

# Working to become active

## Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



### Valuing an active workforce

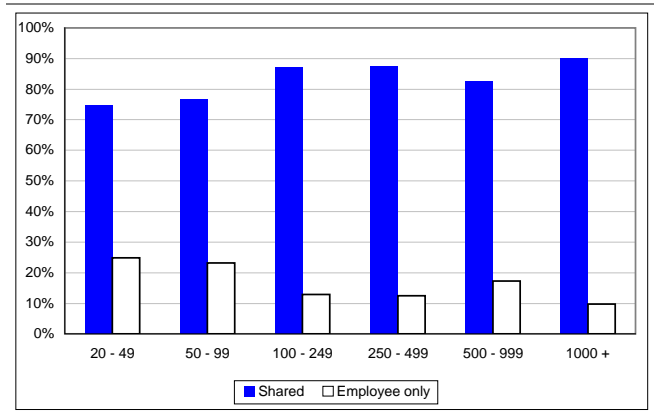
A corporate culture that values physical activity among its employees can be demonstrated through its views about the company's role in promoting an active lifestyle and tangible encouragement to be active. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work* Survey explores the commitment to and encouragement of active lifestyles among employees in Canadian workplaces.

#### Corporate commitment to physical activity

Among companies with 50 or more employees, the majority of Canadian employers (81%) state that the physical activity behaviour of employees is a matter of interest and responsibility for both the employee and the employer. However, the remaining 19% of mid-to-large sized companies report that it is the sole responsibility and concern of the employee. Two-thirds (66%) of companies with 50 or more employees state that employees have *little* or *no* input in the development of physical activity policies, programs, and opportunities at their workplaces. An additional 23% indicate that employees have *moderate* involvement, and only 11% indicate that employees are *considerably* involved (*a lot* or *fully*).

**Region** Beliefs surrounding personal and company responsibility for physical activity behaviour of employees do not differ across regions of Canada. However, workplaces in Quebec are more likely than those in Western Canada to state that employees have little or no input in the development of their physical activity opportunities.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEHAVIOUR by company size, 2007-08

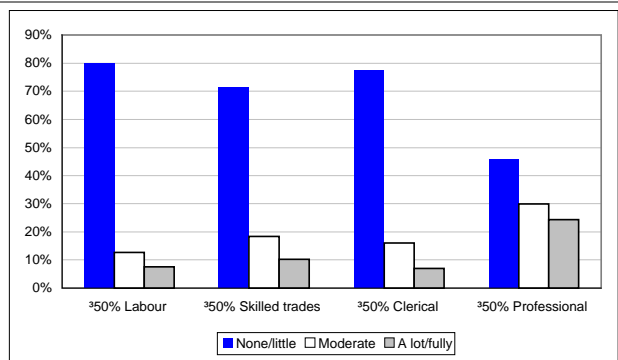


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

**Workplace characteristics** Perceptions about responsibility of physical activity behaviours of employees do not appear to be associated with workplace characteristics (i.e., company size, location of workplace, distribution of employee gender and occupation within the company, etc.). Larger companies (with 1,000 or more employees) are less likely than the smallest companies (with fewer than 50 employees) to state that employees are not involved at all in the development of physical activity opportunities. Companies that have a larger contingent of labour positions ( $\geq 50\%$ ) are more likely than those with fewer labour positions to report that employees have little or no involvement in the development of physical activity opportunities at work. However, workplaces dominated by professional positions are more likely those with fewer professional positions to report a moderate or great deal of involvement, and less likely to report little or no involvement, in developing fitness opportunities.



## EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PLANNING by profession, 2007-08



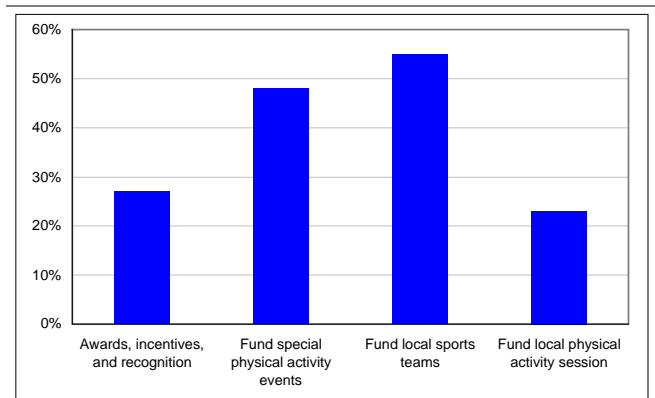
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### Corporate encouragement of physical activity

Thirty-seven percent of Canadian companies with 50 or more employees report that support and encouragement from the employer *substantially* helps employees (*a lot* or *a great deal*) to be more physically active. An additional 36% state that this type of support or encouragement is *moderately* helpful while the remaining 28% report that this is *not very* or *not at all* helpful.

Companies can instil a supportive corporate culture for physical activity even if they are unable to offer facilities as a means of providing opportunities to directly participate in physical activity on-site. Awards, incentives, recognition, or some other type of motivation to increase or maintain employee participation in physical activity is provided by 27% of companies with 50 or more employees. In addition, tangible demonstrations of support for physical activity is evident among roughly half of Canadian companies (with 50 or more employees), whose employers have reportedly sponsored or provided funds for a special physical activity events (48%) or for local sports teams (55%), which includes funding such amenities as tournaments, equipment, and uniforms. Fewer companies (23%) report having sponsored a local physical activity session, such as a free public swim or skate session at a local facility.

## SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT overall, 2007-08



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

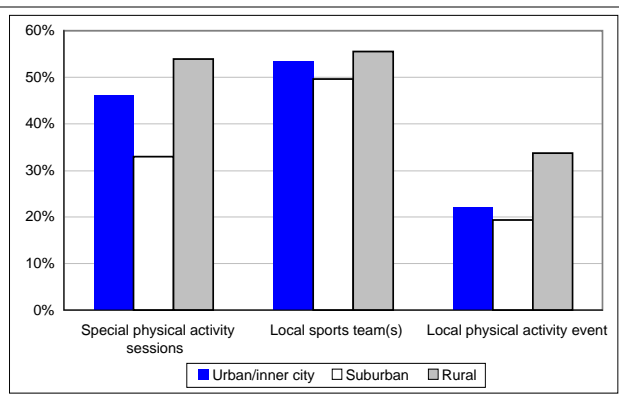
**Region** There are no regional differences among companies rating the helpfulness of employer support and encouragement for employee physical activity, nor in providing tangible supports of physical activity.

**Workplace characteristics** There are no significant differences among companies' ratings of the helpfulness of employer support with regard to workplace characteristics (i.e., company size, location of workplace, distribution of employee gender and occupation within the company, etc.). Company practices related to direct and indirect corporate encouragement of physical activity tend to vary more by company size than by location in the country. The percentage of companies offering awards, incentives, recognition, or some other type of motivation to encourage employees to be active increases by company size from a low of 19% among smaller companies (20–49 employees) to more than half (55%) among the largest companies (1,000 or more employees). In addition, those with mainly professional positions are more likely, whereas those with mainly general labour positions are less likely, to offer awards, incentives, recognition, or some other type of motivation to encourage employees to be active.

Some large companies are less likely than smaller companies to fund local sports teams; more specifically, companies with 500 to 999 employees are less likely than companies with 50 to 100 employees to do so. The largest companies (1,000 or

more employees) are more likely than the smallest companies (<50 employees) to sponsor a special physical activity event. Local physical activity sessions and special physical activity events are more likely to be funded by rural workplaces than suburban workplaces. Similarly, rural and urban workplaces are also more likely than suburban workplaces to sponsor special physical activity events. Companies with a predominantly male workforce ( $\geq 50\%$ ) are more likely to sponsor a local sports team compared to companies with fewer male employees. Workplaces with a predominantly female workforce ( $\geq 50\%$ ) are more likely to sponsor special physical activity events compared to those with fewer women. Sponsorship of local and special physical activity events is more likely to occur in companies with a greater proportion of employees who are in professional positions ( $\geq 50\%$ ) compared to those with fewer of these positions. However, local sports teams are more likely to receive funding from companies with relatively fewer professional positions compared to those with more of these positions.

