



The Global Observatory for Physical Activity presents a portrait of physical activity worldwide

Addressing the pandemic of physical inactivity is a public health priority. Global efforts and collaboration are required to raise the priority given to physical activity and to support countries in their efforts to develop and implement national policies and strategies aimed at increasing physical activity across the life course.

The Global Observatory for Physical Activity (GoPA!), a Council of the International Society of Physical Activity and Health was established following the launch of The Lancet Physical Activity Series in 2012. The Observatory aims to produce bi-annually standardized Country Cards highlighting the status of surveillance, policy and research in the field of physical activity and health.

On December 2015, the **Global Observatory for Physical Activity – GoPA!** published an unprecedented overview of physical activity and public health around the world (available at www.globalphysicalactivityobservatory.com). With information from more than 130 countries available in English and with translations into 30 languages for specific countries, the publication presents country cards with detailed information on physical activity research, policy and surveillance worldwide. *"The cards will be the global face of physical activity"* says Professor Michael Pratt, member of the Observatory's Steering Committee.

The project aims to bring together for the first time representatives of all countries of the globe. *"Having a profile of each country is the starting point. The cards are user friendly tools to forcefully make the case for real commitment to national physical activity surveillance, research and policy"* says epidemiologist and project leader, Pedro Hallal, from Brazil.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for the development of chronic diseases globally, affecting low-, middle- and high-income countries. Physical inactivity accounts for >5 million deaths per year globally, ranging from 1% of all deaths in Bangladesh to 19% in Malta. Worldwide, approximately 30% of adults are physically inactive, with as few as 17% in Southeast Asia and as many as 43% in the Americas and the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Four of the ten most active countries in the world are concentrated in South and Southeast Asia, and five of the least active countries are located in Europe. In addition to the prevalence of physical activity, the Observatory assesses scientific productivity, national surveys and monitoring, and the development of public policies in the area of physical activity and public health.

The Observatory assessed scientific productivity in countries around the world using several standard research metrics. Six countries - the United States, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom, - accounted for 51% of scientific publications on physical activity and public health in 2013. Brazil and China are the only low- and middle-income countries among the leading 20 countries for scientific publications in the field.

Although 90% of the countries included in the launch report conducted at least one survey on physical activity so far, less than 1/3 maintain continuous surveillance systems. The continuous surveillance of physical inactivity and other risk factors for non-communicable diseases is essential for the assessment of time trends and for the evaluation of the impact of interventions.

As for the development of public policies, 37 countries have specific national plans for the promotion of physical activity and another 65 include physical activity in their plans for preventing non-communicable diseases. *"It is not only the large or rich countries who are serious about physical activity. Croatia is a model of a relatively small country with a well organized comprehensive approach to physical activity"* comments Dr. Pratt.

The Observatory's work will not only show how crucial physical activity is for counteracting the health effects of the pandemic of physical inactivity, but will elevate physical activity promotion, surveillance and policy to its maximum importance in the public health arena. The idea is to engage experts, policymakers, as well as national and international physical activity societies to work side by side with the Observatory. *"We are working hard so that the country cards will become an evaluation and advocacy tool for helping governments, researchers and society to improve their health through physical activity"* concludes Dr. Hallal.

GoPA! would like to start a collaboration with other observatories in order to share experiences and to spread out the word about the Global Observatory for Physical Activity. GoPA!'s wish is that the country cards will be widely used as an advocacy tool to promote physical activity around the world.

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