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SPORT HAS NO HOME AT QUEEN'S PARK

Eighty-five provincial sport organizations and \$1.6 billion industry removed from cabinet table

Sport is at the foundation of every Ontario community. Playing hockey in your local women's league, participating in youth soccer, taking in a squash game at the local Y, or playing pick-up basketball at your community centre – all activities are promoted and in most cases facilitated by provincial sport organizations and its thousands of local clubs.

When the Premier announced the new Ontario cabinet on October 20, it did not include the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, formally held by Minister Margaret Best, who became Minister of Consumer Services. Health Promotion and Sport as a Cabinet portfolio had been dissolved. While Health Promotion was redirected to Minister Deb Matthews who continues as Minister of Health and Long Term Care, the Sport portfolio has been left without a Cabinet Minister.

“When Canada hosted the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, British Columbia changed their Ministry of Healthy Living to the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport. We celebrated when Ontario travelled down the same road with the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport,” explained Margaret Emin, Chair, SPORT4ONTARIO. “Now the need to reduce the size of cabinet after winning a minority government has resulted in Health Promotion and Sport potentially being transferred to the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, leaving Sport without a Minister of Sport. Sport has been relegated to obscurity once again.”

Sport has still not officially landed within a portfolio in the Government of Ontario. It is the hope of SPORT4ONTARIO and the provincial sport governing bodies recognized and funded by the previous Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport that sport would retain a seat at the provincial cabinet table, especially when Ontario is the next host of a major, multi-sport Games – 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games.

The *Obesity in Canada* report from the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (2011) stated that the estimated cost of obesity to the Canadian economy was approximately \$4.6 billion in 2008, up \$735 million or about 19% from \$3.9 billion in 2000. This is a conservative estimate, as it is limited to those costs associated with the eight chronic diseases most consistently linked to obesity. Sport has both tremendous health benefits and great economic impact.

According to the Canadian Sport Tourism Alliance, Ontario sport travel makes up nearly \$1.6 billion of the Gross Domestic Product. It's not just major international competitions that bring in revenue to the province; a large part of the funds comes from local sport tournaments in communities across Ontario every weekend.

“In addition to the millions of Ontario residents who participate in basketball as a means of a healthy active lifestyle, our sport contributes millions of dollars in economic impact through sport tourism,” said Michael T. Cvitkovic, Executive Director, Ontario Basketball. “Sport deserves recognition from public office in the same manner as the other provincial portfolios. Premier McGuinty stated that his focus is guiding Ontario through global uncertainty by focusing on building a strong economy. Sport and sport tourism is a driving force in our provincial economy.”

As the Pan/ParaPan American Games torch has been passed to Toronto from Guadalajara, Mexico as host for the 2015 Games, this is the time sports organizations should be thriving, creating legacies that will stem from this international competition. Clear government leadership is required to have sport, and its long-term benefits, at the cabinet table.

SPORT4ONTARIO, in collaboration with provincial partners, is leading the charge to ensure the voice of sport is heard at Queen’s Park. Millions of Ontarians deserve it. Sport is deserving of this.

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About SPORT4ONTARIO

SPORT4ONTARIO is a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the promotion of sport and physical activity in Ontario.