**SPONSORSHIP OF LOCAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TEAMS OR EVENTS by workplace setting, 2007-08**



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

### Trends in commitment and encouragement

Perceptions about personal and company responsibility regarding physical activity behaviours of employees have generally not changed over time. The proportion of companies that provide awards, incentives, recognition, or some other type of motivation to increase or maintain their employee participation in physical activity has increased over time among larger companies (250+ employees). The

proportion of companies that have sponsored a local sports team has decreased over time among smaller companies (<100 employees) and larger companies (250+ employees), whereas there is no change over time among mid sized companies (100-249). Similarly, larger companies (250+ employees) are now less likely to sponsor special physical activity events, such as walk-a-thons, compared to companies of an equivalent size in 2003.

**Region** There are no regional changes over time regarding perceptions about responsibility of activity behaviours among employees, or for tangible supports of physical activity described previously in this bulletin. Quebec companies, however, are now slightly more likely to indicate that employees are *not at all* involved in the development of physical activity policies, programs, and opportunities at work.

**Recommendations for action** The majority of workplaces (81%) indicate that employees' physical activity behaviour is a shared responsibility among the employer and the employee. This is indeed promising, as it suggests that workplaces are receptive to the promotion of physical activity among employees. However, only about one-third of workplaces state that company support contributes substantially to an employee's activity level. So, why the discord? Perhaps companies generally feel that they do not have the means or ability to support and encourage their employees to be active, or perhaps they lack awareness of how to encourage or support their employees, or perhaps they feel that a costly on-site program is required to have an effect of shifting employee activity levels, or it may be that they also believe the workplace is only one component of a complex picture required to encourage Canadians to become more active. In order to provide a supportive environment facilitating physical activity, workplaces can:

- **Involve employees in the development of physical activity programs** Data in this bulletin indicate that the majority (66%) of companies with 50 or more employees say that employees have little or no input into the development of physical activity policies, programs, and opportunities at their workplace. The involvement

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of employees in the process of planning health programs tends to increase their participation levels;<sup>1</sup> therefore, it is important that there is shared leadership among all levels of workers to be involved in the planning, development, promotion, and execution of physical activity opportunities. This can help increase interest and participation in physical activity programs.



- **Provide awards and recognition** Workplaces can consider providing incentives or rewards for employees who participate in physical activities, or incentives for active commuting including subsidized passes for public transportation. Larger companies may want to consider a target incentive value to at least match, if not exceed, the value of parking spaces.
- **Provide a favourable and supportive atmosphere for physical activity** This can be done by implementing suggestions described in this bulletin; that is, companies may sponsor community-related physical activities, contribute toward equipment, jerseys, and tournaments for local sports teams, or sponsor physical activity sessions in the community such as free public skating or swimming. Given that the proportion of workplaces (particularly large workplaces) providing such sponsorship has declined since 2003, this is particularly noteworthy. Workplaces can also encourage employees to participate in local and special physical activity events, such as a Terry Fox Run, Corporate Challenges, or Healthy Workplace Week, or national events such as WinterActive and SummerActive, or Commuter Challenge. Workplaces could also provide a supportive environment for physical activity by encouraging active transportation and reimbursing staff who bicycle for employment travel, or if parking incentives are provided, by subsidizing parking that is further away from the worksite.

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<sup>1</sup> Hunt, M.K., Lederman, R., Potter, S., Stoddard, A. & Sorensen, G. (2000). Results of employee involvement in planning and implementing the Treatwell 5-a-Day work-site study. *Health Education & Behavior*, 27(2): 223-31.