

Working to become active

Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



Demand for resources to support physical activity

A variety of resources can be helpful for workplaces in developing and expanding physical activity programs, such as information, access to facilities and services, or additional human and financial resources. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey* explores the type of resources that would be most beneficial to companies.

Providing more specific information and resources

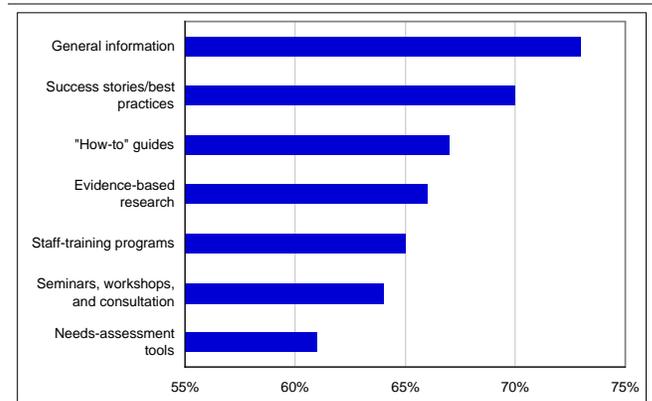
The provision of various resources and information on physical activity can be extremely valuable to workplaces in encouraging employees to be more active. The majority of mid-to-large Canadian companies, having 50 or more employees, report that it would be helpful to them to be offered general information on how to go about developing and implementing programs (73%), evidence-based research on the benefits of physical activity at work (66%), “how-to” implementation guides or case-building templates (67%), seminars, workshops, or consultation services (64%), information on success stories or best practices (70%), staff training programs (65%), and needs-assessment tools (61%).

Region Companies in the North are less likely than the national average and specifically those in Atlantic and Western Canada to indicate that needs assessment tools would be beneficial. Further, workplaces in the North and in Quebec are less likely than those in Atlantic Canada to indicate that seminars, workshops, and consultative services would help in developing physical activity programs. Northern Canadian workplaces are also more likely than Atlantic and Western Canadian workplaces to indicate that general

information and needs assessment tools would be helpful in developing physical activity opportunities at work.

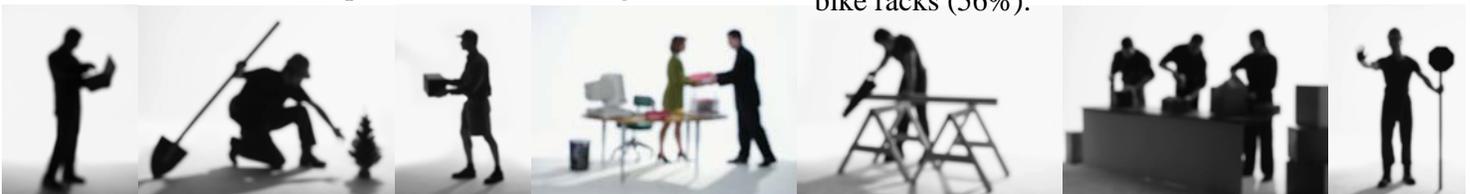
Workplace characteristics The potential demand for each type of informational resource or service may be described as reasonably high across a range of workplace characteristics, in that half to three-quarters of all companies state that these resources would be helpful regardless of company size, composition of the workforce, or whether the workplace is located in an inner-city, suburban, or rural environment.

PROVIDING SPECIFIC INFORMATION AND RESOURCES overall, 2007-08



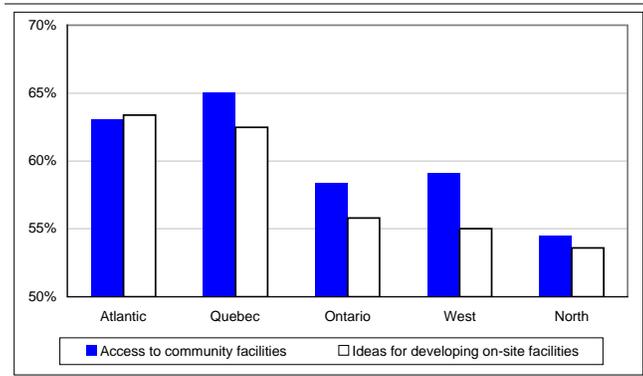
2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey*, CFLRI

Accessing and providing supportive facilities In addition to specific informational materials and services, Canadian companies may find it beneficial to be provided with more facilities appropriate for physical activity. Most mid-to-large companies indicate that it would be useful to have access to community facilities such as schools or community centres (55%) and to be offered practical ideas for developing on-site facilities like showers, lockers, or bike racks (56%).



