

Government Policies for Active Community Design in Ontario: Challenges to Achieving Collaboration between Five Ministries

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Résumé

Le but de cette étude était d'identifier les politiques et stratégies provinciales reliées au concept de communautés actives et de comprendre comment cinq ministères (promotion de la santé et du sport, de transport, des infrastructures, des affaires municipales, et de l'environnement) collaborent vers un agenda commun de communautés actives. Une recension des documents a servi à identifier la législation / les stratégies et des entrevues avec 10 décideurs gouvernementaux ont servi à identifier les priorités, les défis, et la collaboration intersectorielle. Ce processus a produit un inventaire de 39 lois pertinentes aux communautés actives en Ontario. Les défis les plus communs reliés à la mise en œuvre du concept des communautés actives sont identifiés.

Mots clés: politiques, activité physique, décideurs, collaboration, communautés actives

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify provincial policies and strategies related to active communities and understand how five government departments (e.g. health promotion and sport, transportation, infrastructure, municipal affairs, and the environment) are collaborating to enhance the design of active communities. A document review to identify legislation/strategies and interviews with 10 government policy-makers to identify priorities, challenges, and inter-sectoral collaboration were conducted. This process produced a policy inventory of 39 Ontario legislation and strategies that govern planners and public health professionals working to enhance the design of active communities. Challenges related to achieving inter-ministry collaboration and coordination towards a provincial active communities agenda were identified.

Key words: policies, physical activity, policy makers, collaboration, active communities

INTRODUCTION

Planners and public health professionals first combined their efforts to improve living conditions in overcrowded Canadian cities in the late 19th century. By the early 20th century, they had gone their separate ways; public health professionals to focus on population health through prevention, protection, and promotion and planners to focus on the physical patterns of communities (Hodge and Gordon 2008; Sallis et al. 2006). Decades later, there is a need for these two professions to reunite their expertise to address the contemporary health crisis of physical inactivity (Heath et al. 2006; Williams 2007).

Low rates of physical activity are a concern in Canada, with approximately 83% of adults and 91% of children and youth not meeting the minimum level of physical activity recommended in the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute 2011; Statistics Canada 2011). Like most provinces, Ontario is confronting high levels of inactivity among its residents. Fifty percent of Ontario adults are not physically active enough in their leisure time (Statistics Canada 2011) and only 32% of children and youth get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day (Active Healthy Kids Canada 2011). Healthy behaviours, such as physical activity are influenced not only by individual choices, but also by the broader social, physical and policy environments in which we live (Sallis et al. 2006). Planners have a role to play in enhancing the social, physical, and policy environments to create active communities (Sallis 2009).

There is growing evidence of the relationship between the built environment and physical activity (Williams 2007; Heath et al 2006; Transportation

Research Board 2005). Facilitating access to, enhancing the attractiveness of, and ensuring the safety and security of places where people can be physically active is related to increased physical activity (Transportation Research Board 2005). Parks and open spaces, living close to walkable destinations, and the presence of sidewalks are associated with walking behaviours (Williams 2007). Following a systematic review of the evidence, Heath et al (2006) recommended that the creation and/or enhancement of access to places for physical activity be combined with outreach activities and policies to promote “active communities.”

Policies and actions outside of the health sector can directly and indirectly affect the health of the population. For example, governments at all levels (e.g., municipal, provincial, federal) adopt various policies to modify the built environment in ways that can make it easier or more difficult for residents to be physically active (Edwards and Tsourso 2006; Frumkin et al 2004; Polard 2003). Planning policies that control sprawl, protect natural green spaces and increase and integrate multi-modal transportation networks are primarily developed to improve transportation and land use planning, but not necessarily intended to enhance physical activity (Malizia 2006; Hoehner et al. 2003). Given that the policy context in which planners and public health professionals work impacts their practices, including whether or not they work together to develop active communities, there is a need for coordination and collaboration across government departments to develop dedicated policies to increase physical activity (Dannenberg et al. 2011; Lee 2012; Raine et al 2008; Salvesen et al. 2008; World Health Organization 2005).

