivity by 2030. A monitoring framework was established to track progress, consisting of 29 indicators. The first Global Status Report summarizing progress on implementation of GAPPA was published in October 2022.⁸

The Global Status Report highlights that progress has been slow and uneven.⁸ Physical inactivity, and actions to address this problem, are inequitable across world regions and country income levels. For example, the European Region has the highest proportion of countries with an operational physical activity policy, whilst the African region has the lowest, and more high-income countries have policies to tackle physical inactivity compared to all other country income categories. This leads to

widening inequities in access to environments and opportunities that support physical activity participation. The Global Status Report also highlights the need to “close the gap” in physical activity levels among specific population groups including women, older adults, and people living with a disability.

With just 8 years to achieve the 2030 goal, the Global Status Report clearly shows that the time to act is NOW. The International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH) calls on national governments, non-government organizations, academics, the private sector, and civil society to scale up efforts to promote physical activity and prevent the expected 500 million new cases of preventable noncommunicable diseases due to physical inactivity by 2030.⁸

The Global Status Report recommends 5 key areas for action to advance physical activity promotion (also depicted in Fig. 1):

1. Strengthen whole-of-government ownership and political leadership.
2. Integrate physical activity in all relevant policies and support policy implementation with practical tools and clear guidance.
3. Support partnerships, engage communities and build capacity in people.
4. Reinforce data systems, monitoring, and knowledge translation.
5. Secure and align funding with national policy commitments.

There is a need to strengthen whole of government ownership and leadership for the physical activity agenda. No single sector has sole responsibility for physical activity; addressing the physical inactivity pandemic will require a systems approach, engaging all relevant sectors including transport, education, health, sport and recreation, urban planning, and tourism. It requires politicians that dare to take bold action,

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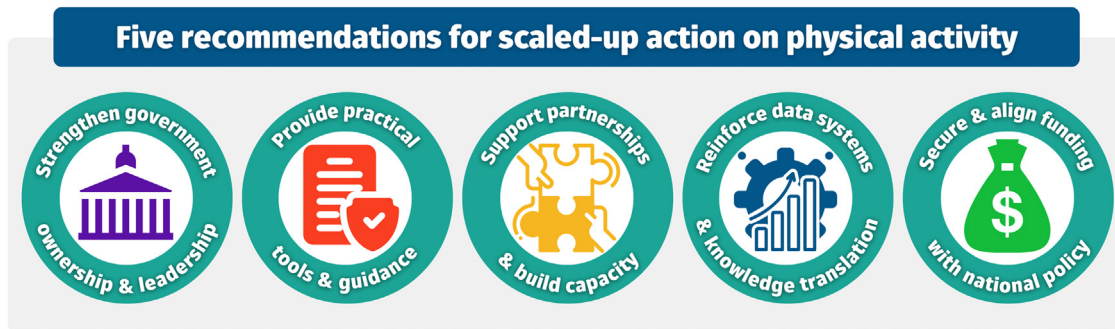


Fig. 1. Five recommendations for scaled-up action on physical activity.

like Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, who took decisive action to reduce space for cars and increase space for active transport, and recently banned air travel for journeys that could be taken by train in less than 2.5 h. The changes in Paris have shown that rapid and large-scale transformations are possible with strong ownership and leadership for change.

Practical tools are needed to support implementation. There is sufficient evidence on what works but implementing known solutions at scale is challenging. The World Health Organization has recently released several modules of the ACTIVE technical package to support countries in understanding not only *what to do* but *how to do it* (apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/275415). To support these resources, the ISPAH Community Hub is compiling case study examples from across the world to support decision makers and practitioners in understanding how to implement effective interventions across each of the recommended actions in GAPPA (ispah.org/community-hub/).

There is also a need to build capacity among the workforce to promote physical activity across all relevant sectors. Organizations like ISPAH have a key role in building capacity, for example, by working with policymakers to support the development of national strategies and developing skills in advocacy across the physical activity workforce to drive increased recognition and action.

“What gets measured gets done” was reiterated by distinguished professor Billie Giles-Corti, one of the keynote speakers at the 2022 ISPAH congress. The Global Status Report shows considerable gaps in national data. There is a need to scale up national surveillance on physical activity and develop indicators for policy implementation. Recent international cross-sectoral collaboration efforts such as the Global Observatory of Healthy and Sustainable Cities (www.healthysustainablecities.org) have demonstrated that it is possible to measure how well cities are doing in terms of physical activity policies and planning. Developing research, surveillance, and monitoring of actions across all sectors and all countries is necessary to assess progress and inform future initiatives to scale-up action.

The fifth recommendation is to address the lack of funding for physical activity promotion. Given the recently published price tag of inaction, it is critical that governments review the distribution of budgets across relevant ministries and commit to pooling resources to achieve the cross-sector benefits that increasing physical activity levels will reap. Large scale

physical activity promotion can often be a “win–win–win” for climate change, health and well-being, as well as local businesses, but this needs to be “sold” to decision makers to address under-investment in physical activity; an area of public health where the evidence on the wide-spread benefits is clear, as are the required actions.

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Authors' contributions

All authors agreed the scope, contributed to writing and revising the text, and approved the final text for submission. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript, and agree with the order of presentation of the authors.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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