

Working to become active

Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



Increasing awareness of physical activity

Workplaces are in a particularly strong position to increase awareness of the benefits of physical activity to working Canadians, as they provide access to large proportions of the population (two thirds of Canadians aged 15+ work full or part time¹), structure in the form of existing information and communication systems, social support, and access to facilities or opportunities. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey* explores the availability and awareness of physical activity resources in Canadian workplaces.

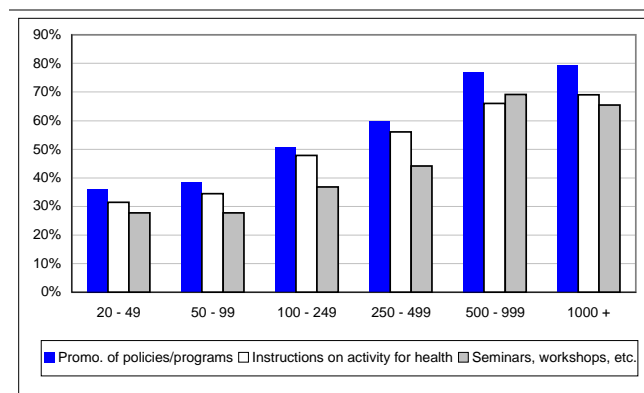
Information on physical activity Companies may provide specific types of information to encourage physical activity among workers in a variety of ways. Information and promotional materials about workplace policies and programs to support physical activity are provided by 45% of companies with 50 or more employees. About four in ten (41%) mid-to-large sized workplaces (with 50 or more employees) provide instructions or guidelines on how to be active for health benefits, and 33% provide seminars, workshops, speakers, or training programs to increase employee awareness of physical activity.

Region Workplaces in Quebec are generally less likely than those in other regions to promote physical activity through information about physical activity policies and programs, instructions or guidelines on how to be more active, and to provide seminars or training programs.

Workplace characteristics The larger the company, the more likely it is to provide specific information to encourage physical activity among workers through each

of the three communications activities. In general, these practices are half as prevalent among small companies compared to larger companies. Only 36% of smaller companies (20–49 employees) provide information and promotional materials about workplace policies and programs to support physical activity, compared to 77% or more among larger companies (500 or more employees). Similarly, 32% of smaller companies provide instructions or guidelines on how to be active for health benefits compared to over 66% of larger companies, and 28% of smaller companies offer seminars, workshops, speakers, or training programs, which is less than half of the proportion that appears among larger companies (65% or more). Companies with a higher male workforce ($\geq 50\%$) are less likely than companies with fewer men to provide seminars, workshops, and training programs and instructions or guidelines on how to be active. Companies employing mainly labour positions ($\geq 50\%$ of workers) are less likely than those with fewer of these positions to report the availability of each of these types of communications encouraging physical activity

PERCEIVED ECONOMIC BENEFITS
by company size, 2007-08



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



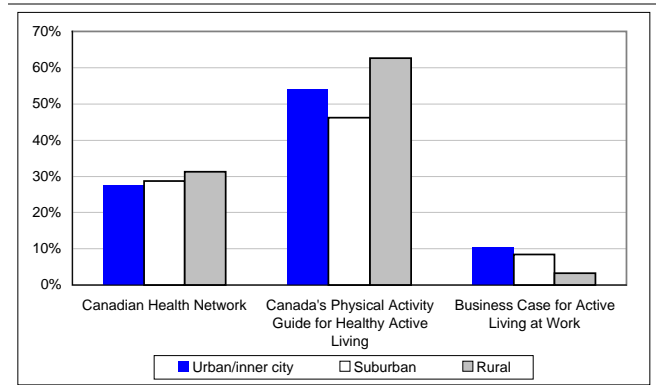
In contrast, companies having predominantly professional positions ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely than those with fewer of these positions to provide guidelines or instructions on how to be more active or to offer seminars, workshops, and training programs for their employees.

Awareness of physical activity information Over half (55%) of Canadian employers with 50 or more employees are aware of Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living,² 29% know of the Canadian Health Network website, and only 8% are aware of the Business Case for Active Living at Work website.³

Region There are generally no differences between regions in awareness of these physical activity resources, with one exception. Companies in Ontario are slightly more likely to be aware of the Canadian Health Network website compared to those in Atlantic Canada.

