

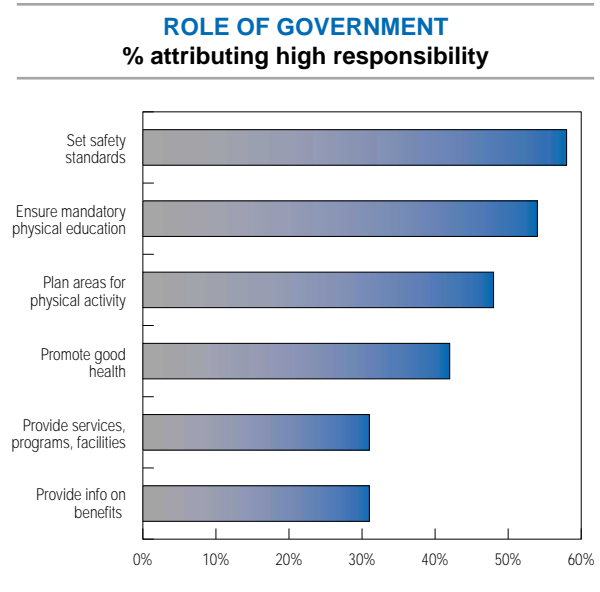
## Role of government

Governments at the national, provincial, territorial, and local levels can affect the health behaviours of Canadians through their influence over initiatives and policies such as health care, workers' health and safety standards, as well as the development and maintenance of community parks and recreational facilities.<sup>1</sup>

In its 1997 Physical Activity Monitor, the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute investigated Canadians' views about the degree of responsibility they believe governments should assume in public education, policy and legislation, environmental change strategies, and the provision of programs and services relating to physical activity. In particular, Canadians were asked about government involvement in:

- promoting good health and well-being among Canadians;
- providing information on the various benefits of an active lifestyle;
- ensuring mandatory daily physical education in elementary and secondary schools;
- setting safety standards for public facilities and for physical activities, including protective equipment;
- providing programs, services, or facilities that encourage physical activity;
- ensuring that environmental areas for physical activity, such as paths, trails, or open green spaces, are incorporated into community planning and development.

Figure 1



1997 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

As shown in Figure 1, over half of survey respondents report that governments have a great deal of responsibility in setting safety standards for physical activity, as well as in ensuring mandatory daily physical education in elementary and secondary schools. Close to 50% cite the provision of paths and other areas for physical activity as a key role for governments. The more general role of “promoting good health and well-being” ranks fourth. Just under a third of those surveyed report that “providing services, programs, or facilities” and “providing information on the benefits of activity” are key responsibility areas for governments.



## Age and sex differences

One significant difference across age groups appears in the proportion of adults who say that the incorporation of areas for physical activity is a very important role of government. As shown in Table 1, adults aged 25–44 are the most likely to rate this role as very important, in contrast with adults aged 65 and older, who are significantly less likely to rate this as very important.

While there are age differences in the numbers of respondents rating different areas of responsibility as very important, the overall rankings generally do not vary across age groups, with two exceptions. One exception occurs for adults aged 45–64, who, unlike other age groups, attribute a greater responsibility to governments for providing programs, services, and facilities than for providing information on the benefits of physical activity. The second exception appears among older adults, who rank the promotion of good health and well-being ahead of ensuring the incorporation of physical activity areas such as paths and trails in the community.

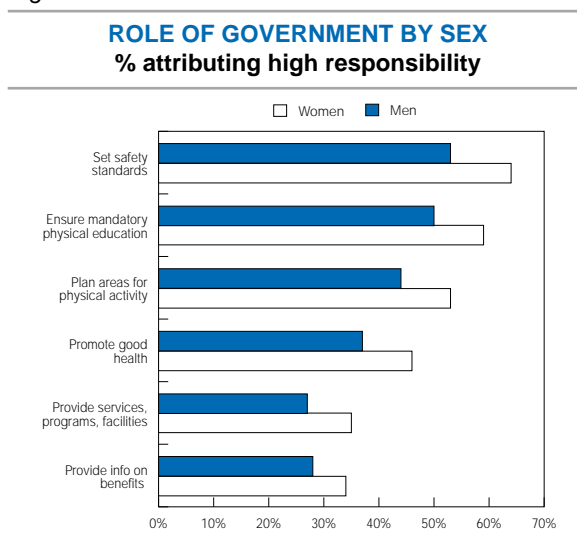
Over half of both women and men assign a great deal of responsibility to government in setting safety standards and ensuring mandatory physical education programs in the school system. While men and women tend to rank the various roles in the same way, women are more likely than men to attribute

