

Minister of Health



Ministre de la Santé

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

Mr. Ron McKinnon
Chair, Standing Committee on Health Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada, K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. McKinnon,

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the Report of the Standing Committee on Health (HESA) entitled *Tackling the Problem Head On: Sports-Related Concussions in Canada* (the Report), presented in the House Commons on June 3, 2019 and re-tabled on April 13, 2021.

I would like to thank the Committee and the Subcommittee on Sport-related Concussions in Canada (Subcommittee) for its examination of sports-related concussions in Canada. I also would like to thank the athletes, the sport participants and their families, the witnesses, and those who provided written submissions, for sharing views and expert advice. Their valuable perspectives and commitment to the prevention of sports-related concussions are important for Canada.

The Government has carefully considered the Report and agrees with the 13 recommendations that focus on: 1) establishing a Concussion Awareness Week; 2) support for the Federal-Provincial/Territorial (FPT) Working Group on Concussion in Sport and stakeholders; 3) concussion research; and 4) collaboration with the provinces and territories to ensure a pan-Canadian approach to sports-related concussion.

FPT governments, in partnership with sport organizations and key stakeholders have been working together to address concussion as it relates to sport safety. This government response highlights actions that are underway by all players to raise awareness for parents, coaches and athletes on concussion treatment. Concussions continue to be a major public health concern. Although COVID-19 has significantly impacted the sport sector, federal, provincial and territorial governments remain committed to take action to increase awareness, prevention, detection, management, and surveillance of concussions.

As part of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada provides leadership and funding to help ensure a strong Canadian sport system that enables Canadians to progress from early sport experiences to high performance excellence. In order to achieve this, Sport Canada

Canada

ensures that sport is delivered in a safe and welcoming manner, which includes addressing the issue of sport-related concussions. Support for the sport system involves many stakeholders, including provincial and territorial governments, National Sport organizations, and Multisport Service Organizations.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) supports Canadians to be more physically active in safe and responsible environments; conducts surveillance of chronic diseases and injuries, including traumatic brain injury and concussion; invests in the development of guidance, protocols and tools; and, increases concussion awareness among Canadians.

Establish a Concussion Awareness Week

During the 2019 Conference of the Ministers responsible for Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation (SPAR) held in Red Deer (Alberta), each province and territory agreed to host an annual day on sport-related concussion awareness at the moment of their choice. FPT governments have now agreed to align the annual concussion awareness days within the same week starting in September 2021. Each jurisdiction will have the option and flexibility to host multiple days for awareness of concussions or to choose only one day within the week. The week will take place every last week of September to align with Rowan's Law Day in Ontario (last Wednesday of September). Concussion Awareness Week will provide provinces and territories with the opportunity to promote activities that could include: age-appropriate education and awareness programs in primary and secondary schools; awareness campaigns for the public; promotion of certification and training programs for health professionals; and update and review of concussion protocols and relevant training for sports organizations.

Members of the FPT Working Group on Concussion in Sport whose membership includes representatives of FPT governments, education, academia, community-based organizations in health and injury prevention, and sport organizations, have begun to develop guiding tools and resources for this purpose.

Support for the FPT Working Group on Concussion in Sport and Stakeholders

The Government will continue to support organizations' concussion activities via Budget 2019 funding commitments for safety in sport. The Government participation in the FPT Working Group on Concussion in Sport ensures that PHAC and Sport Canada are engaged in advancing concussion priorities, in collaboration key stakeholders.

FPT Working Group on Concussion in Sport

The FPT collaborative work on concussion is coordinated under the SPAR mechanism. As the federal Co-chairs, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport Canada) represent the interests of physical activity and sport, respectively. In June 2015, the FPT Working Group on Concussions in Sport was established to prepare recommendations for the FPT SPAR Ministers on the development of a harmonized approach to address the issue of

concussions in sport. The FPT Working Group has presented recommendations to the FPT SPAR Ministers at each of their subsequent conferences in 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2021. The issue of concussions in sport is now a standing item at ministerial meetings.

Stakeholder collaboration

The Government is committed to the safety of all Canadians engaging in sports and recreational activity. Budget 2016 investments to Parachute Canada and partners through PHAC resulted in the development of the Canadian Guideline on Concussion in Sport, Return-to-school and Return-to-sport protocols, Concussion Awareness Training Tools for medical and allied health professionals, and other resources and tools. Parachute Canada is a national charity that champions injury prevention by promoting resources, tools and programming seeking to prevent serious harm or death from preventable injuries. Partners included National Sport Organizations, University of Calgary, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, and British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit. Please visit www.parachute.ca.

The Government is continuing to encourage and support organizations to promote and implement concussion tools and resources via existing funding initiatives. Budget 2019 provided \$30 million over five years, starting in 2019-20, for Sport Canada to ensure a safe and healthy sport system. This included annual funding to National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and targeted Multisport Service Organizations (MSOs). The funding will enable NSOs and MSOs to harmonize their Return-to sport protocols with the latest Canadian Guideline on Concussion in Sport developed by Parachute, to work in the areas of awareness, prevention and surveillance and to ensure better alignment of concussion resources with provincial and territorial sport organizations. As of 2020, 51 NSOs supported by Sport Canada participate in the harmonization of concussion protocols in Canada.

