



LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES TO BE ACTIVE



Introduction

The local environment can potentially play an important role in influencing the physical activity of children and youth. Among adults, physical activity participation is associated with cost and proximity of facilities, as well as feelings of safety.^{42,43} Urban design and infrastructure may also play a role in influencing physical activity related behaviours among adults. Supportive design features include proximity to shops, high population densities, zoning by-laws supporting mixed land use (i.e., an integration of workplaces, shopping or retail, park land, and housing), and mass transit supports. However, according to a U.S. based study, understanding an environment which is supportive of adult physical activity may not necessarily translate into a supportive environment for children to be active. Children's activity levels seem to generally rise with an increase in the variety of places to be active and in the convenience of these places.⁴⁴ Strategies need to take into account different socio-demographic and –economic groups. Understanding the physical environments that are appropriate for both adults and children is essential when developing strategies to increase physical activity.

This section examines the extent to which facilities and programs in the local community are available for children and youth to be active. In addition, it explores attitudes about how well these facilities and programs meet the needs of young people, as well as current use of these opportunities. The data are analyzed by socio-demographic and economic indicators, including the parent's and child's age and gender, region of residence, community size, household income, parent's educational attainment, parent's daily physical activity level, and parent's and child's sport participation. The analyses also compare trend data over time where possible. This section concludes with a discussion of the implications and recommendations resulting from the data.

Public facilities and programs

The majority (92%) of parents report that public facilities and programs for physical activity are available locally. About 60% of parents feel that these opportunities meet their children's physical activity needs *well* or *very well*, while a further 26% report that they meet their needs *somewhat well*. In addition, 14% feel that they *do not* meet their needs *very well* or *at all*. Almost one-quarter (23%) of parents report that their children use these facilities and programs *often* or *very often*, 36% use them *somewhat often*, and 40% use them *rarely* or *not at all*. Parents in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories are less likely than parents overall to report the availability of public opportunities in their community. Parents residing in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan are more likely than parents nationally to report that their children use public facilities and programs *often* or *very often*.

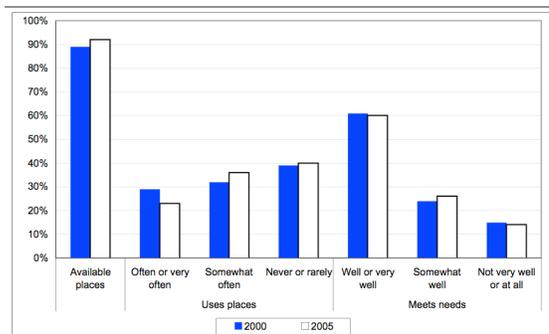
Child's age and sex While girls and boys appear to have equal opportunity locally to be physically active, and their activity needs seem to be met equally well, parents of teens are more likely than others, and parents of teenage girls are more likely than parents of teenage boys, to report that their child *rarely* or *never* uses the available facilities and programs.

Child's participation in sport Parents who report that their children participate in sport are slightly more likely than those who do not, to indicate that there are public facilities and programs available locally. Parents of sport participants are also more likely to indicate that their children's needs are met *well* or *very well* by these facilities and programs, and that their children use them *often* or *very often*.

Parent's age and sex There are no significant differences between mothers and fathers, regardless of age, in reporting the availability of local public opportunities. Mothers are, however, more likely than fathers to report that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well*, and are more likely to report that their children use the facilities and programs *often* or *very often*. Parents aged 45 to 64 are more likely than parents aged 25 to 44 to state that the facilities and programs *do not* meet their children's needs *very well* or *at all* and to report that their children *rarely* or *never* use the facilities and programs.

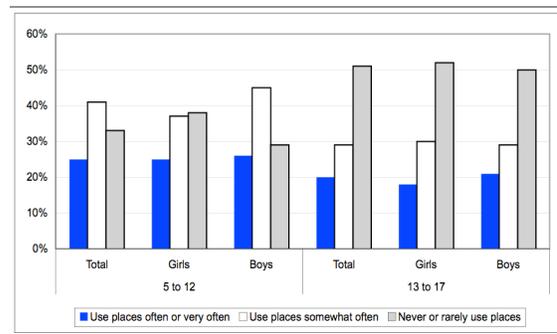
Socio-economic and demographic factors Generally speaking, parents in the higher income range are more likely to report that local public facilities and programs meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS
overall trends 2000-2005



