Foreword from the Joint Consortium for School Health

The Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) is pleased to have collaborated with Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) on this special supplement to the Canadian Journal of Public Health on the topic of school health. The articles that follow are yet another step towards advancing healthy living for children and youth through an integrated, collaborative and evidence-based approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

Each of the articles in this supplement highlights one or more components of comprehensive school health (CSH) – an internationally recognized approach that is championed in Canada by the JCSH. Recognizing that effective, sustainable progress in CSH depends on cross-sector and cross-jurisdiction collaboration, the JCSH has endorsed a Comprehensive School Health Framework that policy-makers and practitioners in health, education and other sectors can use to guide and coordinate their work.

Like the World Health Organization’s School Policy Framework, the CSH Framework supports the implementation of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. It addresses issues such as the differences in language used across jurisdictions and underlines the need to focus on common goals, approaches and principles, allowing partners to pool resources and develop action plans together with, and in support of, schools.

The JCSH itself is an example of collaboration in action. Members include key health and education representatives from governments at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, working with a common vision towards the following shared goals: to promote understanding of, and support for, the concept and benefits of comprehensive school health initiatives; to build system capacity for promoting health through school-based and school-linked programs; and to be a catalyst for collaborative activities.

The articles that follow are in keeping with these goals. They provide an opportunity for comprehensive school health practitioners to draw from the growing body of evidence and to build cross-sectoral partnerships by sharing and learning from one another’s challenges and successes. They also provide a clear understanding of where further research can be focused to build a stronger base of support for effective CSH approaches.

Finally, this supplement serves as a reminder that comprehensive school health is very much a work in progress. Even with the efforts of researchers worldwide, and the experience of front-line practitioners, there is still much to learn and much work to do in this emerging area of public policy. That is exciting. It means there are still many more opportunities to work together to improve the health, education and well-being of Canada’s children and youth, and to help build a stronger, healthier society for the future.

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