A “*Health in All Policies*” approach (World Health Organization 2010) is increasingly recognized as a promising strategy for coordinated and collaborative policy action across government departments. Echoing the “*Healthy Cities Movement*” of the early 1990’s that highlighted the role of local governments in enhancing the health of its citizens (Hancock, 1993; Tsouros, 1990), this approach recognizes that the health of a community is impacted by policies that are managed by government departments outside of the health sector and that many policies to improve health can also help meet the policy objectives of other departments (World Health Organization 2010). For instance, policies that promote smart growth (e.g., walkable neighbourhoods, mix land uses, open spaces, multi-modal transportation options) can also enhance physical activity opportunities (Durand et al 2011). This multi-sectoral approach recognizes how decisions by diverse sectors can impact the health of residents. It models the interdependence of policies and directs governments to establish multi-sectoral governance with a lens for increasing the health of the population (St-Pierre and Gauvin 2010). In Canada, British Columbia and Québec have taken the lead in adopting a “*Health in All Policies*” approach by creat-

ing legislation to bring about inter-ministerial action and the development of healthy public policies (Gagnon and Kouri 2008; Greaves and Bialystok, 2011). In 2011, the Government of Alberta launched a new policy for active living that models integrated governance across sectors and includes a commitment to developing active communities (Government of Alberta 2011). Momentum is thus building in Canada for provincial governments to formally coordinate the collaboration of government sectors involved with enhancing the design of active communities. Although no formalized inter-ministerial strategy is yet in place in Ontario, several ministries have developed or are currently developing policies and strategies related to designing active communities. Understanding the challenges government policy makers may face when engaging in multi-sectoral collaboration and policy action represents a first step in developing a coordinated approach in Ontario (Aarts et al. 2011; Kahlmeier et al. 2010; Salvensen et al. 2008). The purpose of this study was thus twofold: 1) to inventory policies and strategies related to designing active communities in Ontario; and, 2) to identify key leverage points for collaboration between government sectors to enhance the design of active communities. This study received ethical clearance from the Queen's University Research Ethics Board.

METHOD

Setting

The Province of Ontario is the second largest province in Canada and is home to more than 13 million people (Government of Ontario 2012). In 2010, there were 30 ministries, agencies, boards and commissions organized by topic areas (e.g. transportation, environment, municipal affairs and housing and infrastructure). Each Ministry produces a *Result-based Plan Briefing Book* which includes their vision, mission/mandate, key priorities and results, organizational structure, legislation, and financial information. Ministries of interest for this study were those whose legislation primarily governs Ontario planners (e.g., municipal, transportation, land use) and public health professionals (e.g., health promoters, nurses, environmental health advocates and health educators) working to enhance the design of active communities. A detailed description of the method used to identify relevant ministries' can be found in Bergeron and Lévesque 2011. Five Ministries were chosen to participate in this study: Health Promotion and Sport, Transportation, Infrastructure, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Environment.

Policy Inventory

Prior to conducting interviews with ministry representatives, one researcher (KB) reviewed the policies included in the *Result-based Plan Briefing Book*

2010-2011 for all five participating ministries. Policies were defined as formal written legislation and plans or strategies to guide individual and collective behaviour (Schmid et al. 2006). Policies containing the following key words were retained for inclusion in the policy inventory: land use, transportation, environment, infrastructure, health promotion, recreation, active transportation, sustainable transportation, transit, healthy communities, active communities, physical activity and parks. The search process yielded 22 potential policies for inclusion. This first version of the inventory was to guide key informant interviews with policy staff. During the interview, key informants had the opportunity to make additions or changes to the information listed in the inventory. This resulted in the addition of 17 pieces of legislation and strategies. Findings from the interviews were then used to refine and finalize the policy inventory.

Key Informant Interviews

In total, 10 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with policy staff from five ministries between June and August 2010 to collect their perceptions about the challenges related to achieving inter-ministry collaboration and coordination towards a provincial active communities agenda. Interview participant eligibility criteria were: being employed by the Government of Ontario in one of the five selected ministries, and having a professional responsibility to develop policy in at least one of the following topic areas: land use planning, built environment/infrastructure, sustainable transportation, active transportation, or promoting physical activity through community design. A snowball sampling technique (Patton 2002) starting from the authors' ministry contacts was used to recruit two staff members from each of the five ministries. Informed consent was provided by each participant. All interviews were conducted by the principal researcher (KB) who is trained in qualitative data collection methodology. Interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and were audio recorded. Prior to the interview, participants were sent via email a copy of the first version of the Policy Inventory. An interview guide was also developed and included four questions:

1. What, if any additions or changes would you suggest be made to the information listed in the inventory of legislation and strategies?
2. Describe your Ministry's priorities related to designing, supporting and/or promoting active communities.
3. Describe any challenges that might exist in achieving these priorities.
4. Describe ways in which your Ministry collaborates with the four following Ministries (relevant list provided to interviewees).