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS
by child's participation in sport



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

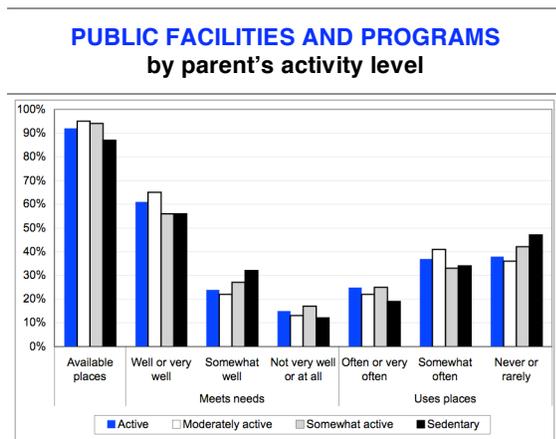
Public facilities and programs (cont'd)

Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents who have never been married are more likely to indicate the availability of public physical activity opportunities compared to those who are widowed, divorced, or separated. Parents who are widowed, divorced or separated are more likely than those who are married to report that the opportunities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*. Parents who have never been married are less likely than other parents to report that their children use these places *often* or *very often*. Parents from the smallest communities are less likely than those in the largest communities to report the availability of public opportunities to be active. Similarly, parents from the smallest communities are less likely than those in the largest ones to indicate that the opportunities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*.

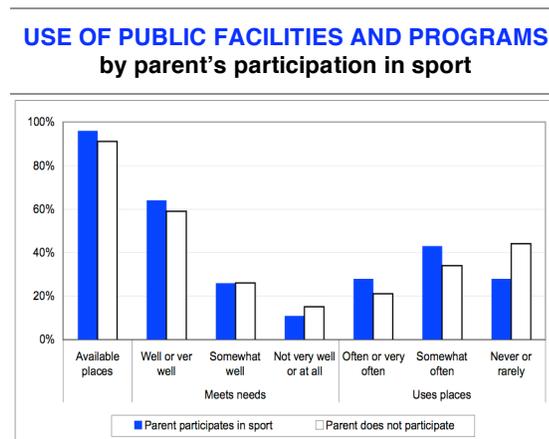
Parent's activity level Parents who are the least active are less likely than other parents to indicate the availability of local public facilities and programs. Parents who are active or moderately active are more likely than less active parents to report that the available facilities and programs meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*, while parents with the lowest levels of activity are more likely than more active parents to report that their children rarely or never use these facilities and programs.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are slightly more likely than other parents to report that there are local public facilities or programs available for their children. Parents who participate in sport are also more likely to report that their children use these facilities and programs *often* or *very often*, and that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by these facilities and programs. Those parents who participate in competitive, structured programs are much more likely than parents who participate in non-competitive sports to report that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well*. Parents who participate in non-competitive, unstructured programs are less likely than other parents to report that their children use these opportunities *often* or *very often*.

Trends The overall proportions of parents who indicate that public facilities and programs for physical activity are available and their perceptions about how these facilities and programs meet the needs of their children have remained constant over time. However, since 2000, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of parents who state that their child uses these facilities and programs *often* or *very often* and a slight increase indicating that they use them *rarely* or *not at all*. The relationships where active parents are more likely to cite the availability of these types of facilities and programs, and are more likely to indicate that their children use them persist over time.



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Private facilities and programs

Nearly three-quarters of Canadian parents indicate that private facilities and programs for physical activity are available locally. Just over two in five parents (44%) report that these facilities and programs meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*, but only 15% actually make use of them *often* or *very often*. Parents residing in the Atlantic provinces and in Saskatchewan are less likely than parents nationally to report that there are local private facilities and programs available for their children, whereas parents in Quebec are more likely to report this. Parents in Prince Edward Island are less likely than others to indicate that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by such facilities and programs.

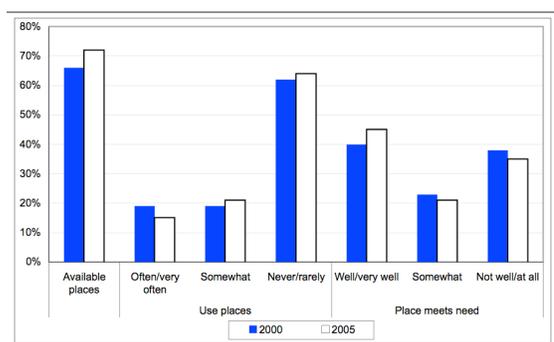
Child's age and sex While parents of teenage girls are more likely than parents of teenage boys to report that there are private facilities and programs available, parents of younger boys are more likely than parents of younger girls to report this.

