

Key findings

Physical inactivity levels have not changed during the latter part of the 1990s.

- 64% of adults aged 18 and older are still considered insufficiently active for optimal health benefits, compared with 79% in 1981.
- Physical inactivity rates are consistent across all regions of Canada, with the exception of the territories, where inactivity levels are lower, and Quebec, where they are higher than in Canada overall.
- More women than men are inactive.
- The most popular activity of Canadians are walking (81%), gardening, yard work (70%), swimming (54%), social dancing (46%), home exercise (45%), and bicycling (45%).
- Over half of Canadian children and youth aged 5–17 are not active enough for optimal growth and development
- Girls are less active than boys.

The majority of Canadians have access to physical activity information in their communities.

- Two-thirds of Canadian adults report that there is a lot of information on physical activity and sports available in their community.
- 64% state that it is easy to get this type of information and a further 24% say it is somewhat easy.
- Two out of five Canadians have personally received information during the last three months about sports or physical activity programs and services in their community, or have spoken to someone about becoming or remaining active. Of these individuals, only 14% had sought this information out themselves, 49% report that the information was offered to them by someone else, and 37% received the information both ways.
- 57% of adults receive information on physical activity or sports through the media, including newspapers, television, and radio. In addition, 18% of adults receive physical activity information from an organized course, lecture, or workshop, and 10% receive information through the Internet.
- Half of Canadians obtain information on physical activity and sports at a facility designated specifically for recreation and sports, and 43% indicate receiving this information at a community centre, a school, or another facility not specifically designed for physical activity. One in four adults receive such information at a shopping mall, on the street, or in some other type of public place. Notably, only 13% of individuals gather this type of information from a medical facility, such as a doctor's office, a clinic, or another type of health care facility.
- 55% of adults who have received information on physical activity or sports received this information from friends or family members. Only 7% of individuals who

received information did so from a church member, public figure, or other prominent member of their community.

- 88% of adults received information on where to go to be active in their local community; 86% obtained information on the kinds of physical activity or sports facilities, programs, and services available in their community; 70% received information on how to become more active in daily life; 68% obtained information on how to improve physical activity or sport skills; and 60% received information on why they should be active.
- Among Canadians who obtained information on physical activity, two-thirds believe that they are active regularly, 32% occasionally, and 3% not at all. Just over half of participants say that the information they received during the past year has led them to think about being more active. Moreover, 65% report that the information helped them become more active, and 35% claim that it had no influence at all.

While opportunities for physical activity abound, they are not universal.

Walking trails

- Two-thirds of Canadians report that there are many places in their communities where they can safely walk, such as sidewalks, paths, and walking trails.
- Nine in ten Canadians make use of these opportunities, with half doing so frequently. As many as 82% of adults believe that it is very important to have safe places to walk in their communities.
- One in four adults report that they would walk more often if there were more safe places to walk.

Bicycling paths, trails, and lanes

- One-third of Canadian adults report that there are many places in their communities where they can safely ride a bicycle, including designated bicycle lanes, paths, or trails set aside for riding bicycles.
- Less than one-quarter of adults frequently use this infrastructure
- 67% believe that the availability of places to ride a bicycle in their communities is very important.
- 40% say that they would bicycle more often if there were more safe places to bicycle in their communities

Willingness to bicycle on various types of routes

- 88% of adults say they are very willing to ride a bicycle on roads with a completely separate bicycle lane and no vehicle traffic.
- 57% report being very willing to ride on a multi-use trail where there is no vehicle traffic but where other people can use the trail for hiking or other activities.
- 51% are very willing to ride in a lane designated for cyclists only on roads with vehicle traffic.

- 11% are very willing to ride a bicycle on roads with vehicle traffic and without a designated bicycle lane.

Recreation trails

- Just over one-quarter of adults report that there are many multi-purpose trails in their communities that can be used for different physical activities or sports (e.g., bicycling, hiking, cross-country skiing).
- 18% frequently use these types of trails to do physical activity, and 55% use them sometimes.
- Over half of adults think multi-purpose trails are very important for being active.
- One-third state that they would be active more often if there were more multi-purpose trails in their communities.

Designated facilities

- Roughly two out of five Canadians report that there are many facilities, places, and programs in their communities designed specifically for physical activity and sport—such as fitness centres, pools, arenas, and tennis courts.
- 16% of adults use these types of facilities and programs frequently, and 45% use them sometimes.
- Half of adults think that it is very important to have such opportunities available in their communities.
- 28% say that they would be active more often if more of these types of opportunities were available.

Non-designated places

- One-quarter of Canadians report that there are many other types of places in their communities that are not specifically designed to increase participation among the general public but where they can be active—including school gyms used after hours, places at work where people can be active, community centres used for exercise, or public places where youth can skateboard.
- 6% use these places frequently, a further 37% use them sometimes, and 56% never use them.
- Almost half of adults think that it is very important to have places like this in their communities.
- 21% state that they would be active more often if there were more of these places.

