

Working to become active

Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



Barriers to participation in activity

Barriers to participation in physical activity are perceived hindrances or impediments that prevent a person from being more active or prevent the existence or expansion of physical activity opportunities. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey* explores perceptions of barriers that appear in Canadian workplaces, such as those pertaining to the environment, personnel, information, and financial support.

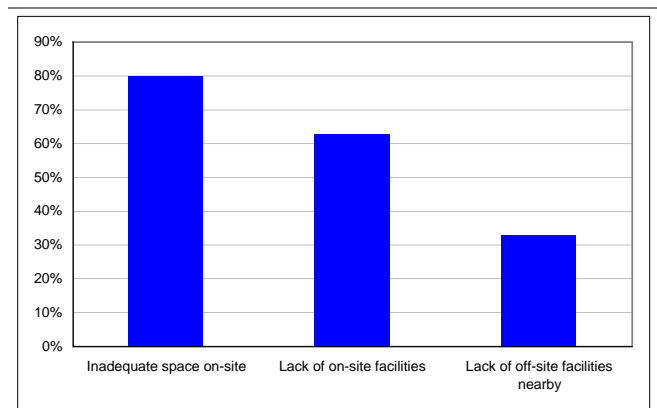
Inadequate space and facilities Among companies with 50 or more employees, inadequate space and facilities at the workplace represent key factors preventing the initiation or expansion of physical activity programs at work, with 80% of employers reporting inadequate space and 63% of employers citing the lack of on-site facilities (such as showers, bicycle racks, and so on). One third (33%) of these mid-to-large sized companies report that the lack of nearby off-site facilities is an issue constraining the provision of workplace physical activity programs.

Region Companies in Quebec are more likely than those in Western Canada to cite the lack of on-site lockers, showers, and other facilities as an issue. Otherwise, there are no differences across the regions of Canada with respect to space or facility availability.

Workplace characteristics In general, the greater the degree of urbanization, the more likely it is that companies cite inadequate space as an issue (81% of urban companies versus 68% of rural companies). Larger companies are less likely to cite the lack of on-site facilities as a barrier. Companies with 250 to 999 employees are more likely than small companies

(<50 employees) to cite the lack of on-site facilities as an issue. Companies with fewer professional positions (<50%) are more likely to report inadequate space and lack of facilities at the workplace as a perceived barrier compared to those with more of these positions. Moreover, companies with fewer labour positions (<50%) are more likely than companies with a higher proportion of these types of positions to cite the lack of off-site facilities as a barrier, whereas companies with a majority of professional positions ($\geq 50\%$) are less likely than those with fewer such positions to report this as a problem.

INADEQUATE SPACE AND FACILITIES overall, 2007-08



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

Lack of interest and support A frequently cited barrier to initiating or expanding an activity program among companies with 50 or more employees is lack of personnel or volunteers to manage the program, as reported by close to two-thirds (65%) of companies. More than half (55%) of companies this size report that low employee interest or motivation to participate is a barrier, whereas 42% consider a lack of management

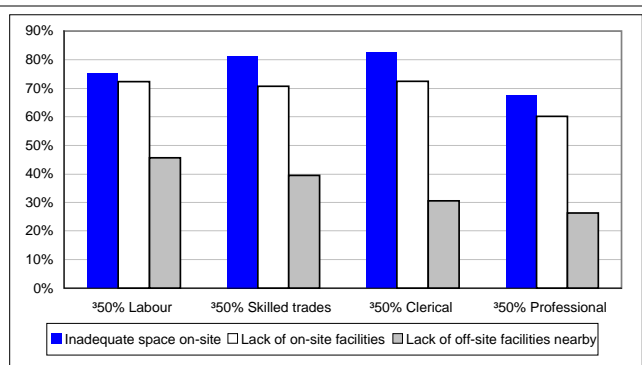


support or interest to be a barrier. Lack of company funds also appears to be a key issue, cited by roughly half of companies (54%).

