

Commentary

# Commentary on “The BRICS Council of Exercise and Sport Science (BRICSCESS) — A new era has dawned” that has been published on *JSHS*

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In 2018, the *Journal of Sport and Health Science* published an opinion article by Uvinha et al<sup>1</sup> that introduced the readers to the BRICS Council of Exercise and Sport Science (BRICSCESS). BRICS is an acronym coined in 2010 to reflect the first letter of 5 nations with emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The composition of the BRICS nations is of high strategic importance in terms of geography and health because the BRICS countries cover more than one-quarter of the world’s land mass, are home to nearly 40% of the world’s total population, and are undergoing rapid economic and population growth.

In 2011, health ministers from the BRICS nations initiated a discussion about population health, first in reference to HIV/AIDS, and subsequently in how they could develop collaborative public health strategies to address the issues of common health concerns. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are growing rapidly in the BRICS nations. NCD risk factors, which include raised blood pressure, obesity, and elevated glucose, are of growing public health concern given the relative percentage of the global population living in BRICS countries. For example, in nearly every BRICS nation except China, raised blood pressure is approximately 2%–6% higher in males than the global prevalence of 24.1%.<sup>2</sup> The percentage of females in South Africa, Brazil, and Russia who are obese exceeds the global average of 15%.<sup>3</sup> South Africans have fasting blood glucose levels that exceed the global prevalence of 8.5%.<sup>4</sup> Of particular concern is that nearly 35% of males are current smokers, although this value varies among BRICS nations.<sup>4</sup> Such NCD risk factors contribute to the increasing burden of NCDs and disability and premature death due to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and other conditions.

Compelling scientific evidence suggests that regular physical activity (PA) is associated with decreases in levels of glucose, blood pressure, obesity, and improvements in other

medical conditions associated with chronic disease, disability, and premature mortality.<sup>5</sup> Yet, not all adults in the BRICS nations engage in PA at levels recommended by the WHO.<sup>6</sup> Epidemiologic data showed that in 2018 the age-standardized prevalence of insufficient PA among adults in the BRICS nations ranged from 14.1% in China to 47.0% in Brazil. Also of concern is the high prevalence of insufficient PA in India (34.0%), South Africa (38.2%), and Russia (17.1%).<sup>7</sup>

In response to the high prevalence of physical inactivity and health disparities in the BRICS nations, the BRICSCESS was founded in 2014.<sup>1,8</sup> Under the inaugural leadership of Dr. Ming-Kai Chin (Hong Kong, China), Dr. J. Hans de Ridder (South Africa), Dr. Ricardo Ricci Uvinha (Brazil), Dr. Gulshan Khanna (India), and Dr. Maria Abulkhanova (Russia), the BRICSCESS organization aims to promote communication, interaction, and cooperation among research institutes, universities, and future professional leaders and volunteers in exercise science, PA, and sport sciences.

The formation of the organization is significant because it intends to work collaboratively on issues related to the health and wellness of people in the BRICS countries, with the strategic aims focusing on organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops and on publishing resources related to exercise, PA, and sport sciences. One of the unique features of BRICSCESS is that it adopts a multi-interdisciplinary, holistic approach for promoting and enhancing health and wellness of people.

The BRICSCESS inaugural conference was held in Santos, Brazil, in December 2017 with the theme “Sports Mega Events and Health Promotion: Policies and Legacies in Exercise and Sport Science”.<sup>9</sup> The program highlighted Brazil’s accomplishments in hosting 7 mega sporting events in 1 decade, resulting in economic benefits, development of new recreational venues, and enactment of policies regarding sports opportunities and programming. Building on the success of the 2017 conference, the second BRICSCESS conference will be held in Cape Town, South Africa in October 2019 with the theme “Holistic Health, Sports Science and Sustainability: The

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Way Forward".<sup>10</sup> With more than 700 participants from nearly 40 countries expected to attend, the conference, which will focus on the areas of exercise, PA, and sport sciences, will be held in conjunction with the South African Sports Medicine Association and the first World Congress on Future Leaders/Volunteers. The conference will offer an exciting opportunity for PA and sports science researchers and future leaders to develop consensus and produce broad and sustained strategies and actions aimed at addressing major public health issues related to physical inactivity among BRICS nations, as well as among other nations that face the increasing NCD and health care burdens that have an impact on public health.

BRICSCESS's accomplishments, which are designed to increase PA in youth and adults, complement other activities in the BRICS nations. For example, the Russian Federation recently launched a program, "Development of Physical Culture and Sports", intended to increase the number of people who regularly exercise and play sports. Russia's initial goal was 25% participation by 2013 and is now 40% participation by 2020.<sup>11</sup> In 2018, South Africa launched a set of 24-h movement guidelines for children from birth to 5 years.<sup>12</sup> The guidelines integrate PA, sitting behavior, screen time, and sleep. India has adopted national PA guidelines,<sup>13</sup> based on the WHO guidelines,<sup>6</sup> that encourage people to be active, adopting the slogan "Let's be active everyone, everywhere, every day". Brazil has long been known for the *Agita São Paulo* PA promotion program. Started in 1996, the program recommends that people perform at least 30 min/day of moderate-intensity PA.<sup>14</sup> In China, the *Healthy China 2030* blueprint calls for increases in the number of people taking part in physical exercise; its strategic goal is to have 700 million people engaging in PA at least once a week and 435 million more regularly.<sup>15,16</sup> The *Healthy China 2030* blueprint also recommends environmental modifications to make it easier for people to be active. These examples are but a small snapshot of the efforts individual BRICS nations are taking to increase participation in exercise and PA.

From the perspectives of public health and health promotion, BRICSCESS is a timely organization that is urgently needed to bring awareness to the health impacts of physical inactivity and its consequences, and to encourage public actions that prevent NCDs and reduce health costs by promoting PA and sports efforts at the population level in BRICS nations. Linked by a website ([bricscess.co.za](http://bricscess.co.za))<sup>8</sup> with its headquarters in South Africa, BRICSCESS is led by a board of directors and international advisors. Memberships are offered at the institutional, professional individual, student, and lifetime levels. A newsletter highlights activities developed by members who lead exercise, PA, and sports efforts in schools and communities. Perhaps the greatest potential of BRICSCESS is in harnessing the enthusiasm of future leaders/volunteer in promoting PA in their local schools and communities. With each BRICS nation promoting PA in various ways, future leaders/volunteers can support national, regional, and local efforts designed to get people active.

Because BRICSCESS is a new organization, it will take time to realize its impact in increasing exercise, PA, and sports in the BRICS nations. Nevertheless, the time is now to embrace

BRICSCESS's aims to engage future leaders in exercise and sports sciences through international conferences and local activities, to offer international exchanges for young professionals, and to welcome volunteers interested in promoting exercise, PA, and sports to youth and adults living in the BRICS nations. Remembering the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson—"The first wealth is health"<sup>17</sup>—the emerging economies and continuing growth of populations in the BRICS nations require a physically active and healthy population to materialize their goals. BRICSCESS represents a new era in providing a coordinated approach to promoting exercise, PA, sports, and healthy lifestyles for all persons in the BRICS nations.

### Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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