After completing the 10 interviews, the interviewer felt that a saturation point had been reached as no new information was gathered during the last interviews (Patton 2002).

Data Analysis

The transcripts from the audio-recorded interviews and written notes were thoroughly read and re-read in a systematic process of directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Patton, 2002). Directed content analysis was conducted in two phases. First, data were organized by Ministry; thus data from one to three policy staff interviews were included in each of five units of analysis. Each data set was searched to extract 'data segments' representing challenges to inter-ministry collaboration for the development of active communities. This was done by breaking down text passages into smaller units based on content with a shared commonality (e.g. physical activity engineered out of daily living; use of the private automobile; the demand for single dwelling home), yielding a large number of data segments (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Patton 2002). These data segments were then grouped into sub-themes representing types of challenges (e.g., physical activity numbers are low, indirect relationship to promote physical activity) and regrouped a third time into more inclusive themes (e.g., integrating land use and transportation planning, competing interests). Next, the themes that emerged from the analysis of each of the Ministries' data set were examined to create overarching subthemes (e.g., the public wants single dwelling homes on big lots) and themes representing challenges faced across ministries (e.g., unsupportive normative environment). This analysis was an iterative process that relied largely on the cutting and sorting technique recommended by Patton (2002). Trustworthiness and credibility were established through ongoing interaction and member checking with participants to ensure authenticity (Patton 2002). Information was clarified with participants after the interviews through email communication. Additionally, in early 2012, participants were invited to review the Policy Inventory in order to ensure its contemporary accuracy and to review the challenges identified via the analysis. The five quotes contained in this article are from four different respondents, representing three ministries.

RESULTS

Policy Inventory

Based on the policy review and completed interviews, a final policy inventory of Ontario legislation and strategies related to active communities that currently exist or are in the process of being developed as of 2012, was created. It was noted by more than one interview participant that legislation mandated by

three ministries not included in our study sample (i.e., Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services) should be added to the policy inventory as they have legislation or strategies related to active communities. Table 1 provides an overview of the completed inventory that contains 39 policies across 8 ministries. A brief description for each policy is also included in the table. The Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport had the largest number of policies, followed closely by the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Of the original five ministries, the Ministry of Infrastructure had the least number of policies. Overall, each policy, strategy or plan provides direction to enhance the environmental, physical, social, and/or economic health of the province by creating healthier communities. Some policies focus more on the environment (e.g., Environmental Assessment Act, Green Energy Act), infrastructure (e.g., Places to Grow Act, Planning Act), social (e.g., Ontario Public Health Standards, Ontario Trails Strategy) and economic (e.g., Building Together: Jobs and Prosperity for all Ontarians Plan) aspect of creating active communities.

Table 1: Policy Inventory of Ontario Legislation and Strategies that Govern Planners and Public Health Professionals Working to Enhance the Design of Active Communities

*indicates a strategy or plan

Ministry	Policies	Policy Description
Ministry of Children and Youth Services	Poverty Reduction Act (2009)	The focus of this strategy is on children and families, with the goal of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over five years.
Ministry of Community and Social Services	Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005	The goal is to make Ontario completely accessible for persons with disabilities by January 2025. The AODA mandates the creation of standard development committees in five general areas: Customer Service, Transportation, Employment, Information and Communication and Built Environment.
Ministry of the Environment	Environmental Assessment Act (2010)	This Act requires an environmental assessment of any major public sector undertaking that has the potential for significant environmental effects. This includes public roads, transit, wastewater and stormwater installations.
	Green Energy Act (2009)	This Act was created to expand Ontario's production of renewable energy, encourage energy conservation and promote the creation of clean-energy green jobs.