Region Lack of company funds appears to be a more prevalent issue in the Atlantic compared to workplaces in Western Canada. Low employee interest in participating, lack of management support, and lack of managing personnel or volunteers do not differ by region.

Workplace characteristics Companies with a predominantly female workforce ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to indicate that the lack of company funds is a barrier, whereas those with a predominantly male workforce are less likely to do so. Additionally, workplaces that are predominantly professional are more likely to cite a lack of company funds as significant barrier to physical activity programs. Otherwise, although there are no other significant differences by type of occupation with regard to lack of funds, personnel to manage programs, and management support, companies in which the majority of positions are in general labour are more likely to report that low employee interest to participate is a barrier in offering or expanding a physical activity program.

**LACK OF INTEREST AND SUPPORT
by profession, 2007-08**



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

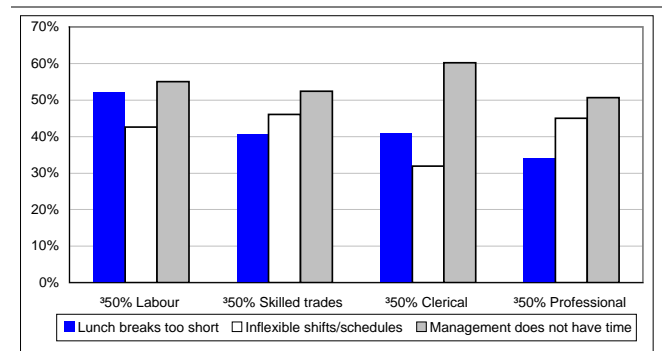
Shortage of time Half of mid-to-large sized Canadian companies report that management’s lack of time prevents the start or expansion of workplace physical activity programs. More than four in ten companies with at least 50 employees cite too short lunch breaks (45%) and inflexible shifts or work

schedules (42%) as barriers to offering more workplace programs.

Region There are no significant regional differences in the percentage of companies reporting inflexible shifts or work schedules, short lunch breaks, and lack of management time as issues.

Workplace characteristics Companies with fewer professional positions ($< 50\%$) are more likely to report that short lunch breaks are a barrier compared to companies which are composed of more professional positions. Companies with predominantly labour positions ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely than those with fewer of these positions to cite short lunch breaks as a barrier. There are no significant differences related to workplace characteristics in the percentages reporting that inflexible shifts or work schedules and lack of management time are constraints to offering workplace programs.

**SHORTAGE OF TIME
by profession, 2007-08**

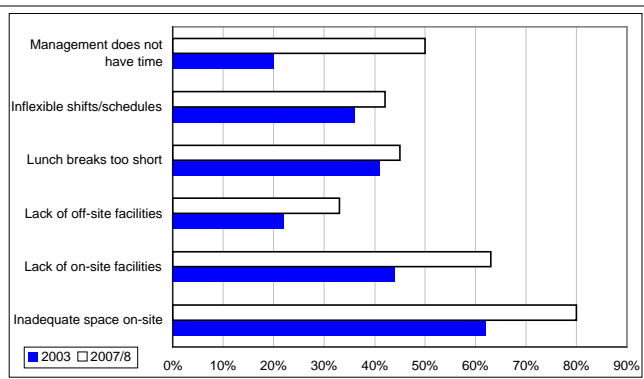


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Changes in barriers since 2003 Since 2003, there have been increases in the percentage of companies reporting key barriers to starting or increasing workplace physical activity programs when examining these by company size. For example, among companies with fewer than 250 employees, inadequate space is now more likely to be seen as a barrier compared to 2003. In addition, lack of nearby off-site facilities for physical activity is now a more prevalent barrier among companies with less than 100 employees than it was in 2003. Barriers such as the lack of on-site facilities (e.g., showers, lockers, etc.), the lack of management time, low employee interest or motivation to participate, and the lack of required

and trained staff are now more prevalent among all company sizes compared to 2003. Moreover, a lack of support or interest from management is now more prevalent as a barrier among smaller companies (<100 employees) and larger companies (250+ employees) compared to companies of the same size in 2003. Although a 2003 methods study indicated no significant differences between self-completed and telephone surveys, it is possible that the change to a telephone interview has introduced a social desirability bias to explain why the company does not have programs, and thus has contributed to the above-noted changes over time.

