

## 127 Steps Toward a More Active World

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On December 4, 2015, The Global Observatory for Physical Activity (<http://www.globalphysicalactivityobservatory.com/>) released the first ever comprehensive country-by-country report on the status of physical activity surveillance, research, and policy activities for 127 countries around the world.<sup>1</sup> These countries account for 81% of the global population and 76% of the world's physical activity research publications in PubMed. The 127 country cards (available in English and 26 of the original languages<sup>1</sup>) include data on mortality attributable to physical inactivity; as well as the prevalence of adults participating in physical activity sufficient to promote health, research productivity, and national public health policy for physical activity (eg, Appendix Figure 1: Country Card from Japan in English and Japanese).

Physical inactivity accounts for more than 5 million deaths each year globally.<sup>2</sup> The country cards demonstrate that this enormous burden of mortality is spread across low, middle, and high-income countries. The estimated proportion of mortality due to physical inactivity ranges from a high of 19% in Malta to 1% in Bangladesh. Self-reported physical activity levels vary substantially around the world as well, with 6 countries reporting 90% or more of the adult population reaching the 150 minutes/week recommended by the World Health Organization and 16 countries reporting 40% or less of the population meeting the physical activity recommendation.

An encouraging 114 countries have at least 1 national survey on physical activity, although only 31 have some degree of ongoing surveillance. As physical activity has moved into the mainstream of public health, the quantity and quality of research has grown. In 2013, papers on physical activity from 105 countries were published. However, fully 52% of scientific publications on physical activity come from only 6 countries (United States, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Spain, and Germany). The leading 20 countries accounted for 82% of global physical activity research productivity in 2013, and the only low- or middle-income countries (LMIC) appearing on this list were Brazil and China.

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Public health action to reduce physical inactivity is manifest in the incorporation of physical activity into national public health plans and surveillance systems. Thirty-five countries have specific national plans for physical activity and another 68 countries include substantive attention to physical activity within their national non-communicable disease (NCD) prevention or health promotion plans. Unfortunately, only 12 of the 64 countries classified as LMIC in the first release of country cards have a specific national plan for physical activity. Seventy-nine percent of these countries do include physical activity in their national NCD plans.

The initial release of 127 country cards clearly demonstrates the scale and extent of the global pandemic of physical inactivity. There is also good news: half of the countries in the world engage in research on physical activity, and 103 countries (81%) have initiated public health efforts to address physical inactivity as evidenced by inclusion of physical activity within national public health plans or policies. In terms of surveillance, 114 (90%) have included physical activity at least once in a national survey. These are important initial steps along a difficult path. The Global Observatory for Physical Activity will continue to monitor progress against the pandemic of physical inactivity and will release country-specific cards every 2 years.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All the country cards are available in English and also, if the contact agreed, each card was translated into its original language (26 original languages: Arabic, Bulgarian Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Greenlandic, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Maori, Nepalese, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Slovak, Welsh). Although this commentary appears in the September issue of the *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, the actual timing of publication followed that of The Global Observatory for Physical Activity's release of country cards.

### References

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2. Lee IM, Shiroma EJ, Lobelo F, Puska P, Blair SN, Katzmarzyk PT. Effect of physical inactivity on mayor non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy. *Lancet*. 2012;219:219–229. PubMed doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61031-9

# Appendix

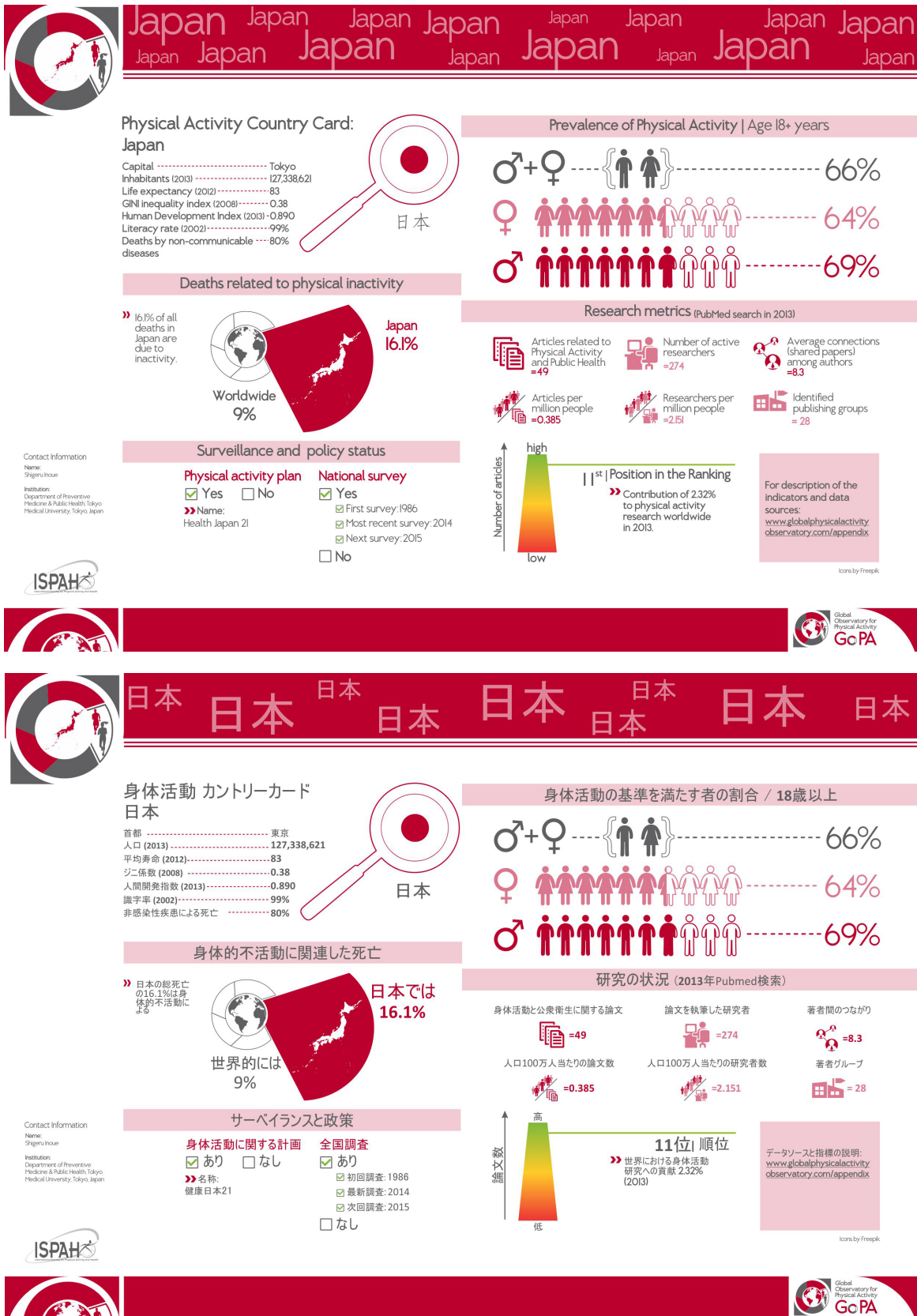


Figure 1 — Japan’s physical activity country card in English (top) and Japanese (bottom).