Table 1

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT BY AGE GROUP % attributing high responsibility				
	18–24	25–44	45–64	65+
Set safety standards	56%	62%	57%	52%
Ensure mandatory PE	54	57	52	51
Plan areas for physical activity	45	53	49	37
Promote good health	36	40	46	45
Provide info on benefits	30	33	30	31
Provide services, programs, facilities	27	30	35	30

1997 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Figure 2



1997 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

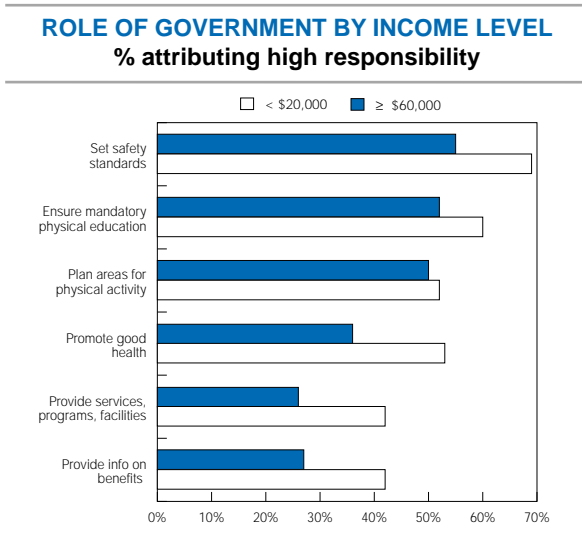
a great deal of responsibility to governments in promoting all aspects of physical activity, as shown in Figure 2.

Within age groups, differences between men and women are found among 25- to 44-year-olds, with significantly more women than men assigning a great deal of responsibility to government for providing services, programs, and facilities, ensuring daily mandatory physical education, setting safety standards, and planning areas for physical activity. Additionally, among 45- to 64-year-olds, more women than men report the promotion of good health and the provision of services, programs, and facilities as important roles of government.

## Socioeconomic differences

Interestingly, Canadians in the lowest income group are consistently more likely to report that government has a great deal of responsibility in all types of interventions probed (Figure 3). This finding is supported by research in the field, namely the Community Health Assessment and Promotion Project, which focused on a poor and underprivileged community in a large American city.<sup>2</sup> This study found that low income groups were quite interested in receiving promotional information on the benefits of physical activity as well as dietary information.

Figure 3



1997 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

The relative rankings of the various governmental roles follow the general population trend across occupational groups. One exception lies with the unemployed, who cite information on the benefits of physical activity as often as promoting good health and well-being. Another exception occurs among retired individuals, who assign a stronger responsibility to government for the promotion of good health and well-being than for the incorporation of physical activity areas such as paths and trails in the community.

People who are married or in a common-law relationship tend to rate the importance of governmental roles for increasing physical activity similarly to people who have never been married. In contrast, people who are widowed, divorced, or separated are more likely to view governments as having a high degree of responsibility in all areas investigated.

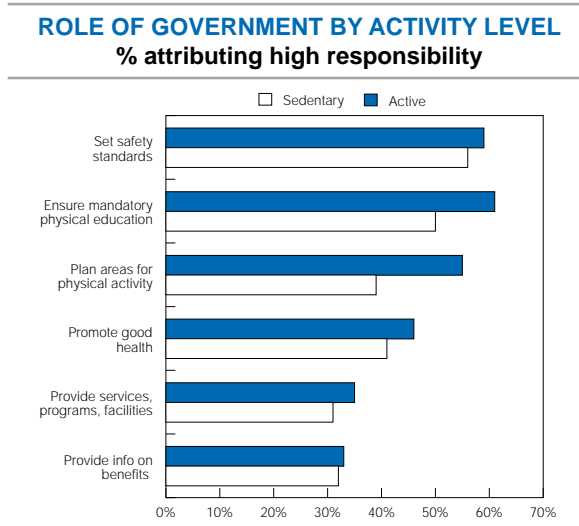
Overall, the relative ranking of governmental roles in providing various supports and programs follows the general trend across community sizes, with the exception of communities with populations under 1,000. In these communities, respondents rank “ensuring mandatory physical education in schools” highest, with “setting safety standards” following close behind.