CHANGES IN BARRIERS trends, 2003 – 2007/08



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

Region Compared to 2003, companies in Ontario, the Atlantic, and Western Canada are now more likely to cite the lack of adequate on-site space and the lack of management time as barriers. Similarly, companies in Ontario and Western Canada are now more likely to cite the lack of on-site facilities as a barrier (e.g., lack of showers, lockers, etc). Lack of employee interest and motivation to participate in physical activity programming, as well as a lack of required staff or trained personnel, are now more prevalent in all regions compared to 2003.

Recommendations for action Tight deadlines and work demands are frequently cited as barriers to physical activity and these types of barriers can have health consequences (e.g., increased cigarette use, unhealthy weight gain, etc), in addition to those related to physical inactivity. Canadian data¹ indicate that employees who increased their hours of work from a standard work week over time increased the

risk of negative health behaviours. Workplaces can play a key role in helping employees overcome barriers or motivating their workforce. For example, companies can:

- Understand differences in barriers by employee gender, age, and occupation** The prevalence of key barriers is associated with demographic and economic variables. The employee composition of a workplace can influence policies that are established to help overcome persistent barriers, such as: flexible hours to help employees manage work demands and fit physical activity into their daily routine, telecommuting or job sharing and active breaks to help overcome the perceived barrier of a lack of time, and providing child care and family-friendly opportunities to help alleviate the barrier of competing demands. An employee survey may help to identify potential barriers and enablers that will help certain populations overcome barriers pertaining specifically to them.
- Provide targeted advice** Individual counselling or group information sessions could focus on how to overcome barriers to physical activity, how to establish personal goals for physical activity, social benefits related to physical activity, opportunities for physical activity in the community, information that develops confidence and skills for various types of activities, and injury prevention. It may help to involve physicians, local public health officials, or other health care professionals when “making the case” for physical activity in the workplace. Companies can also invite local recreation or public health staff to discuss the availability of various physical activity opportunities in the community and encourage employees to become more active.
- Motivate disinterested employees** Workplaces could fully involve employees in the development and ongoing maintenance of physical activity programs. Increased engagement of employees in the planning process may increase participation levels in the programs by addressing employee needs while helping to alleviate time issues for management.

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- **Use existing tools and resources** Canadian resources have been established and designed to help workplaces plan and implement a successful physical activity program. For example, case templates and frameworks for building workplace programs,² self-evaluation, and auditing tools^{2,3} already exist and are readily available on the internet. In addition, the Alberta Centre for Active Living⁴ offers tools, information on benefits, step-by-step guides, and practical ideas in order to increase promotion of physical activity at work.
 - **Promote alternatives when lacking space** Inadequate space is a key issue and is apparent for all types of workplaces. Workplaces could consider: establishing agreements with local off-site physical activity facilities for group discounts for employees, subsidizing fitness club memberships, or renting off-site facilities in the community (including community centres, schools, and church halls).



¹ Shields, M. (2000, Spring). Long Working hours and health. Perspectives on Labour and income. Statistics Canada, Catalogue number 75-001-XPE.

² Plotnikoff, R., Fein, A., Milton, L., Prodaniuk, T., & Mayes, V. (2003). Workplace physical activity framework. Alberta Centre for Active Living. [On-line] Available: <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/en/index.html>

³ National Quality Institute (Accessed March 2008). NQI Tools for Small Business [On-line] Available: http://www.nqi.ca/small_business/default.aspx

⁴ Alberta Centre for Active Living. (accessed March 2008). Physical activity @ work [on-line]. Available: <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace/en/index.html>