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### **Party platforms reveal Liberals silent on health crisis facing majority of Canadians**

**Ottawa** - The Liberal Party of Canada, although strong on health care reform, has made no commitment in its election platform to tackle the epidemic of physical inactivity in Canada – even though two-thirds of Canadian children are so inactive they are at risk of premature death and disability. The Coalition for Active Living (CAL), a national organization representing more than 45 organizations that promote disease prevention through physical activity, is concerned that the alarming medical evidence and statistics on obesity and inactivity have not left a lasting impression on Canada's governing party.

"We continue to warn government that we're facing a major health crisis in this country that is potentially on par with the cost of chronic disease attributed to smoking 40 years ago," said Dr. Rick Bell, CAL chair and Associate Professor in the School of Physical Education at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. "We have always maintained that tackling the physical inactivity crisis will require the same kind of investment that governments have put into anti-smoking campaigns in the past."

CAL is calling on the next government to invest \$500 million over the next five years to change public health policy, develop community physical and social environments, increase public education and invest in research. They are also asking government to consider tax incentives to encourage more physical activity among Canadians.

"For the majority in our society, a sedentary lifestyle constitutes a major health risk," said Dr. Harold Dion MD CCFP FCFP, Chair of the Board, Quebec College of Family Physicians, and Quebec Representative, Doctors Promoting Active Living (DPAL). "If we refuse to tackle this issue now, obesity and physical inactivity will be the source of an almost incalculable burden on our health and social systems of the future."

Where the Liberal platform is silent, the Conservative Party of Canada makes a commitment to physical activity promotion, specifically: *Physical activity is an important cornerstone of health promotion... Government has a role to play in encouraging amateur sport, including getting young Canadians involved in physical activity at the local level.* The Conservative plan commits one per cent of federal health spending to ensure physical activity levels are raised across the country and among all sectors. "It will be important for the Conservatives to remember, however, that the promotion of physical activity can't begin and end with the funding of sport," said Bell. "The major health benefit comes with getting those who are currently inactive to begin participating in the physical activities of daily life."

For its part, the New Democratic Party of Canada promises to restore ParticipAction as a means of preventing disease. While CAL agrees that health awareness and promotion are an important component, it is only one of many steps that need to be taken to address the physical inactivity epidemic.

“In Canada, \$2.1 billion, or about 2.5 per cent of total health care costs, are directly attributable to physical inactivity,” Dion added. “While health care remains a major concern for all Canadians, politicians seem content to watch as, for the first time in history, we raise a generation of children whose life expectancy could be lower than our own.”

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