Region There are no significant regional differences in the potential demand for resources to help companies expand supportive facilities.

PROVIDING MORE FACILITIES
by region, 2007-08



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

Workplace characteristics Companies with 1,000 or more employees are more likely than others to report that practical ideas for developing on-site facilities (e.g., showers, locker areas, bicycle racks, etc.) would be helpful.

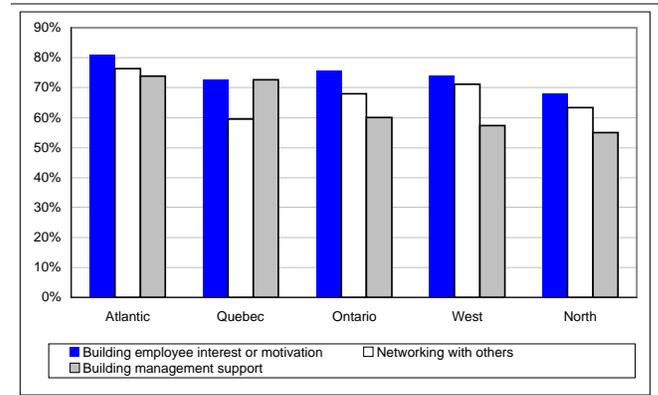
Building personnel support Approximately three-quarters (78%) of mid-to-large companies indicate that help in building employee interest or motivation to participate in physical activity programs would be beneficial to them. In addition, 67% indicate that networking with others who offer such programs would be beneficial, and 65% indicate that help in building management support for such programs would be as well.

Region Companies in the Atlantic are more likely than those in Ontario and Western Canadian companies to report that help in building management support for physical activity programs would be useful to them. Quebec companies are less likely than those in the Atlantic provinces to indicate that networking with others who offer physical activity programs would be useful.

Workplace characteristics Companies with 250 to 499 employees are more likely than the national average to report that help in building employee interest or motivation to participate in physical activity programs would be useful, while those with 1,000 or more

employees are more likely than the national average to report that it would be useful to network with others who offer such programs.

BUILDING PERSONNEL SUPPORT
by region, 2007-08



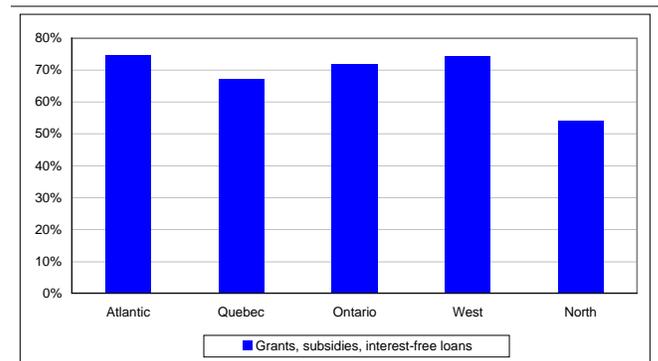
2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Increasing funding support for physical activity

Almost three-quarters of smaller (72%) and mid-to-large (71%) Canadian workplaces report that grants, subsidies, or interest-free loans would be helpful to them in developing or expanding physical activity programs for their employees.)

Region Workplaces in the North are less likely than others (except for those in Quebec) to report that grants, subsidies, or interest-free loans would be of benefit to them.

INCREASING FUNDING SUPPORT
by region, 2007-08



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

Workplace characteristics Companies of all sizes report that grants, subsidies, or interest-free loans would be helpful. Those companies in which men

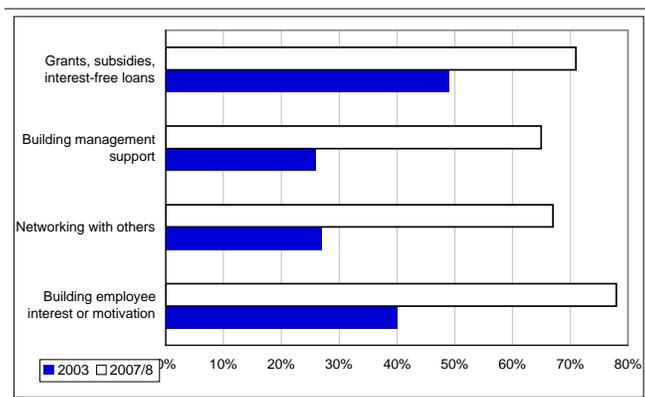
comprise less than half of the workforce are more likely than those in which men comprise half or more of the workforce to indicate that they would benefit from grants, subsidies, or loans. It is therefore unsurprising that companies in which women comprise less than half of the workforce are less likely than those in which women comprise half or more of the workforce to indicate that they would benefit from such funding.

