

# Working to become active

## Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace

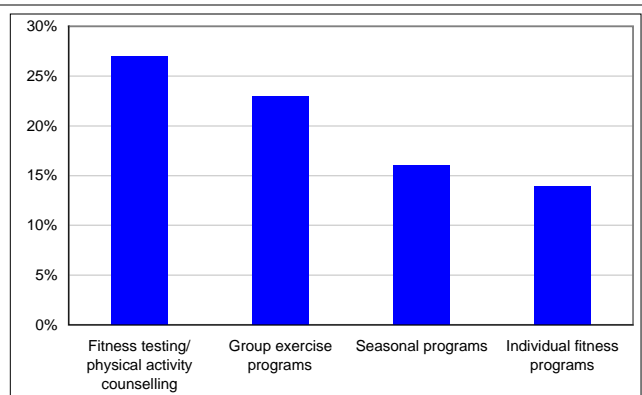


### Providing supportive programming for physical activity at work

Physical activity programming in the workplace can be an effective means of increasing physical activity in workers for both the short and long term.<sup>1,2</sup> The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey* explores the availability of and access to physical activity programming in Canadian workplaces.

**Fitness programs at work** Relatively few Canadian companies report fitness programs at work. Approximately one fifth of mid-to-large sized companies (having 50 or more employees) offer access to fitness testing or physical activity counselling (27%) and to group exercise programs such as walking clubs on-site (23%). In addition, 16% of these companies offer seasonal programs that encourage year-long participation, and 14% offer individual fitness programs.

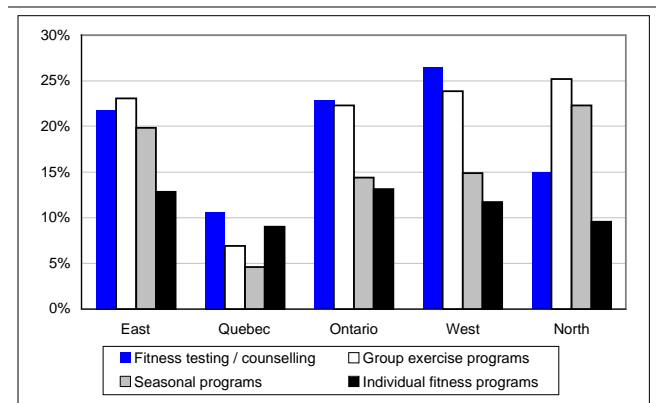
**FITNESS PROGRAMS overall, 2007-08**



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

**Region** Companies in Quebec report less access to group exercise programs than companies elsewhere, and are also less likely to provide access to fitness testing or physical activity counselling than the national average and specifically than those located in Ontario and the West.

**FITNESS PROGRAMS by region, 2007-08**



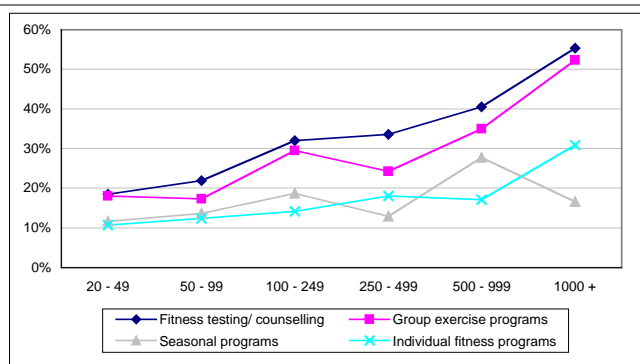
2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey*, CFLRI

**Workplace characteristics** The availability of programs at work is generally more prevalent in larger companies. For example, both group exercise programs and fitness testing or counselling are offered in about 20% of small-to-mid sized companies (with 20-99 employees), whereas they are offered by half of the largest companies (1000 or more employees). A similar pattern occurs for individual fitness programs; however, companies with 500-999 employees are more likely than small companies to offer seasonal programs. Companies with a predominantly female workforce ( $\geq 50\%$  of employees) are more likely to offer group exercise programs such as running or walking clubs than those that have fewer women. Workplaces that have a predominately labour-based workforce ( $\geq 50\%$  of employees) are more likely



than those with fewer such positions to offer group exercise programs, fitness testing or physical activity counselling, and seasonal physical activity programs. Conversely, companies that have a greater proportion of professionals ( $\geq 50\%$ ) are more likely to offer group exercise programs on-site and seasonal programs to encourage physical activity. There are no differences in the likelihood of offering these types of fitness programs at work by location of the company (inner city, suburban, or rural).

