

Working to become active

Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



Policies to encourage physical activity at work

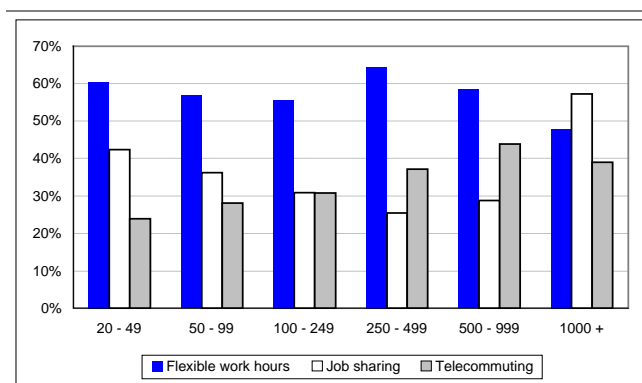
Corporate culture sends messages to employees about the value that a company places on an active workforce through its day-to-day policies, working style, and activities. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work* Survey explores the availability of policies that may help to support and encourage physical activity in the workplace either indirectly (e.g. flexible work arrangements to support employee efforts to be more active) or directly (e.g. permitting employee involvement in special physical activity events during work).

Policies related to job flexibility Many Canadian workplaces do not have policies concerning flexibility of jobs to encourage physical activity at work. Indeed, the majority (70%) of mid-to-large sized companies (with 50 or more employees) do not have policies allowing employees to work at home, 21% allow this as informal practice, and only 9% of companies have a formal policy allowing telecommuting. Two-thirds of mid-to-large sized workplaces (66%) do not have policies for job sharing, 20% informally allow this, and 14% have formal policies on this option. In addition, roughly two out of five (43%) mid-to-large sized companies do not have policies concerning flexible work hours. Over one-third of companies (36%) allow flexibility unofficially, and 21% have instituted formal policies.

Region There are very few differences regarding the provision of workplace policies pertaining to job flexibility by region; however, Quebec workplaces are less likely than those in the Ontario to have informal policies or practices relating to flexible work hours.

Workplace characteristics Companies located in rural environments are the least likely to provide policies, whether formal or informal, related to flexible working hours for employees. When examining specific groups of company size, a few differences appear: the smallest companies (<50 employees) are more likely to report having *no* policies regarding telecommuting compared to certain larger companies (250 to 999 employees), though these smallest companies are more likely to have policies regarding job sharing compared to those with 250 to 499 employees. Companies with a mainly female workforce ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to have some sort of policy for job sharing compared to those with relatively more men. Workplaces with relatively fewer professional positions (<50%) are more likely to have no policies regarding telecommuting compared to those with fewer of these positions. Workplaces with relatively more labour positions are more likely to have no policies regarding telecommuting compared to those with fewer of these positions, while those with fewer labour positions are more likely than to report the availability of informal policies for this option.

POLICIES RELATED TO JOB FLEXIBILITY
by company size, 2007-08



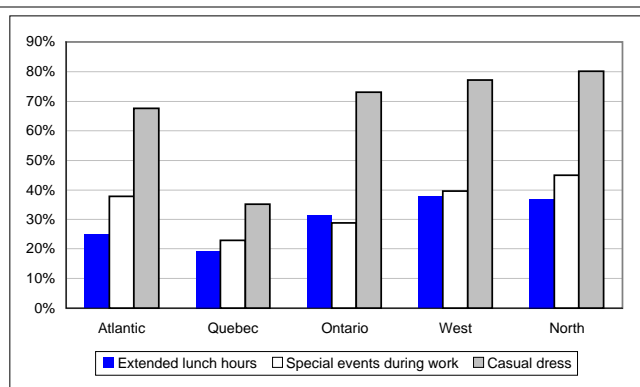
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Policies related to individual supports of physical activity

Roughly one third (32%) of mid-to-large sized workplaces have formal policies allowing dress down days or casual dress codes as a means of encouraging physical activity, while 38% allow this through informal policies, and 31% do not have any such policies in place. Seven in ten (71%) mid-to-large sized companies do not have policies allowing extended lunch hours for employees to participate in physical activity, and almost two-thirds do not have policies encouraging employee participation or organization of special physical activity events during work (64%). However, about one quarter of workplaces permit these practices informally (25% for extended lunch hours and 22% for special events). A minority of workplaces have formal policies regarding extended lunch hours for employees (4%) or policies encouraging employee involvement in special physical activity events during work (14%).