	<p>Ontario's Action Plan on Climate Change* (2009)</p>	<p>This plan is the framework for action to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions.</p>
	<p>The Lake Simcoe Protection Act (2009)</p>	<p>This Act provides the authority for the establishment of (and amendments to) the <i>Lake Simcoe Protection Plan</i> (2009) which is a comprehensive plan to protect and restore the ecological health of Lake Simcoe and its watershed. Under development (as of 2012) is a <i>Lake Simcoe Multi-Season Recreation Strategy</i>.*</p>
<p>Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport (formally)</p>	<p>Sport Development Strategy* (under development as of 2012)</p>	<p>This strategy will be designed to achieve better results from high-performance athletes and to create healthier communities through additional opportunities for public participation in sport.</p>
	<p>Healthy Communities Fund* (2010)</p>	<p>The <i>Healthy Communities Fund</i> (2010) has been set up to create a one-window approach to fund community partnership programs. The fund encourages partnerships and provides support to provincial and community organizations to plan and deliver initiatives that address multiple risk factors for chronic disease and promote health and wellness. The goals of this approach is to: create a culture of health and well-being; build healthy communities through coordinated action; create policies and programs that make it easier for Ontarians to be healthy; and enhance the capacity of community leaders to work together on healthy living. This approach encompasses the <i>Ontario's Action Plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living*</i> (2006) which integrates the former <i>Healthy Weights Strategy</i> (2004) with the physical activity components of <i>ACTIVE 2010*</i> (2004) into a broader, integrated plan for Healthy Eating and Active Living and the Ontario Heart Health Program (1998).</p>

	Ontario Public Health Standards* (2008)	These are published guidelines for the provision of mandatory health programs and services by public health units in Ontario. <i>Guidance Documents</i> for implementation in 2010-11 to help local boards of health plan and execute their responsibilities under the <i>Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act</i> and the <i>Ontario Public Health Standards</i> have also been developed.
	Ontario Injury Prevention Strategy* (2007)	A government-wide approach to injury prevention to reduce preventable injuries in Ontario.
	Ontario Trails Strategy* (2005)	The long-term plan that establishes strategic direction for planning, managing, promoting and using trails in Ontario.
	Ministry of Tourism and Recreation Act (1990)	Responsible for the recreation portion of this Act.
	Community Recreation Centres Act (1990)	This requires recreation facilities funded under this act to have minister approval before their disposition.
	Health Protection and Promotion Act (1990)	Section 7, in so far as it relates to the following mandatory health programs and services: Chronic Disease Prevention, Injury Prevention including Substance Abuse Prevention, Child Health and Reproductive Health, as described in guidelines published under section 7, and any other provision of the Act in so far as it relates to the administration or enforcement of section 7 respecting those programs and services.
	Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act (1990)	In so far as it relates to health promotion.
Ministry of Infrastructure	Building Together: Jobs and Prosperity for all Ontarians* (2011)	Ontario's long-term infrastructure plan that will guide infrastructure planning and investment decisions for the next decade.

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	Places to Grow Act (2005)	Enabled the development of the: 1. <i>Growth Plan for Northern Ontario*</i> (2011) which is a 25-year vision for positioning Ontario's North to thrive and compete in the global economy. 2. <i>Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*</i> (2006) which is a 25-year framework to manage growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area (Southern Ontario) for the purpose to promote healthy communities, keep the economy strong and protect the environment.
	ReNew Ontario Plan* (2005)	A plan of action that directs infrastructure investments to the areas that Ontarians have said are their priorities – health care, education and economic prosperity.
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing	Planning and Conservation Land Statue Law Amendment Act (Bill 51) (2006)	This was the second step in planning reform in Ontario to build strong communities.
	Provincial Policy Statement* (2005)	Is the complimentary policy document to the Planning Act. It provides policy direction to decision-makers on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development.
	Greenbelt Act (2005)	Enabled the creation of the <i>Greenbelt Plan*</i> (2005), which protects one million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land in the Golden Horseshoe from urban development and sprawl and identifies where urbanization should not occur in order to provide permanent protection of the agricultural land base and the ecological features and functions occurring in the Greenbelt Plan Area.
	Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act (Bill 26) (2004)	Planning reform to building strong communities in Ontario. This was the first step in planning reform.

	Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (2001)	Enabled the development of the <i>Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*</i> to protect a geological landform in south central Ontario, covering 190,000 hectares of environmentally sensitive land called the Oak Ridges Moraine.
	Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (1985) revised 1990, 1999 & 2011	Established a planning process to ensure that the area would be protected and enabled the development of the <i>Niagara Escarpment Plan*</i> to protect this topographical feature and which serves as a framework of objectives and policies to strike a balance between development, preservation and the enjoyment of this important resource.
	Planning Act (1990)	Sets the ground rules for land use planning in Ontario and describes how land uses may be controlled and who may control them. Provides for the <i>Provincial Policy Statement</i> setting out Provincial land use policy.
	Parkway Belt West Plan (1978)	Protects a multi-purpose utility corridor, inter-urban transit corridor, urban separator and links open space system. This plan was a culmination of regional planning, infrastructure planning and greenbelt planning.
Ministry of Natural Resources	Far North Act (2010)	Provides for the development of community based land use plans initiated by First Nations designating permitted land uses.
	Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (2006)	Provides for the establishment of provincial parks and conservation reserves and their management. Parks may be classified as a natural environment park, a nature reserve park, a wilderness park, a recreational park, a waterways park or a historical park.
	Conservation Authorities Act (1990)	Provides for the establishment of conservation authorities for the purpose of establishing and undertaking programs designed to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in their area of jurisdiction.
	Conservation Land Act (1990)	Provides for the establishment of grant programs to promote the recognition, encouragement and support of the stewardship or conservation of certain lands, and for the making of easements for conservation.

	Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (1990)	Establishes the Niagara Escarpment Plan and Commission and provides for the maintenance of the Niagara Escarpment and land in its vicinity substantially as a continuous natural environment where only compatible development occurs.
Ministry of Transportation	Sustainability Strategy* (2010)	An innovative strategy focused on social, environmental and economic sustainability.
	Safer Roads for a Safer Ontario Act (Bill 203) (2007)	This act that targets drinking drivers and street racers.
	Road Safety Act (Bill 73) (2009)	An act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads.
	Metrolinx Act (2006)	Influenced the development of a Regional Transportation Plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area titled: <i>The Big Move: Transforming Transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area*</i> (2008). This plan was created to improve the coordination and integration of all modes of transportation in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.
	Bicycle Policy (1992) (currently being updated as of 2012)	The policy is grounded in the principle that the bicycle is a legitimate mode of transportation and a vehicle under <i>Ontario's Highway Traffic Act</i> . The updated will work to improve the conditions for bicycling in the province and assists the Ministry in supporting government initiatives that prioritize bicycling including the <i>Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe</i> and the <i>Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan</i> .
	Transit-Supportive Guidelines (1992) (released in 2012)	These guidelines aim to assist urban planners, transit planners, developers and others, working in communities of all sizes, in creating an environment that is supportive of transit and developing services and programs to increase transit ridership. These guidelines have been updated and were released in 2012.

	Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act (1990)	Legislation that allows the Government of Ontario to make improvements to the provincial transportation system when it is in the best interest to the economy and residents of Ontario.
	Highway Traffic Act (1990)	Legislation that governs highways and roads in Ontario.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

There is a trend in Canada and Ontario to develop resources that bring planners and public health professionals together towards an active communities agenda (Bergeron and Lévesque, 2011; BC Healthy Built Environment Alliance, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada 2010). A significant contribution from the present study is the development of a policy inventory that has the potential to become a ‘go-to’ resource for planners and public health professionals working together to enhance the design of active communities. Using the information in the inventory, planners and public health professionals can gain a greater understanding of the policy context in which they all work. For instance, key informants shared that the inventory clearly outlines legislation and strategies that planners need to consider when reviewing development plans and that public health professionals need to consider when advocating for active community design. Moreover, this inclusive inventory opens the door for greater discussion between the two professions about how specific legislation and/or strategies can influence efforts to create active communities. For example, planners learning about the Ontario Injury Prevention Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport 2007) might be more likely to make planning decisions that reduce the likelihood that community members sustain injury when actively commuting to work.

This increased reciprocal knowledge can be used not only to strengthen their joint efforts to create active communities, but also to jointly influence changes to government policies. For example, we learned from our key informant interviews that three policies (i.e., Sport Development Strategy, Bicycle Policy, and Transit-Supportive Guidelines) included in the inventory are currently in the process of being updated or have been updated. With this information in hand, these two professions can combine their respective discipline-specific expertise toward the development of a joint submission to the ministry overseeing a given policy. To our knowledge, this is the first integrated planning- public health inventory of provincial government policies related to

active communities. In addition to offering a turn-key inventory to Ontario professionals working towards an active communities agenda, this policy inventory can serve as a template for other provinces in Canada and beyond striving to achieve a *Health in All Policies* approach (World Health Organization 2010).

Priorities Related to Designing and Supporting Active Communities

From the key informant interviews, we found that all participants were able to describe their Ministry's priorities related to enhancing the design of active communities in Ontario. All priorities identified were linked to the Government of Ontario's priorities for a stronger, greener and better Ontario that includes a focus on improving the quality of life for residents. Within each Ministry, identified priorities were directly related to their mandated legislation and strategies. For example, the Ministry of Transportation priorities include increasing transit ridership, promoting a multimodal transportation network, promoting road safety, improving Ontario's highway bridge and border infrastructure and integrating the principle of sustainability, whereas the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing priorities include land use planning and development to create well-planned communities that promote green space. Each Ministry is contributing to an active communities agenda, however, it is not clear why this is not translating into more physically active residents.