## Physical activity levels

Promoting physical activity is more likely to be viewed as a key role of government by active Canadians than by sedentary Canadians (Figure 4).

Compared with sedentary Canadians, active Canadians are more likely to assign a great deal of responsibility to government in environmental and policy interventions such as the incorporation of areas for physical activity in the community and ensuring mandatory physical education programs in schools. In addition, promoting good health and providing services, programs, and facilities are indicated as key roles of government more often by active than by inactive Canadians.

Figure 4



1997 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

## The way ahead

Policy, legislative, and environmental supports have been identified as important strategies for increasing population levels of physical activity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, environments that are conducive to physical activity ranked highest among the supports that Canadians view as very important in making it easier for them to be active.<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with the conclusion of King (1991)<sup>4</sup> that supportive environ-

ments are a necessary prerequisite to educational and individual behaviour change strategies. This implies that while promotion and education strategies continue to play a key role in encouraging and educating Canadians about how to be and remain active, environmental supports are critical elements seen by researchers and Canadians alike in facilitating behaviour change.

The data provide some early indication that persons in different life stages are likely to have different needs for government services and supports. For example, the incorporation of paths, trails, green spaces, and other areas for physical activity into community development is particularly important among 25- to 44-year-olds, who typically have both young families and heavy time commitments. As a result, this factor impacts not only on people in this age segment but also on their children and on the family unit itself.

More Canadians are choosing to be active than a decade ago, but there is a clear call for environmental changes to enable them to follow through more effectively on their intentions to be active. Furthermore, Canadians believe that governments have a great deal of responsibility in creating environments that are more conducive to physical activity. While public education is seen as a key government role by a substantial number of Canadians, the majority view legislative, policy, and environmental change strategies as areas in which government has a great deal of responsibility.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (1996). Policies and community interventions. *The Research File*, Reference no. 96-03.
- <sup>2</sup> Sallis, J.F., Bauman, A., & Pratt, M. (1998). Environmental and policy interventions to promote physical activity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 15 (4), 379–397.
- <sup>3</sup> Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (1998). Resources and services. *Progress in Prevention*, Bulletin no. 28.
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# Role of government

1997 Physical Activity Monitor

	Set safety standards		Ensure mandatory daily physical education		Include trails, paths into community development	
	High responsibility	Moderate responsibility	High responsibility	Moderate responsibility	High responsibility	Moderate responsibility
<b>TOTAL, ADULTS (18+)</b>	58%	33%	54%	33%	48%	39%
women	64	31	59	33	53	38
men	53	34	50	34	44	40
<b>18–24</b>	56	39	54	37	45	45
women	62	35	54	40	52	42
men	51	44	55	33	39	49
<b>25–44</b>	62	29	57	33	53	38
women	66	27	61	31	57	36
men	58	31	53	35	49	40
<b>45–64</b>	57	33	52	34	49	38
women	62	34	55	36	53	38
men	52	33	48	33	45	37
<b>65+</b>	52	35	51	31	37	38
women	62	–	61	–	43	39
men	–	–	–	–	–	–
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>						
Less than secondary	63	29	61	24	49	35
Secondary	58	34	53	36	43	43
College	59	33	59	32	50	41
University	57	33	50	36	53	36
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>						
< \$20,000	69	27	60	29	52	38
20,000–39,999	54	36	56	30	47	41
40,000–59,999	58	33	49	37	47	40
≥ \$60,000	55	36	52	38	50	39

– Data unavailable because of insufficient sample size.

	<b>Set safety standards</b>		<b>Ensure mandatory daily physical education</b>		<b>Include trails, paths into community development</b>	
	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>						
<i>Full-time worker</i>	58%	33%	52%	35%	49%	40%
<i>Part-time worker</i>	63	29	53	38	53	41
<i>Unemployed</i>	56	–	55	–	53	–
<i>Homemaker</i>	68	–	68	–	56	35
<i>Student</i>	59	37	59	36	51	43
<i>Retired</i>	54	33	52	28	39	37
<b>COMMUNITY SIZE</b>						
< 1,000	61	28	64	22	35	48
1,000–9,999	50	39	49	35	44	38
10,000–74,999	60	31	52	36	48	38
75,000–299,999	61	33	60	32	51	38
≥ 300,000	58	34	52	36	52	40
<b>FAMILY COMPOSITION</b>						
<i>Living with a partner</i>	56	34	53	35	46	40
<i>with children at home</i>	58	32	56	34	45	43
<i>without children at home</i>	55	35	51	35	47	38
<i>Widowed, divorced, separated</i>	69	24	63	28	55	31
<i>with children at home</i>	74	–	67	–	65	–
<i>without children at home</i>	68	25	62	28	52	32
<i>Never married</i>	58	34	53	32	50	40
<i>with children at home</i>	69	–	71	–	57	–
<i>without children at home</i>	57	35	51	33	49	41
<b>ENERGY EXPENDITURE</b>						
<i>Active (≥3 KKD<sup>1</sup>)</i>	59	32	61	31	55	34
<i>Moderately active (1.5–2.9 KKD)</i>	55	36	49	38	47	44
<i>Somewhat active (0.5–1.4 KKD)</i>	63	27	52	35	42	45
<i>Sedentary (&lt;0.5 KKD)</i>	56	37	50	27	39	36