Support services

- Fewer than one in five Canadians report that there are many other kinds of support services available in their communities to help them be active, whether information or advice on how to be active, links to places where specific instruction or coaching can be obtained, or access to child care while participating in physical activity.

- 4% frequently use such services, 31% use them sometimes, and 66% never use them. About one-third of adults believe that it is very important and 48% believe it is somewhat important that these kinds of support services be available to help them be active.
- 20% state that they would be active more often if there were more of these types of services available.

Systemic barriers to physical activity programs, services, and facilities are varied and diverse.

Convenience

- Almost one-quarter of Canadian adults strongly agree that the hours and class times offered by their local centres do not suit them.
- 14% of adults strongly agree that it is too hard to get to places where they can be active.
- 16% of Canadian parents strongly agree that the hours and class times offered by their local centres do not suit the needs of their children.
- 19% of parents strongly agree that it is too hard to get to places where their children can be active.

Program availability

- 17% of Canadians strongly agree that there are not enough physical activity programs, services, or facilities in and around their local community.
- One in five adults strongly agree that the programs and facilities available are not the right type for them.
- Almost one-quarter of parents strongly agree that there are not enough programs, services, or facilities in and around their local communities that offer opportunities for their children to be active.
- Roughly one in five parents strongly agree that the programs and facilities available are not the right types for their children.

Information about programming

- 17% of adults strongly agree that there is not enough information on local physical activity and sport opportunities, although the majority of adults find that there is a lot.
- 12% of adults strongly agree that they lack awareness of how to build physical activity into their daily lives.
- One in ten parents strongly agree that there is not enough information on local physical activity and sport opportunities available for children.

Cost

- One-quarter of Canadian adults strongly agree that the dollar costs of doing physical activity are too high for them.

- One-quarter of Canadian parents strongly agree that the dollar costs associated with their children doing physical activity are too high.

Maintenance of facilities

- 12% of adults strongly agree that trails and parks are not well maintained in their community.
- 11% of Canadians strongly agree that sport and recreation facilities are not well maintained in their community.

Social support

- Almost one-quarter of Canadians strongly agree that it is too hard to find other people to be active with.
- One in five adults strongly agree that there are not enough places where they can be active and bring their children along.
- 17% of adults strongly agree that it is too hard to find the right type of coaching or instruction.
- One-quarter of Canadian parents strongly agree that there are not enough places where a family can be active together.
- 17% of parents strongly agree that it is too difficult to find the right type of coaching or instruction for their children.
- 15% of parents strongly agree that it is too difficult to find partners for their children to be active with.

Skill and ability

- 17% of Canadian adults strongly agree that they are not good at doing sports and physical activity.
- 13% of Canadian parents strongly agree that their children are not good at sports and physical activity.

Safety

- 15% of Canadian adults strongly agree that safety concerns keep them from walking or bicycling.
- 62% of adults strongly disagree that safety concerns keep them from walking and bicycling. Those who do find safety an issue cite many factors that prevent safe walking and bicycling in their neighbourhoods: 34% strongly agree that there is too much traffic, 20% strongly agree that there is too much crime on the streets, 24% strongly agree that there are badly maintained sidewalks and bike lanes, and 27% strongly agree that there are poorly lit sidewalks and streets.
- The majority (65%) of parents strongly disagree that safety concerns keep their children from walking and bicycling. Nevertheless, 13% of Canadian parents strongly agree that safety concerns keep their children from these activities.

- Of those parents concerned with safety issues, 22% strongly agree that sidewalks and bike lanes are not properly maintained, and 21% strongly agree that sidewalks and streets are poorly lit.

Many tactics would help Canadians and their children to be active.

Provide incentives

- About one in five adults strongly agree that the provision of incentives—such as certificates for attendance or completion of programs—or the provision of rewards for people who walk or bicycle a lot would help them become more active.
- Roughly one-third of parents strongly agree that the provision of incentives or rewards for being active would help their children become more active.

Reduce costs

- Half of Canadians strongly agree that if their workplace provided employee subsidies for health or fitness memberships, it would help them become more active.
- Roughly two in five adults strongly agree that dropping or reducing user fees at places like arenas or swimming pools would help them become more active.
- 28% strongly agree that providing affordable instruction and coaching on how to do different sports and physical activity would help.
- Two out of five parents strongly agree that the provision of subsidized fitness club memberships by communities would help their children become more active.
- 35% of parents strongly agree that dropping or reducing user fees at places like arenas or swimming pools would help their children become more active.
- 37% of parents strongly agree that providing affordable instruction and coaching on how to do different sports and physical activity would help their children be more active.