Not surprisingly, the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport was the only Ministry to have specific priorities related to increasing physical activity levels (e.g., promoting health and well-being, valuing sport and recreation, chronic disease prevention and injury prevention). The priorities of the other ministries only indirectly support physical activity opportunities at the community level. For example, the Ministry of the Environment has the mandate to protect the environment, not just from an ecosystem perspective, but also from a recreation perspective (e.g., swimming, canoeing, kayaking). Additionally, the Ministry of Infrastructure's priority to manage growth and development by mandating healthy community design (e.g., intensification, connectivity, public transit, parks and open spaces) creates communities that provide physical activity opportunities. With no dedicated priorities to increase physical activity levels outside of the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, there is a risk that the active communities agenda might not be met.

This study can be viewed as a starting point for assessing the alignment of success for all ministries in increasing physical activity. Moving forward, the articulation of the role each ministry can play in generating ideas and plans for action will need to be determined. Unfortunately, as discussed below, assessing success factors and defining the role each ministry can play is not a simple task.

Challenges to Designing and Supporting Active Communities

Key themes capturing participants' perceptions about the challenges related to achieving inter-ministry collaboration and coordination towards a provincial active communities agenda emerged from the interview data. Themes included: 1) unsupportive normative environment (social norms are not supportive of active communities), 2) electoral process (the process to elect government officials influences efforts to achieve priorities), 3) funding (the availability, amount and allocation of funding presents challenges), 4) measurement issues (better measurement tools are needed to show how implementing government plans/strategies makes a difference at the population level), and 5) legacy of infrastructure (the legacy of old infrastructure and the significant time it takes to build new infrastructure present challenges). Table 2 summarizes the key findings and representative participant statements for each theme.

Table 2: Challenges to Achieving Inter-ministry Collaboration and Coordination Towards a Provincial Active Communities Agenda

Themes	Sub-themes	Representative statements
Unsupportive normative environment	Physical activity has been engineered out of daily living.	<p>The population of Ontario is increasing, if social norms related to physical activity do not shift, there will be more people inactive and suffering from preventable chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.</p> <p>Physical activity is competing with other interests, including sedentary behaviour. In order to get people active we have to create very attractive physical activity spaces.</p> <p>The healthy choice is not the easy choice.</p>

	<p>The use of the private automobile makes it difficult to get people to shift to public transit.</p>	<p>We have created environments where people do not live and work in the same area and are forced to use motorized transportation, most often a private car, to get from one area to another.</p> <p>Shifting people from personal vehicles to public transit would require a significant lifestyle change.</p>
	<p>The public wants single dwelling homes on big lots.</p>	<p>There is a lack of education and awareness of active community design and this impacts the public's understanding of the density described in the provincial growth plans.</p>
		<p>There is a need for a cultural shift for the public to demand and/or accept active community design.</p>
Electoral process	<p>New elected officials require education of current legislation and strategies and this takes away from policy implementation.</p>	<p>Once the municipal election was over, more time would be spent on education and awareness to ensure that elected municipal officials understood the growth plans, and not necessarily on policy implementation.</p> <p>The upcoming provincial-wide election raises two issues; the need to not upset constituents and the potential for government mandates to change. The fact that social norms are not supportive of active communities caution must be used when implementing priorities so as not to upset the constituents.</p>

		<p>If the current political party changed, it was anticipated that priorities may also change and this could impact the current progress of achieving priorities related to designing active communities.</p>
Funding	<p>There is a limited amount of funds to support mandated plans/strategies.</p>	<p>Some of the changes required to achieve priorities related to enhancing the design of active communities will take a lot of money.</p> <p>It is challenging to determine how best to allocate funds to have an impact.</p>
Measurement issues	<p>There is a need for better ways to measure how active community design impacts health and how these impacts are communicated.</p>	<p>Better health impact measures could help communities in their planning.</p> <p>Population growth, which is forecasted in growth plans, and an aging population are challenges. There is concern with not knowing the actual growth numbers and how this will impact the tax base to pay for active community infrastructure.</p>
<i>Legacy of infrastructure</i>	<p>Having old infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges) in Ontario is challenging, as these types of infrastructure were not designed with physical activity in mind.</p>	<p>There are few pedestrian bridges that link neighbourhoods on either side of Highway 401 (provincial highway).</p> <p>Some infrastructure projects being built today were approved 10 years ago and may not be supportive of active communities design.</p>