POLICIES RELATED TO INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTS by region, 2007-08



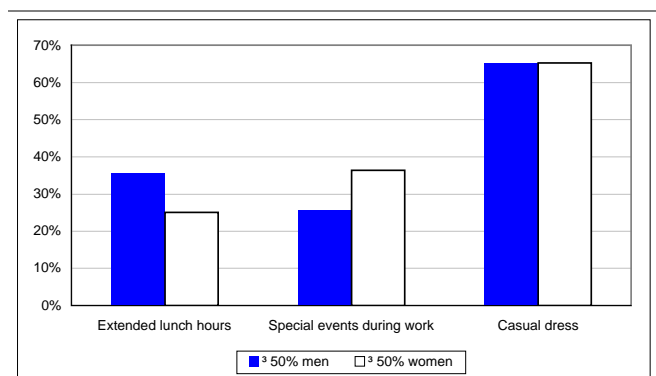
2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Region Quebec workplaces are much more likely than others to have no policies regarding dress-down days or casual dress codes for employees, and they are less likely to informally permit casual dress; Western Canadian workplaces are more likely than average to have dress-down or casual dress policies. Quebec companies are more likely than those in Western Canada to indicate that there are no policies allowing extended lunch hours, and Quebec companies are less likely than most others (except for Atlantic companies) to have informal policies for this practice. Quebec workplaces are more likely than those in Western and Northern Canada to state that they have

no policies regarding employee involvement in physical activity events during work. Companies in the North are generally the most likely to have informal policies related to involvement during work hours.

Workplace characteristics The smallest companies (<50 employees) are more likely than the largest ones (≥500 employees) to have no policies in place allowing employee involvement in physical activity events. Companies with 100 to 499 employees are more likely than the smallest ones (<50 employees) to indicate having formal policies regarding casual dress. Companies with more female employees (≥50%) are more likely to indicate that there are no policies permitting extended lunch hours compared to those with a predominantly male workforce. Companies that are predominately female are, however, more likely to have policies for employee involvement in these events during work, whereas companies that are predominately male are more likely to report that *no* such policies exist. Workplaces that have relatively more labour positions (≥50%) are more likely to have no policies in place permitting casual dress or physical activity events compared to those with relatively few labour positions. Companies with relatively fewer professional positions (<50%) are less likely to indicate that their workplaces have policies permitting casual dress, while those with relatively more professional positions are more likely to have informal policies permitting the organization of special physical activity events during work.

POLICIES RELATED TO INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTS by majority gender at workplace, 2007-08

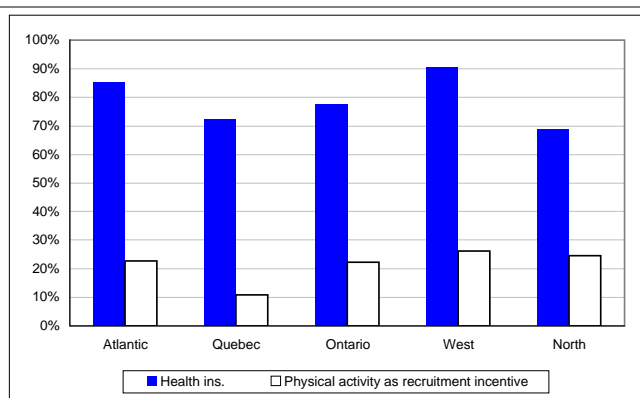


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Policies related to human resources issues The majority (91%) of mid-to-large sized Canadian companies have policies concerning private health insurance benefits for employees, and the remaining 9% do not have policies for this. Although the majority of workplaces do not have policies that promote physical activity opportunities as incentives during the recruitment of new employees (77%), 5% have informal policies for this and a further 18% have formal policies in place.

Region Companies in the Western provinces are more likely than the average Canadian workplace, as well as those from all other regions (except the Atlantic) to indicate that they have formal policies regarding private health insurance. In addition, workplaces in Quebec and the North are more likely than companies in the Western provinces to have no such policies. Quebec workplaces are more likely than the average as well as those in Ontario and the West to indicate that no policies exist regarding the promotion of physical activity opportunities as incentives during recruitment.