### FITNESS PROGRAMS company size, 2007-08

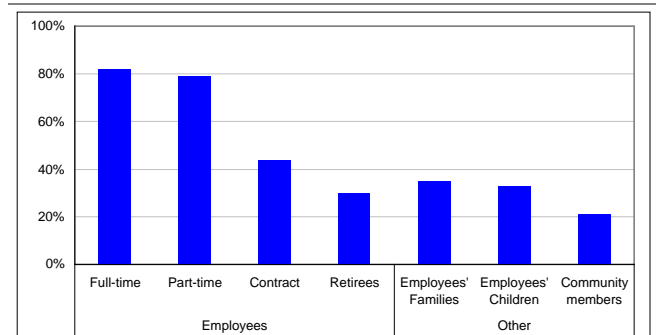


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

### Inclusiveness of, and access to, programming

Among mid-to-large companies with programs, most full-time employees (82%) can access on-site physical activity amenities (equipment, facilities, and programs). The majority of these are also accessible to part-time employees (79%). Access is more limited among contract workers (44%), employees' children (33%), and other family members (35%). These companies also provide access to such amenities to retired employees (30%) and to other members of the community (21%). Most mid-to-large companies allow access after work (74%), during lunch (72%), before work (67%), or on weekends (69%). About four in ten companies (42%) permit use of these during work hours.

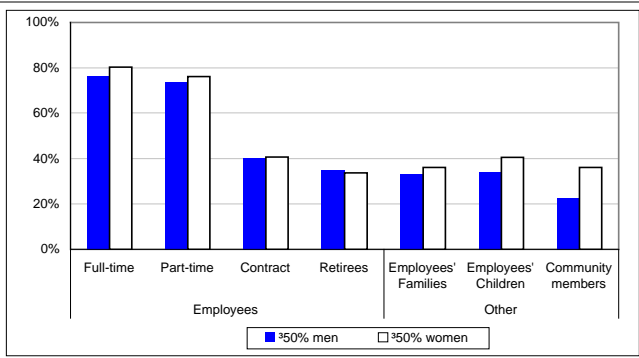
### INCLUSIVENESS OF PROGRAMS overall, 2007-08



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

Region Workplaces in Ontario and the West are more likely than those in Quebec to permit access to programs by their full-time staff. Companies in the Quebec are less likely than those in Ontario, Western and Northern Canada to provide access to programs among part-time workers. Workplaces in Quebec are less likely than the average Canadian workplace to report access by full-time and part-time workers. Companies in the West are more likely to provide access to employees' families than those in Quebec and Ontario. Open access to other members of the community does not differ by region. Among companies with programs, those in the West are more likely than those in Ontario to provide access during work hours. Those in Quebec are less likely than average to provide access both before and after work; Quebec companies are less likely than those in Ontario, the West, and the North to provide access after work, and are less likely than all other regions to provide access before work. Companies in the West and North are more likely than the average Canadian company, and specifically than those in Quebec and Ontario to permit access on weekends.

**INCLUSIVENESS OF PROGRAMS  
by employee gender, 2007-08**

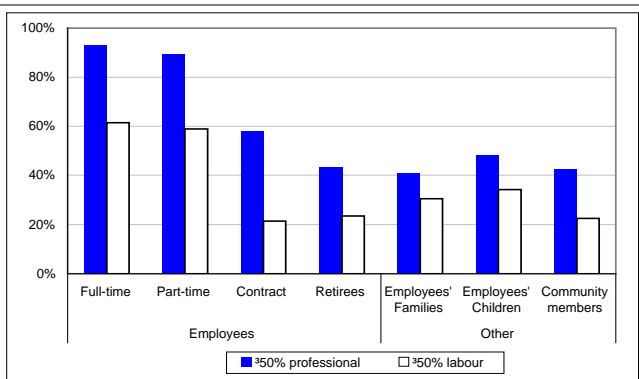


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

**Workplace characteristics** The largest companies (with 1000 or more employees) are more likely than those with fewer than 500 employees to permit access to programs by full-time or part-time workers and to provide access after work or in the evenings.

Workplaces with a predominately female ( $\geq 50\%$ ) workforce and those with mainly professional ( $\geq 50\%$ ) positions are more likely to allow other members of the community to use the company's physical activity equipment or facilities, or to participate in physical activity programs. Companies with mainly labour positions are less likely than others, and those with mainly professional positions are more likely, to report that access to physical activity opportunities is open to full-time, part-time, and contract workers. Companies with predominantly labour positions are also less likely than others to provide access before work, during lunch, and after work or in the evenings. Companies with mainly professional positions are more likely than others to provide access after work or in the evenings.