This study provides important information on the challenges to achieving inter-ministry collaboration and coordination towards a provincial active communities agenda. For example, as highlighted in Table 2, participants identified the need to shift social norms related to physical activity in order to decrease the number of people suffering from preventable chronic diseases, improve infrastructure to support physical activity and the need to balance implementing policies with educating newly elected officials. It is worth noting that at the time of the interviews (i.e., summer of 2010), municipal elections were scheduled for the upcoming fall and it was anticipated that a province-wide election would be held in the fall of 2011. Thus, all participants mentioned the impact of the election process as a significant challenge to implementing a coordinated active communities agenda. This is not surprising given that the key informants would likely be the ones tasked with educating newly elected municipal and provincial officials about current legislation and strategies. It was perceived that this additional workload would limit their time to move the active communities agenda forward.

Challenges identified by the key informants were common across ministries; this further strengthens the rationale for a coordinated inter-ministry agenda. For example, the normative environment, electoral process, funding, measurement issues, and legacy of infrastructure are influenced by the social, physical, and policy environments. Therefore, solutions to address these challenges require a multi-layered and collaborative approach. This finding is consistent with previous evidence supporting the need for multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration (Ball et al 2010; Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute 2007; Giles-Corti 2006; Ball 2006; Giles-Corti and Donovan 2002). Additionally, the challenges found in this study are not unique to Ontario policy makers. For example, cultural, financial, governance and legacy factors were identified by policy-makers in Atlantic Canada as barriers to investments in the built environment to reduce youth obesity (Grant, MacKay, Manuel, & McHugh, 2010). An unsupportive normative environment was found to be a barrier in a study to understand key stakeholders' perspectives in the City of Edmonton on the development of walkable neighbourhoods (Clark et al., 2010).

Collaborative Efforts

This study found that some collaboration is happening across provincial government sectors (health promotion, transportation, municipal affairs, environment, and infrastructure). However, these collaborative efforts are not without impediments. Several participants identified the need for a better working relationship between the three levels of governments related to creating active communities. One participant remarked that "*things like active transpor-*

tation, cycling lanes, require more federal involvement for coming up with more municipal funding to support that kind of infrastructure.” There appears to be an understanding that creating active communities needs to include all levels of government, as communities receive funding from each level of government.

Attention to physical activity as an outcome was limited to the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport. For example, several participants commented that only the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport has a mandate that includes physical activity performance measures, and that physical activity does not necessarily receive the attention it should outside of that Ministry. One participant stated that *“we have to focus on the things that our legislation tells us we have to focus on ... physical activity...at best becomes a consideration.”* However, several participants were able to acknowledge that physical activity was a co-benefit of other priorities that they are working on. For example, one participant described the co-benefit of physical activity as *“if you protect the lake, you protect the shoreline areas from development, providing opportunities for recreation.”* Another participant commented that *“healthy active people is on our radar but not the driving force...it is more about the environment and the economy.”* Several other studies have identified physical activity as a co-benefit to other government priorities such as climate change (Frumkin et al. 2008; Frumkin et al. 2004; Younger et al. 2008). There is an opportunity to leverage this awareness of the co-benefits and move towards a common agenda to increase physical activity levels through a coordinated and collaborative approach.

Regarding multi-sectoral collaboration, participants discussed formal and informal collaboration when reflecting on ways in which their Ministry collaborates with other ministries. Formal collaboration includes a number of joint policy committees that meet regularly at the different levels (e.g., Minister, Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister, Director, Manager, civil servant/staff). The Ontario’s Trail Coordinating Committee was mentioned by several participants as a good example of how Ontario ministries collaborate. Informal collaboration includes sharing information at the civil servant level, canvassing other ministries for changes to policies, and making sure that other ministries are aware of consultation processes happening with the public or with professional organizations. All participants commented that there is a fair amount of communication between ministries to balance the interests/mandates of the different ministries. For example, one participant commented that *“it comes down to balancing the different interests and at the end of the day, determining what the policy direction will be given that sometimes the interests are competing.”*

Not all ministries collaborate to the same degree with other ministries. For example, all participants mentioned working with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the topic of land use planning, but several commented

that they do not work closely with the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, except on the topic of trails.

