Foreword from Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada

The Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion at Health Canada and the Centre for Health Promotion at the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) are pleased to have supported the development of this special supplementary issue of the Canadian Journal of Public Health on school health, in collaboration with the Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH). This supplement profiles the importance of advancing healthy eating and physical activity policy within a broader comprehensive school health framework and highlights examples of Canadian and international action. It is intended to stimulate discussion for action and further research on healthy eating and physical activity to improve the health and well-being of children and youth within the school setting.

The collection of seven articles is the culmination of work by 13 Canadian and international experts in the fields of physical activity, nutrition, education and comprehensive school health. These articles include key findings from scientific background papers produced in 2008, which provided the evidence to inform the development of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) School Policy Framework.1 PHAC, Health Canada and the JCSH worked in collaboration with WHO to support the development of this framework as one of the tools for implementing the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAS).2 In Canada, the JCSH has endorsed and promotes a Comprehensive School Health Framework, which supports the implementation of DPAS across its member jurisdictions.

Healthy eating and physical activity are influenced by many factors, including economic and social factors, the physical environment, as well as the time, skills and capacity to make healthy choices. Given the role these factors play in children’s lives, schools are recognized as a key environment for supporting healthy eating and physical activity in children and youth.

This supplement summarizes the state of knowledge on policy options to support healthy eating and physical activity in the school setting; describes roles of stakeholders; and provides an overview of monitoring and evaluating implementation of school policies. It also outlines where further research is needed to strengthen the evidence base to inform future programs and policies. The articles are intended for use by academics, policy-makers, public health practitioners and education specialists in both the health and education sector.

Significant efforts are underway, both in Canada and internationally, to support healthy eating and physical activity within the school setting. This supplement makes an important contribution to disseminating knowledge on policy options that support healthy eating and physical activity in schools. However, more work needs to be done to highlight knowledge gaps and the importance of supporting research, particularly in Canada, to determine the effectiveness of comprehensive school health efforts. Collaborative efforts, across health and education sectors, are key factors to strengthening our knowledge base to improve the health of Canadian children and youth.

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REFERENCES