

**For Immediate Release:  
Monday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

## **Health Coalition: Provincial Leadership Needed to Help More Kids Walk and Wheel to School**

**EDMONTON (June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018)** – June 3-9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 is Wheel Week across Alberta, a week aimed at promoting active travel by encouraging Alberta students to walk and wheel to school. Yet, for many Alberta schools, promoting active travel throughout the year remains a challenge.

Young people who participate in active school travel tend to be more physically active, have increased self-confidence and are less likely to be overweight (1). "Increasing the number of young people walking, biking or wheeling to school is important for personal and community well-being," said Tracey Coutts, School Active Travel Coordinator for SHAPE (Safe Healthy Active People Everywhere) and Ever Active Schools. "A safe active school journey is a place of social and emotional well-being, and prepares a child to learn."

In celebration of Wheel Week, Nellie Carlson, a K-9 school in Edmonton, will be hosting a bike rodeo, complete with bike safety education, an obstacle course, bike wash and bike decorating. Students, staff, parents and administrators at Nellie Carlson are geared up to make the week fun and educational. Principal Henry Madsen, an avid cyclist himself, supports this initiative whole-heartedly: "Any form of human powered transportation promotes health, independence and environmental stewardship... and it's good for the brain!"

However, many schools across the province face challenges when it comes to promoting active school travel throughout the year.

A [new report](#) by the Centre for Active Living (ACAL), which surveyed school active transportation champions across the province, highlights potential reasons for this. According to the report, common barriers to active school travel include lack of financial and volunteer support, distance students must travel, limited measurement and accountability, and policy misalignment. On the flipside, key facilitators included strong leadership, policy change at the municipal and provincial level, and making active travel part of the school budget. The report was funded by the Alberta Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

"Champions across the province are working hard to support a culture of active travel in their schools. However, what we're finding is that some champions are falling short of achieving their vision of success due to limited resources and supports," said Sultana Macridis, PhD, Research Associate and Knowledge Translation Specialist for ACAL.

To reduce barriers to active school travel across Alberta, the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention (APCCP) wants to see greater provincial leadership. Housed at the University of Alberta, the APCCP is a coalition of 17 Alberta organizations, including ACAL, SHAPE and Ever Active Schools. "Development of an active school transportation plan for Alberta could go a long way in terms of

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ensuring schools and communities have the resources and supports needed to help more kids walk, bike or wheel to school,” noted Kayla Atkey, Policy Analyst for the APCCP.

According to a 2016 survey of 1200 Albertans conducted by researchers at the University of Alberta, 96% of respondents support the implementation of active transportation policies designed to promote walking (e.g. safe routes, adequate lighting). Further, 96% of respondents support safe active travel to school through walk or cycle-to-school programs, crossing patrols or school attendance confirmation.

In November 2016, MLA David Shepherd brought forward the Active Schools Week Act to raise awareness and provide school jurisdictions with planning tools to support active travel. “Unfortunately the Bill did not pass before the end of session, but it highlighted the important role that provincial leadership can play in bringing attention to the many benefits of active school travel,” said Tracey Coutts.

Individuals and schools interested in participating in Wheel Week can register at [www.shapeab.com](http://www.shapeab.com).

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To arrange for an interview: please contact Kayla Atkey at 780-492-0493.

Available Spokespersons:

- Tracey Coutts, School Active Travel Coordinator, SHAPE and Ever Active Schools
- Henry Madsen, Principal, Nellie Carlson, K-9 school, Edmonton
- Sultana Macridis, PhD, Research Associate and Knowledge Translation Specialist, Alberta Centre for Active Living
- Kayla Atkey, Policy Analyst, Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention

#### About the APCCP

The APCCP represents a broad range of practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and community organizations who have come together to coordinate efforts, generate evidence and advocate for policy change to reduce chronic diseases in Alberta. For more information: [www.apccp.ca](http://www.apccp.ca).

#### Resources

- School Active Transportation Survey: A Perspective from Champions, Alberta Centre for Active Living. Available from: [https://www.centre4activeliving.ca/media/filer\\_public/f5/48/f5481384-dfc7-45b6-8a58-86be4b16eebb/2018-active-transportation-report.pdf](https://www.centre4activeliving.ca/media/filer_public/f5/48/f5481384-dfc7-45b6-8a58-86be4b16eebb/2018-active-transportation-report.pdf)
- An Active School Transportation Plan for Alberta: [http://abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/final\\_apccpissuebrief\\_active-school-transportation.pdf](http://abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/final_apccpissuebrief_active-school-transportation.pdf)
- Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs Topic Summary: Physical Activity: <http://abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca/evidence/chronic-disease-prevention-survey/>

#### References

1. Alberta Centre for Active Living. School active transportation survey: a perspective from champions. Accessed May 18<sup>th</sup> from [https://www.centre4activeliving.ca/media/filer\\_public/f5/48/f5481384-dfc7-45b6-8a58-86be4b16eebb/2018-active-transportation-report.pdf](https://www.centre4activeliving.ca/media/filer_public/f5/48/f5481384-dfc7-45b6-8a58-86be4b16eebb/2018-active-transportation-report.pdf)