1 Kilo-calories/kilogram of body weight/day; an energy expenditure of 3 KKD is equivalent to walking one hour every day.

– Data unavailable because of insufficient sample size.

	<i>Promote good health and well-being</i>		<i>Provide services, programs, facilities</i>		<i>Provide information on benefits</i>	
	<i>High responsibility</i>	<i>Moderate responsibility</i>	<i>High responsibility</i>	<i>Moderate responsibility</i>	<i>High responsibility</i>	<i>Moderate responsibility</i>
<b>TOTAL, ADULTS (18+)</b>	42%	39%	31%	44%	31%	47%
women	46	38	35	44	34	46
men	37	40	27	45	28	49
<b>18–24</b>	36	49	30	58	27	57
women	40	51	27	62	24	62
men	33	47	33	55	29	52
<b>25–44</b>	40	40	33	46	30	49
women	43	42	38	44	31	47
men	38	38	28	48	28	50
<b>45–64</b>	46	35	30	40	35	43
women	53	30	35	39	39	43
men	38	39	24	41	30	43
<b>65+</b>	45	37	31	34	30	41
women	51	31	37	34	38	34
men	–	–	–	–	–	–
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>						
Less than secondary	48	36	36	36	38	39
Secondary	44	37	33	46	32	48
College	37	43	29	48	30	51
University	40	42	30	44	26	50
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>						
< \$20,000	53	36	42	46	42	42
20,000–39,999	44	40	32	46	35	45
40,000–59,999	36	40	32	43	23	55
≥ \$60,000	36	45	26	45	27	50

– Data unavailable because of insufficient sample size.

	<b>Promote good health and well-being</b>		<b>Provide services, programs, facilities</b>		<b>Provide information on benefits</b>	
	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>	<b>High responsibility</b>	<b>Moderate responsibility</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>						
<i>Full-time worker</i>	38%	42%	29%	46%	28%	48%
<i>Part-time worker</i>	43	42	38	43	31	50
<i>Unemployed</i>	40	–	30	45	40	39
<i>Homemaker</i>	56	35	41	44	35	50
<i>Student</i>	38	47	28	62	25	61
<i>Retired</i>	48	31	32	33	32	42
<b>COMMUNITY SIZE</b>						
< 1,000	45	26	23	45	31	38
1,000–9,999	45	35	33	39	33	41
10,000–74,999	40	42	29	43	31	48
75,000–299,999	38	45	31	47	27	52
≥ 300,000	40	43	30	50	26	53
<b>FAMILY COMPOSITION</b>						
<i>Living with a partner</i>	42	38	29	43	30	47
<i>with children at home</i>	39	40	28	43	29	48
<i>without children at home</i>	44	36	30	42	29	46
<i>Widowed, divorced, separated</i>	50	34	42	38	40	41
<i>with children at home</i>	39	39	43	39	36	40
<i>without children at home</i>	53	32	42	37	41	41
<i>Never married</i>	38	48	32	53	28	55
<i>with children at home</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>without children at home</i>	37	49	31	53	28	56
<b>ENERGY EXPENDITURE</b>						
<i>Active (≥3 KKD<sup>1</sup>)</i>	46	38	35	46	33	46
<i>Moderately active (1.5–2.9 KKD)</i>	39	39	29	45	27	52
<i>Somewhat active (0.5–1.4 KKD)</i>	39	44	29	46	32	45
<i>Sedentary (&lt;0.5 KKD)</i>	41	35	31	35	32	43

1 Kilo-calories/kilogram of body weight/day; an energy expenditure of 3 KKD is equivalent to walking one hour every day.

– Data unavailable because of insufficient sample size.