Changes in the demand for resources over time

Since 2003, there has been an increase in the percentage of companies that report a demand for all resources to help start or expand their workplace physical activity programs within each age group. 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 nonetheless contributed to at least some of the increased demand for resources reported by companies. Caution should be therefore be exercised when comparing results.

Region The increases in demand for most resources appear in all regions across the country. Similarly, an increase in the demand for general information on how to go about developing and implementing a program, "how to" implementation guides or case-building templates, access to community facilities, and grants, subsidies, and/or interest-free loans has occurred in Atlantic and Western Canada, as well as in Ontario. Workplaces in Ontario and Western Canada now have an increased demand for practical ideas for developing on-site facilities.

TRENDS IN THE DEMAND FOR RESOURCES by region, 2003-2007/08



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

Recommendations for action According to these findings, there is a demand for resources to assist in developing or expanding physical activity programs at work. The top ranked factors are: help in building employee interest to participate or organize physical activity opportunities, increased financial assistance, and more information. Workplaces can:

- **Build interest for physical activity** In order to build interest in and meet employee needs for physical activity programs and opportunities at work, workplaces can be encouraged to involve employees in all aspects of the planning, design, and implementation of programs in order to understand barriers and motivators for physical activity. Involving employees in the planning process can help increase participation levels. Workplaces can consider allowing employees who volunteer to participate in the organization of physical activity activities, or allow those who participate on physical activity committees to do so during work hours.¹ Workplaces can also consider providing incentives or rewards for employees who participate in physical activities, including certificates or rewards, monetary rewards, time off from work, or draws for gift certificates that focus on physical activity. Other forms of encouragement can include social rewards or reinforcement for employees who participate in physical activities, such as a social event that publicly recognizes employees who participate in physical activities, an “active employee of the month award”, verbal encouragement from managers and senior staff for employees who participate in physical activity, or recognition of participants in physical activities or team events in company wide addresses, newsletters, or emails.

- **Promote alternative facilities for physical activity**

The majority of companies report that it would be useful to have access to community facilities such as schools or community centres, or to be offered practical ideas for developing on-site facilities like showers, lockers, or bike racks. Workplaces can consider renting or establishing agreements to use off-site physical activity facilities in the community, as well as those not specifically designed for this purpose (i.e., community centres, schools, or church halls).

Alternatively, workplaces can look to negotiate group discounts for employees and their families for memberships, fees, or lessons. In addition, workplaces can be encouraged to use existing space at the worksite for low intensity physical activity, such as hallways for “walking trails”, stairwells for stair climbing at lunch, meeting rooms for yoga, or cafeterias for low intensity aerobics.

• **Find solutions for funding support** The majority of companies feel that access to grants, subsidies, or interest-free loans would help them with their physical activity programming. Workplaces could consider outsourcing new physical activity programs to YM/YWCAs or other local groups. Physical activity programs do not have to be costly investments, as on-line tools are available to help companies develop and evaluate a successful program. For example, the *Stairway to Health* program encourages employees to use the stairs more frequently as a means of increasing physical activity (a Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work and Health Canada initiative).² The program’s web site supports the adoption of this program in a wide variety of workplaces by providing scenarios for budgeting purposes, ranging from little or no available budget to large budgets, and provides accompanying promotional materials, posters, planning tools, and evaluation material.

• **Promote existing resources** The majority of Canadian workplaces indicate that more information would help them to initiate or enhance programs. Promoting existing resources that are designed to help workplaces plan and implement a successful physical activity program would be useful. For example, case templates and frameworks for building workplace programs, self-evaluation and auditing tools³, information on benefits, step-by-step guides, and practical ideas in order to increase promotion of physical activity at work⁴ are available on the internet.



- ¹ Emmons, K.M., Linnan, L.A., Shadel, W.G., Marcus, B., & Abrams, D.B. (1999). The Working Healthy Project: A worksite health-promotion trial targeting physical activity, diet, and smoking. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 41(7), 545-555.
- ² Health Canada and the Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work. (Accessed March 2008). Welcome to Stairway to Health. [On-line]. Available: [Hhttp://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.htm](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.htm)
- ³ National Quality Institute (Accessed March 2004). NQI Tools for Small Business [On-line] Available: [Hhttp://www.nqi.ca/small_business/default.aspx](http://www.nqi.ca/small_business/default.aspx)
- ⁴ Alberta Centre for Active Living. (accessed August 2007). Physical activity @ work [on-line]. Available: [Hhttp://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/workplace)