Workplace characteristics The largest companies (1,000+ employees) are more likely to be aware of the Canadian Health Network website than smaller companies (<100 employees). There are generally no differences in awareness of Canada's Physical Activity Guide or the Business Case for Active Living at Work website with company size. Companies in rural settings are slightly more likely than those in suburban settings to report awareness of Canada's Physical Activity Guide. Worksites in rural locations are, however, slightly more likely than those in inner city or urban locations to report a *lack* of awareness of the Business Case for Active Living at Work website. Companies with a greater proportion of female employees ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely than those with a greater proportion of males to report an awareness of Canada's Physical Activity Guide. Companies with relatively more men ($\geq 50\%$) are less likely to be aware of the Canadian Health Network website. Companies with relatively more clerical positions ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to report a *lack* of awareness of the Business Case for Active Living at Work website than those with fewer of these positions. Workplaces with *fewer* labour positions (<50%) or with *more* professional staff ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to report being aware of the Canadian Health Network website.

AWARENESS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INFORMATION by worksite location, 2007-08



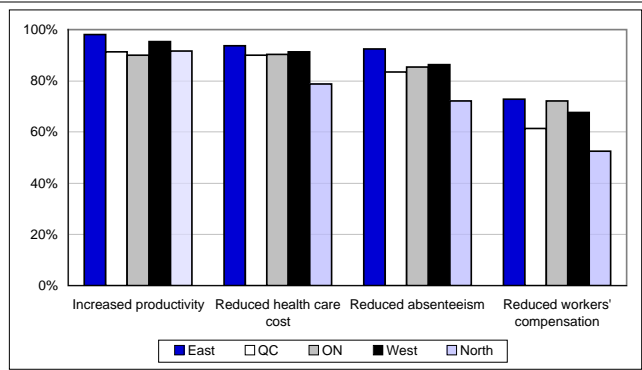
2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Perceived economic benefits of physical activity

The majority of Canadian companies with 50 or more employees consider increased productivity (91%), reduced health care costs and insurance premiums (91%), and reduced absenteeism (87%) to be key benefits of a physical activity program. Other reported benefits of a physical activity program include reduced workers' compensation claims (74%), followed by a reduced number of accidents (71%) and lower turnover rates (67%).

Region Workplaces in the Atlantic are more likely than the average Canadian workplace, as well as those in Quebec and Ontario to report increased productivity as a benefit of having a physical activity program. Companies in Northern Canada are less likely than the national average, and more specifically than those in the Atlantic to report reduced absenteeism and reduced health care costs or insurance premiums as benefits. Companies in the North are also less likely than those in Atlantic Canada and Ontario to report lower staff turnover as a benefit of a physical activity program.

**PERCEIVED ECONOMIC BENEFITS
by region, 2007-08**



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

Workplace characteristics Companies with 250-499 employees are more likely than those with 100-249 employees to cite increased productivity as a benefit of a physical activity program. Larger companies (1,000+ employees) are more likely than smaller companies (<100 employees) to report reduced health care costs and insurance premiums, as well as a reduced number of accidents, as benefits of a physical activity program. These largest workplaces are also the most likely to cite reduced workers' compensation claims as a benefit of a physical activity program.

Perceived human resource benefits of physical activity The majority of companies with 50 employees or more cite human resource related benefits as outcomes of a physical activity program at work: 99% of companies report improved employee health and wellness, 95% cite improved morale, followed by 91% who cite better employee relations, 89% reporting improved corporate culture, and 86% who report greater job satisfaction among employees.

Region Atlantic companies are more likely than those in Ontario to report greater job satisfaction as a key benefit of having a physical activity program. Atlantic workplaces are also more likely than the national average and specifically those in Quebec to report better employee relations as a benefit. There are no other significant regional differences in perceived human resource benefits.

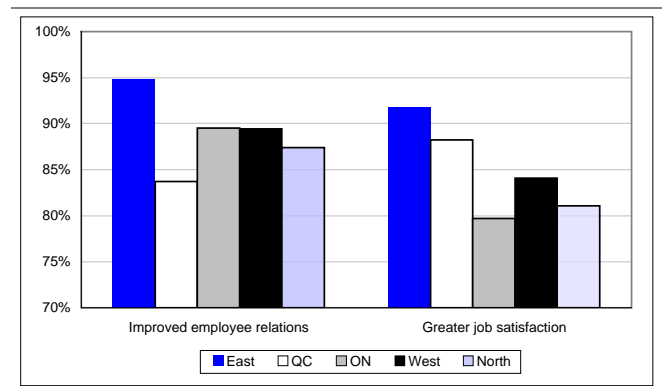
Workplace characteristics There are no differences between workplace characteristics such as company size, location of workplace, distribution of employee

demographics such as gender and occupation and the perceived human resources benefits of physical activity.