Since April 1, 2021, Sport Canada funding recipients are now required to have a policy on concussion that covers the areas of awareness, prevention, detection, surveillance and management, which includes a specific Return-to-sport protocol compliant with the latest Canadian Guideline on Concussions in Sport.

The Government has also provided funding for three national conferences on concussions in sport (2018, 2019, 2021) organized by the Sport Information Research Centre (SIRC). This funding demonstrates the Government's commitment to support the sport community's ongoing efforts to promote concussion awareness, and to share emerging research and best practices. The Government is committed to supporting these annual conferences until 2024.

Although Budget 2021 commitments are not targeted to advancing concussion priorities, it is recognized that the commitments related to mental health will benefit Canadians, including those living with mental illness linked to brain injuries, including concussions.

These investments and established relationships build the foundation for continued dialogue and collaboration.

Concussion Research

The Government continues to prioritize concussion research and recognizes that advances in research can also support concussion surveillance activities and vice versa. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) invested \$38.5 million between 2015 and 2020 to support research on traumatic brain injuries, including concussions. This investment supported researchers in universities and teaching hospitals across the country who are working to further our understanding of concussions and to improve diagnosis and treatment options. For example, in 2015, CIHR awarded a Foundation Grant to Dr. Keith Yeates at the University of Calgary for his research to advance concussion assessment and treatment in children and youth.

In March 2020, \$1.5 million over five years was awarded to the Canadian Concussion Network, who represent multiple disciplines and institutions, and are leaders in national and international concussion initiatives. This network will shape best practices and policies in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of concussion, with a particular focus on youth and sport.

Collaboration with the provinces and territories to ensure a pan-Canadian approach to sports-related concussion

The Minister of Health and the Minister of Canadian Heritage are mandated to work together to implement a pan-Canadian concussion strategy and raise awareness for parents, coaches and athletes on concussion treatment. This strategy is based on an approach endorsed by FPT Ministers for sport, physical activity and recreation in June 2016. The Harmonized Approach on Concussions consists of five key components: awareness, prevention, detection, management and surveillance to address the issue of concussions. It became the framework for the pan-Canadian concussion strategy and forms the basis for developing guidelines for each jurisdiction. Its aim is to ensure that key groups of Canadians are aware of and have tools to prevent, detect and manage concussions. Key groups of Canadians are defined as athletes/participants, coaches, parents, medical practitioners, administrators, officials, teachers and volunteers.

Concussions is a public health issue and each provincial and territorial government has the authority to set action plans that addresses the needs in their respective jurisdictions. As noted above, recommendations from the FPT Working Group on Concussions in Sport are intended to provide provinces and territories with a general direction in the development of their respective action plans with the aim of achieving a harmonized approach to address the issue of concussions.

PHAC facilitates the dissemination and implementation of concussion protocols in school-based sports through its membership in the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, a

partnership of the federal government and Ministries responsible for Health and Education in all provinces and territories (except Quebec) that aims to promote the wellbeing and achievement of children and youth in school settings.


PHAC conducts injury surveillance and research on concussions to learn more about rates, prevalence and the sports and recreation activities where concussions and related other traumatic brain injuries occur most frequently and why. Multiple data sources are used such as Vital Statistics (Statistics Canada), Hospitalization Data (CIHI) and survey data. A key data source used to identify sports- and recreation-related concussion is the electronic Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (eCHIRPP). The eCHIRPP system has a dual purpose – it is used as a national surveillance system as well as individual local surveillance systems in the specific provinces/territories. National surveillance data is reported by various means including reports, peer-reviewed articles, and blogs. Individual hospitals report to their local communities using similar means. The eCHIRPP system has been and continues to be enhanced with elements to quickly identify specific sports, increase timeliness and detect early warnings using artificial intelligence and text mining methodologies; and to increase quality and timeliness. Discussions with the sector are ongoing as to how best to enhance data collection and sharing between F/P/T partners, taking privacy concerns raised by the sport sector into consideration.

A new report entitled, *Injury in Review 2020: Spotlight on Traumatic Brain Injuries Across the Life Course* was released in August 2020. This report uses multiple data sources (including eCHIRPP) to describe the circumstances (sports and recreation, motor vehicle, fall, etc.) surrounding concussions and other brain injuries. Differences by age and sex are highlighted; disaggregation of results by other socio-demographic identity factors was not possible due to data source limitations. Also, a rapid response survey on concussion has been funded and developed by PHAC in collaboration with Statistics Canada. This survey will provide insight into the rates, distribution and mechanisms of concussion in Canada.

PHAC supports the Canadian component of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), a World Health Organization collaborative, cross-national study that aims to gain insight into young people's well-being, health behaviours and their social contexts. The HBSC national report was released in spring 2020 and included national concussion results based on self-reported data from students in grades 6 to 10. A concussion-specific report will be released in 2021 with additional results, including associations with mental health.

In conclusion, the Government would like to reiterate its thanks to the members of the Committee, the Subcommittee, athletes, witnesses and all those who have contributed to this study and Report on sports-related concussions. The Government is committed to improving the safety of Canadians and reducing concussions in sports by working with provinces and territories through both governmental actions as well as collaborative actions within the sport, physical activity, recreation, health and other sectors. This Report contributes to the evidence base of knowledge that will help Canadians better understand the effects of concussions and will help healthcare professionals respond to the treatment and management of concussion occurrences.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P. Hajdu". The signature is stylized with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Health