POLICIES RELATED TO HUMAN RESOURCES
by region, 2007-08



2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Workplace characteristics Generally speaking, smaller companies (with less than 50 employees) are less likely than larger companies to have formal policies concerning private health insurance benefits for their employees. The proportion of companies that have some sort of policy in place to promote physical activity opportunities as recruitment incentives is greater in larger companies than in smaller companies. Smaller companies are much more likely to indicate that no such policies currently exist. Companies with a

relatively larger female workforce ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to indicate that there are no policies concerning private health insurance benefits, whereas those with relatively fewer women are more likely to state that there are formal policies in place for this. Workplaces that have relatively fewer labour positions ($<50\%$) are more likely to have formal policies regarding the provision of private health insurance benefits. Companies that have relatively more professional positions ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to have formal policies providing private health insurance benefits.

Changes since 2003 in the availability of policies related to physical activity

There have been changes in the proportion of Canadian workplaces offering policies (whether formal or informal) that encourage and support physical activity since 2003. Among companies with 100 employees or less, there has been a decrease over time in the proportion citing informal policies or practices regarding casual dress. Among large companies with 250 or more employees, there has been an increase in the availability of formal policies regarding dress down days or casual dress codes, as well as employee participation in or organization of special physical activity events, between 2003 and 2007. Over time, there has also been an increase among companies with at least 100 employees in indicating that the promotion of physical activity opportunities at work is formally used as an incentive during recruitment, though these companies are less likely to cite informal policies for this than they were in 2003.

Region There have been a few notable differences over time regarding the availability of policies in the workplace within certain regions (among companies with 50 or more employees). Notably: companies in Western Canada are now more likely to have formal policies regarding flexible work hours; those in Ontario are less likely to have informal policies regarding employee participation in or organization of special physical activity events; those in the Atlantic are now more likely to have formal policies regarding the provision of private health benefits; and those in Western Canada and in Ontario are less likely to have informal policies and practices regarding the promotion of physical activity opportunities at work as incentives during recruitment.

Recommendations for action Generally speaking, relatively few Canadian workplaces have formal policies to provide a corporate culture to support and encourage physical activity. Policies and programs could be established to support physical activity and to further add to a positive social and physical environment.

Companies can be encouraged to:

- **Provide comprehensive physical activity programming** Opportunities and programs could be scheduled at various times of the day to ensure that all employees have access when it suits their particular circumstances (in the early morning, during breaks, at lunch, after work, or during the weekends). Workplaces can provide programs offering a variety of structured and non-structured physical activities, competitive and non-competitive activities, and those relevant to both men and women of different ages, cultures, and abilities or disabilities. This may also support individuals of all skill development and confidence levels.
- **Adopt policies to reinforce alternative or indirect supports in the workplace that encourage physical activity** Workplaces can be encouraged when possible to include job sharing, telecommuting, and flexible hours as examples. Currently, a low-to-moderate amount of companies actually have formal policies in place to permit these types of indirect supports. For example, 21% of workplaces (with 50 employees or more) have formal policies regarding flexible hours, 14% have formal policies for job sharing, and a mere 9% have a formal policy allowing telecommuting.
- **Adopt general health promotion policies, with a particular focus on physical activity** Research from the Conference Board of Canada¹ indicates that wellness programming can be one component of business strategies for recruitment. Moreover, organizations are being asked to prove their worth as contributors to social well-being. In response to this, many organizations use ‘triple bottom-line reporting’, where they focus on three elements of organizational sustainability: economic,

environmental, and social. Workplace health programs play an integral role in achieving success on the social bottom line.

- **Ensure adequate training of managers and key personnel** Companies can ensure that personnel involved in programs are trained to increase awareness of physical activity-related policies and programming within the organization. These employees should receive training or development at least once a year to keep on top of current research, skill development, and guidelines related to physical activity. In addition, workplaces could encourage managers or senior staff to be active as they are in an influential position to act as role models for appropriate physical activity behaviour.



¹ Bachman, K. (2002). Health Promotion Programs at Work: A Frivolous Cost or a Sound Investment. The Conference Board of Canada