Changes in awareness since 2003 The proportions of large companies (250 or more employees) that provide seminars, workshops, expert speakers, or training programs to increase awareness of physical activity or that provide instructions or guidelines on how to be active for health benefits have increased since 2003.

The proportions citing economic benefits of physical activity (including reduced absenteeism, reduced health care costs and premiums, lower staff turnover, reduced number of accidents, and reduced workers' compensation claims), as well as perceived human resource benefits of physical activity (greater job satisfaction, better employee relations, improved corporate culture, improved employee health and wellness, and improved morale), have increased over time among all company sizes.

**PERCEIVED BENEFITS
by region, 2003 & 2007-08**



2003 & 2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Region Compared to 2003, workplaces in Quebec are now less likely to provide information and promotional materials about policies and programs to support physical activity at work. The proportion indicating that increased productivity (except not productivity), reduced absenteeism, and reduced accidents are benefits of having a physical activity program has increased in Ontario, the Atlantic, and Western Canada since 2003. Similarly, the proportions citing reduced health care costs or premiums, lower staff turnover, reduced workers'

compensation claims, and human resource benefits of physical activity (i.e., greater job satisfaction, improved corporate culture, improved employee health and wellness, and improved morale) have increased generally in all regions over this time period. Since 2003, companies in Ontario and in Western Canada have become more likely to cite better employee relations as a benefit of physical activity.

Recommendations for action Workplaces are an ideal venue for increasing awareness about the benefits of physical activity to Canadian workers given the large proportion of Canadians in the labour force, the amount of hours per day spent at the worksite, as well as the existing policy and communication vehicles available at the workplace. Companies can also be encouraged to:

- **Obtain and provide appropriate tools and resources to promote physical activity** Workplaces can be encouraged to obtain, use, or modify existing resources and tools for promoting physical activity in the workplace, such as Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living, Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria,⁴ Stairway to Health,⁵ the Business Case for Active Living and Health at Work website, the Canadian Health Network website, and provincial and territorial websites. Promote local health fairs, workshops, and information sessions involving physical activity professionals in the community (e.g. municipal recreation or YM/YWCA staff, university professors, kinesiologists, etc) as a source of physical activity information.
- **Involve experts and professionals to motivate the workforce** Workplaces can be encouraged to network with local physical activity experts (fitness leaders and professionals in national, provincial, or regional physical activity organizations) to speak to or motivate employees regarding specific aspects of physical activity. As examples, companies can provide lunch-hour talks on a variety of topics related to health and well-being,⁶ workshops, lectures, discussion groups, videos or books on loan, internet resources, physical activity information brochures in

company newsletters, or other types of media. Companies can also encourage employees to discuss physical activity with their occupational health and safety nurses, community recreation staff, or other health care professionals.⁷

- **Provide targeted messages** Specific targeted messages should vary depending on the physical activity level and motivation level of individuals.⁸ This means that a variety of materials with different types of messages (benefits of physical activity, overcoming barriers, etc) to employees are required. Materials should contain information that is based on theory and should be easy to read and to look at, including interesting colour, font, and so on.⁹ Companies should provide maximum exposure to the employee population, ensuring that physical activity information is attractive and strategically posted.



- ¹ Statistics Canada. Labour Force Information – June 10 – 16, 2007. Publication 71-001. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/71-001-XIE/2007006/tablesectionlist.htm>
- ² Health Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (2004). Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living. [On-line]. Available: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html> (accessed 2008)
- ³ Public Health Agency of Canada and Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work. Active Living at work [On-line] Available : <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work/> (accessed April 2008).
- ⁴ National Quality Institute (Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria. [On-line] Available: http://www.nqi.ca/nqistore/product_details.aspx?ID=63 (Accessed April 2008)
- ⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada. Welcome to Stairway to Health. [On-line] Available: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.htm> (Accessed April 2008)
- ⁶ Health Canada. (1999). *HealthWorks: A "how-to" for health and business success*. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. (Cat. no. H39-474/1999E).
- ⁷ DiNubile, N.A., & Sherman, C. (1999). Exercise and the bottom line. Promoting physical and fiscal fitness in the workplace: a commentary. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, 27(2), 37-43.
- ⁸ Marcus, B.H., Emmons, K.M., Simkin-Silverman, L.R., Linnan, L.A., Taylor, E.R., Bock, B.C., Roberts, M.B., Rossi, J.S., & Abrams, D.B. (1998). Evaluation of motivationally tailored versus standard self-help physical activity interventions at the workplace. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 12 (4), 246-253.
- ⁹ Peterson, T.R., & Aldana, S.G. (1999). Improving exercise behavior: An application of the Stages of Change Model in a worksite setting. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 13(4), 229-232.