**INCLUSIVENESS OF PROGRAMS  
by certain professions, 2007-08**



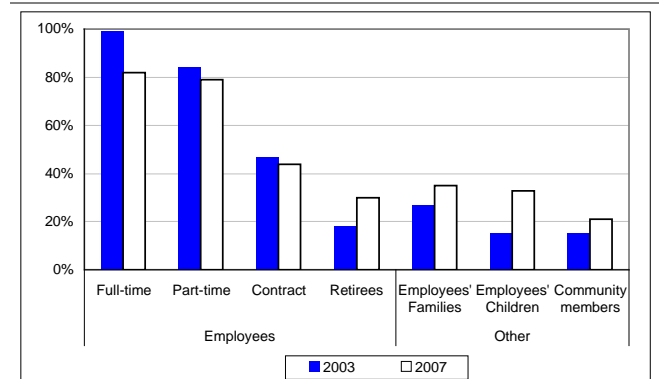
2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

**Trends in availability and access to fitness programming**

Since 2003, the availability of group exercise programs has increased among companies with 100 to 249 employees. Similarly, the availability of fitness testing or physical activity counselling has also increased over time among companies with 100 or more employees. The availability of individual fitness programs and seasonal programs has not changed since 2003. Employee access among companies with on-site physical activity amenities (equipment, facilities, and programs) has decreased since 2003 for full-time (all company sizes) and part-time employees (among companies with fewer than 100 employees), but has increased for employees' children in companies with fewer than 100 employees. Also, there has been an increased access to programs during lunch and after work or in the evening for companies with 100 or more employees.

**Region.** The availability of fitness testing and physical activity counselling has increased over time in companies with 50 or more employees in Western Canada. There are no regional differences with the availability of individualized or group fitness programs or seasonal programs over time. Access to company fitness programs within region has changed since 2003; namely, full-time employee access has decreased over time in all regions. Employees' children in Western companies are now more likely to have access than they were in 2003. The times that programs are available has increased over time, in that there have been increases in the availability of opportunities after work or in the evenings in Quebec, Ontario, and Western Canada.

**TRENDS IN AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS  
trends between 2003 & 2007-08**



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

**Recommendations for action** Fitness programs are the most common type of workplace health program, and although only 29% of surveyed worksites with 100 or more employees offer them,<sup>3</sup> research indicates that they can be effective in increasing physical activity,<sup>4,5</sup> increasing worker productivity, and reducing short term disability workdays.<sup>6</sup> In addition, workplaces can:

- **Motivate inactive workers** Given that active employees are more likely to participate in physical activity programs at work and to use group discounts and subsidies, the provision of targeted or individualized instruction or counselling may prove useful for encouraging inactive employees to do the same. Using a population health perspective, the largest gains to the public system can be made by getting inactive adults to increase their activity levels while at the same time reinforcing active individuals to become even more active.<sup>7</sup> These gains potentially translate into workplace benefits of reduced absenteeism and increased productivity.

- **Provide a variety of opportunities** Formal fitness programs offer more structured, rather than incidental, physical activity opportunities. In order to increase opportunities to be active among those who do not currently participate, workplaces could consider promoting a broad range of opportunities that appeal to both those who prefer team activities and those who prefer individual activities. Workplaces can offer easy and low-cost activities which can be integrated into daily life, such as walking at lunch.<sup>8</sup> Larger companies could encourage or facilitate the formation of recreational clubs such as ski or softball clubs. Smaller companies could investigate local community recreational clubs or opportunities for team sports for their employees (cross-country leagues within an industrial park or entering a team in a nearby community recreation league).

- **Be inclusive** As these findings show, company programs could be open to all: to full-time and part-time workers, to contract workers, to retired workers, and to employees' families. As members of the local community, large and small companies could look to community programs to enlarge the

type of opportunities accessible to their employees. Reciprocally, companies can open their programs to members of the community more generally.



- <sup>1</sup> Purath, J., Michaels Miller, A., McCabe, G., & Wilber, J. (2004). A brief intervention to increase physical activity in sedentary working women. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 36(1); 76-91.
- <sup>2</sup> Hallam, JS., & Petosa, R. (2004). The Long-Term impact of a four-Session Work-Site Intervention of Selected Social Cognitive Theory Variables Linked to Adult Exercise Adherence. *Health Education and Behavior*. 31(1): 88-100.
- <sup>3</sup> Macdonald, S., Csiernik, R., Durand, P., Rylett, M., & Wild, TC. (2006). Prevalence and factors related to Canadian workplace health programs. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 97(2): 121-125
- <sup>4</sup> Proper, KI., Koning, M., Van der Beek, AJ. Hildebrandt, VH. Rosscher RJ. & van Mechelen W. (2002). The Effectiveness of Worksite Physical Activity programs on Physical Activity, Physical Fitness and Health. *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*. 13: 106-117.
- <sup>5</sup> Lucove, JC. Huston, SL. & Evernson KR. Workers' Perceptions about Worksite Policies and Environments and their Association with Leisure-Time Physical Activity. *American Journal of Health Promotion* 21(3):196-200.
- <sup>6</sup> Burton, WN., McCalister, KT., Chen C. & Edington EW. (2005), The association of health status, worksite fitness centre participation, and two measures of productivity. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, April. 47(4): 343-347
- <sup>7</sup> Blair SN, Kohl HW, Gordon NF, & Paffenbarger RS JR. (1992). How much physical activity is good for health? *Annu Rev Public Health*. 13:99-126.
- <sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. (1999). Promoting physical activity: A guide for community action. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.