In summary, given that there is informal and formal collaboration across ministries, that there are varying degrees in which they collaborate, and that challenges identified to achieving priorities are influenced by the social, physical, and policy environments, our findings suggest that provincial inter-sectoral collaboration in Ontario needs to be strengthened.

Discussion and Recommendations

One strategy for the province of Ontario to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration is to consider adopting a “Health in All Policies” approach. This approach includes integrating governance across sectors (whole-of-government approach) to strengthen accountability for population health outcomes, like physical activity (Gagnon and Kouri 2008; World Health Organization 2005; Government of Alberta 2011; Geneau, et al. 2009). This approach also includes strengthening coordination, accountability, and performance measurements (Geneau et al. 2009). Other provinces in Canada (e.g., Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec) and across the world (World Health Organization, 2010) are engaging in this type of approach. Ontario can refer to these models for best practices to implementing a “Health in All Policies” approach; the present findings suggest that the time is opportune given the current policy environment in Ontario. The Government of Ontario could learn how these provincial governments are structured in order to implement an integrated governance approach by purposely engaging relevant government sectors. It is recommended that relevant ministries be engaged to build on their current priorities and to exchange on corollary areas where co-benefits might be leveraged towards a common agenda. For example, in the province of British Columbia, there is commitment from the Premier’s Office for the development of a cross-ministerial accountability framework that includes embedding the objectives and goals of an integrated strategy (ActNow BC) into all ministry service plans (Geneau, et al. 2009). The Premier of Ontario could employ a similar approach by ensuring that ministries report their commitment to achieving priorities related to designing active communities in their *Results-based Plan Briefing Book*. Consideration to adopt a “whole-of-government” approach in the Province of Ontario has become even more critical in 2012, since the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport no longer exists following the recent election. Health promotion has been assigned to the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care and the recreation and sport portfolio has been assigned to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport. This separation has the potential to weaken coordination and collaboration related to physical activity and community design. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that health, and physical activity in particular, are seen as a priority for the current government. Conversely, an integrated ap-

proach has the potential to address funding and data/measurement challenges identified in this study. Having a designated forum for ministries to openly discuss the availability and allocation of funding and to develop complementary measurement and surveillance tools would likely optimise resources and positively impact the population. Adopting this approach offers the possibility of strengthening provincial action and multi-sectoral collaboration to enhance the design of active communities (Aarts et al. 2011).

Future research could include replicating the Policy Inventory each electoral cycle in order to gauge the progress of the active communities agenda in Ontario. Moreover, the process to develop a Policy Inventory could be used by other provinces in Canada as a way to assess and gauge the progress of an active communities agenda across Canada. This could provide important information for public health and planning practitioners and researchers alike.

It is important to note that investigating only one case (i.e., the province of Ontario) constitutes a limitation of this study. Another limitation is the dynamic nature of the policy environment; changes in policies and personnel would likely impact the findings. Study strengths that enhance the credibility of the findings included the use of two different data collection methods (document review and interviews) and completing participant checks (Patton 2002).

CONCLUSION

Physical inactivity is a concern in Ontario. Active communities provide the opportunity for residents to engage in physical activity. There is a need for coordinated and collaborative policy action across government ministries to purposely work together towards an active communities agenda. This study contributes to the trend in Canada and Ontario to develop resources that bring planners and public health professionals together. Although the Ontario-specific content of the Policy Inventory may appear less salient to planners and public health professionals working outside of Ontario, the process used to develop the Policy Inventory may be highly relevant for other jurisdictions in Canada and beyond to use as a template to develop their own regional policy inventory.

A key finding from this study is that a strategic approach is needed for inter-ministry collaboration and coordination in order to move government sectors towards a common agenda to increase physical activity. This message reiterates previous recommendations for governments to align their mandates and objectives for the health of all citizens (Hancock. 1993), and is consistent with the concept of Healthy Communities currently advocated by the Canadian Institute of Planners. (Canadian Institute of Planners and HB Lanarc, 2012).

This study provides important information about the challenges to achieving inter-ministry collaboration and coordination towards a provincial active communities agenda. Additionally, the lack of multi-ministerial dialogue around the alignment of success is a barrier. These insights provide a starting point to address the challenges to promote active communities.

Finally, this study provides direction to the province of Ontario to consider reviving the momentum initiated by the Healthy Cities Movement (Tsouros, 1990) by adopting a “Health in All Policies” approach to integrate governance across sectors to strengthen accountability for physical activity outcomes.

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