Provide information

- One-third of Canadians strongly agree that the provision of a toll-free (1-800) number, which they can call to obtain information on local activities, child care services, and so on, would help them be more active.
- 17% of adults strongly agree that the provision of more information about physical activity through the media and over the Internet would help them be more active.
- Almost one-third of Canadian parents strongly agree that the provision of a toll-free (1-800) number, through which they can obtain information on local activities and support services, would help their children be more active.
- One in five parents strongly agree that the provision of more information about physical activity through the media and over the Internet would help their children be more active.

Provide a variety of activities

- One-third of Canadian adults strongly agree that the provision of a wide variety of activity programs, facilities, and places to be active would help them become more active.
- 27% strongly agree that the provision of more opportunities for them to try out different activities would encourage their participation.
- Just over one-third of parents strongly agree that the provision of a wide variety of activity programs, facilities, and places to be active would help their children's physical activity routine.
- 62% of parents strongly agree that the provision of daily physical education by schools would help their children become more active.
- Just over half of parents strongly agree that the provision of more opportunities at school to participate in different activities would help their children be more active.

Increase social support

- 31% strongly agree that if communities provided outreach programs to help people be active at home, work, or school, it would help them to be more active.
- 28% strongly agree that the provision of services that link people up with other people who want to be active would help them be more active.
- 29% strongly agree that if there were more family-oriented programs and classes, it would help them become more active.
- 31% of parents strongly agree that if communities provided outreach programs to help children be active at home or at school, it would help their children to be more active.
- 34% of parents strongly agree that the provision of services that link children up with other children who want to be active would help.
- 37% of parents strongly agree that more family-oriented programs and classes would help their children become more active.

Provide a supportive infrastructure

- More than two in five adults strongly agree that if their community maintained a well-linked network of trails and paths, it would help them become more active.
- Just over one-quarter strongly agree that supportive facilities—such as showers, bicycle racks, and lockers at schools, workplaces, and community centres—would help them be more active.
- 17% agree strongly that the provision of ski racks, bicycle carriers, and such on buses and other public transportation would help them be more active.
- One-third of parents strongly agree that the maintenance of a well-linked network of trails and paths by the community would help their children to be more active.

- One-quarter of parents strongly agree that supportive facilities—such as showers, bicycle racks, and lockers at schools, workplaces, and community centres—would help their children be more active.
- One-fifth of parents agree strongly that the provision of ski racks, bicycle carriers, and such on buses and other public transportation would contribute to their children’s regular physical activity regime.

Promote participation

- 44% of parents strongly agree that emphasizing participation in physical activity programs instead of winning competitions would help their children become more active.
- 48% of parents believe strongly that activity programs that teach children to respect each other and to play fairly would help their children become more active.

Implications

The sport and recreation system in Canada should offer a variety of programming, services, and facilities to accommodate the needs of all Canadians.

The sport and recreation system plays a significant role in the provision of the many and varied opportunities for being active in Canada. However, access to these opportunities may be limited in certain parts of the country. The system can optimize its impact by promoting the benefits of physical activity and practical means of overcoming commonly reported barriers, accommodating personal preferences, skills, and choices, and providing information on where physical activity can be done and available opportunities. The 1999 Physical Activity Monitor reveals that Canadians believe that the provision of a wide variety of activity programs, facilities and places to be active, and more opportunities for them to try out different activities is an important contributor to their physical activity behaviour. Parents also hold similar views for their children’s physical activity patterns.

Given this, the sport and recreation system should

1. encourage a variety of physical activities;
2. provide a range of structured and unstructured as well as competitive and non-competitive physical activities to support individuals of varying skills and abilities;
3. provide a variety of opportunities in programming, services, and facilities that are family-oriented, group-oriented, and individual-based.
4. ensure a variety of facilities in the community that are convenient, safe, and accessible.

The sport and recreation system could be more supportive of Canadians’ physical activity behaviour.

A balanced approach to behaviour change includes both individual and environmental components. The sport and recreation system has the potential to reach all Canadians

through the provision of local programs, facilities, and infrastructure. Its current impact could be increased if municipalities were to investigate the applicability of systemic barriers to participation reported by Canadians to their local situation and implement strategies to overcome them. Systemic barriers include

- inconvenient scheduling,
- lack of programming focusing on the current needs of clients,
- insufficient promotion of local opportunities,
- excessive cost,
- poor maintenance of facilities,
- lack of family-oriented opportunities and social support,
- inadequate networking of paths and trails.

The sport and recreation system, in partnership with other key players, should strive to create a more supportive local environment for physical activity.

Efforts to increase physical activity do not reside in one sector alone. Rather, it is important to establish an integrated system, involving all key sectors in the life of Canadians. For Canadians to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives, they need to find physical activity opportunities at every turn, whether in their community, at work, at school, at church, and so on.

To increase physical activity, consider

- building the case for physical activity to elicit partnerships with key sectors, such as workplaces, schools, communities, and the health care sector;
- partnering with other municipal organizations to create common infrastructure solutions;
- developing and implementing recreational opportunities in conjunction with sectors such as the workplace and the school system.