

With 400 million federal dollars for active transportation infrastructure, now is the time for a provincial active travel strategy in Alberta.

On March 12, the Government of Canada announced a \$400 million fund for active transportation projects and a national active transportation strategy. All Albertans can benefit from this federal investment, but a provincial strategy is needed to guide and attract the dollars toward made-in-Alberta solutions.

Locally, municipalities and schools have been active in this regard: 18 towns and cities across Alberta have committed to active travel plans in the last decade. Since 2017, Ever Active Schools has partnered with 45 schools in 14 school authorities to implement comprehensive active school travel planning.

Celia Lee, executive director of Sustainable Calgary, explains, "What we witness in Alberta is a missing middle: failure to have a provincial strategy in place leaves us ill-positioned to attract federal investments, inform the national strategy, and guide, coordinate and support municipal strategy."

A provincial strategy would support cities, towns, municipalities and school communities to plan, design, and fund capital projects that encourage more active travel among citizens. Alongside economic and environmental benefits, more active travel reduces behavioural risk factors for chronic disease, improves public health and enhances community connectedness

"Public support for this issue is high," said Dr. Kim Raine of the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention. "Our 2019 survey of over 1800 people found that 95% of the general public and 96% of policy influencers supported promoting safe active transportation to school, while 88% supported building and maintaining active transportation infrastructure."

An urgent opportunity exists to consolidate the work of communities, researchers and advocates into a central policy to inform provincial spending and plans that support healthy built environments and their many co-benefits.

"The active transportation needs vary across the province," said Brian Torrance, Director of Ever Active Schools. "We want to amplify the voices of Albertans from rural, urban and Indigenous communities so federal active transportation investments reflect local priorities and advance the well-being of all Albertans."

The Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease and Prevention, Sustainable Calgary and Ever Active Schools suggest a Provincial Active Transportation Strategy grounded in evidence, best practices and the diverse Alberta experience. Adopting this strategy and related policies promoting active travel would have upward influence, informing the National Active Transportation Strategy to address the needs of Albertans.

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