Child's participation in sport Parents of sport participants are more likely than other parents to indicate that they have local private facilities and programs available and that these facilities and programs meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*. They are also significantly less likely than parents of non-participants to indicate that their children use private facilities and programs *rarely* or *not at all*.

Parent's age and sex Mothers are more likely than fathers to report the availability of private facilities and programs; however, there are no significant differences between older and younger parents. Mothers are also more likely to indicate that these facilities and programs meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*.

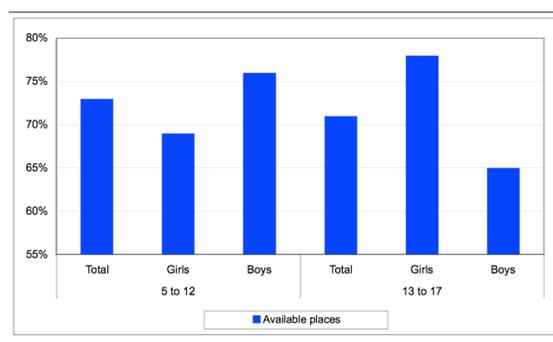
Socio-economic and demographic factors There is a general increase in the proportion of parents who indicate that there are private opportunities for their children to be active with increasing attained education level of the parent. Parents with less than a high school education are more likely to indicate that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well*, compared to those with a university education. The proportion of parents indicating that private opportunities are available for their children to be active increases with increasing household income.

PRIVATE FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS overall



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS by child's age and sex



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Private facilities and programs (cont'd)

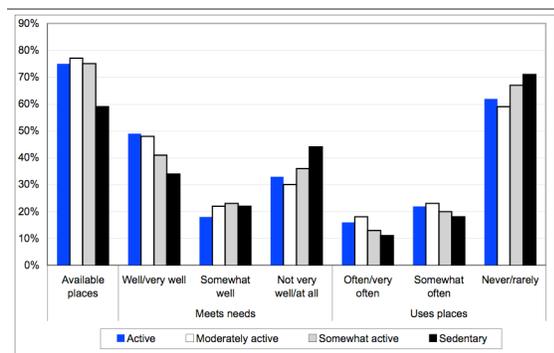
Socio-economic and demographic factors (cont'd) Generally speaking, parents with the highest level of household income are more likely to report that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by these types of facilities and programs. Parents in the lowest income bracket are more likely to state that their children *never* or *rarely* use these types of facilities. Parents who have never been married are more likely to report the availability of private opportunities for their children to be active. Parents who have never been married are also more likely to state that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* compared to parents who are widowed, divorced or separated, who in turn are more likely to report this than married parents. Parents from the smallest communities are less likely than those from the largest communities to indicate that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by the private opportunities available.

Parent's activity level Parents who are the least active are less likely than other parents to report that there are private facilities and programs available or that these facilities and programs suit their children's needs *well* or *very well*, yet are more likely to state that their children *rarely* or *never* use these facilities or programs to be active.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are more likely to report the availability of private opportunities for their children to be active, that their children use these opportunities *often* or *very often*, and that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by these opportunities.

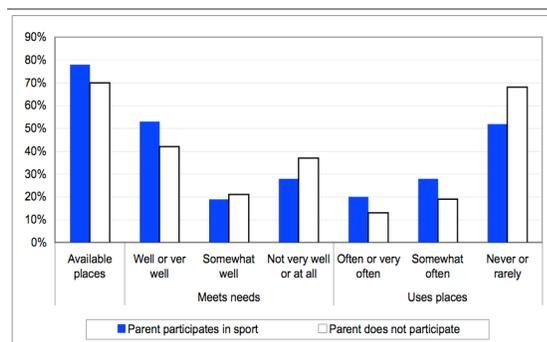
Trends There has been a significant increase since 2000 in the proportion of parents who indicate that there are local private facilities and programs available where their child can be active. Moreover, the proportion of parents who state that these opportunities meet their child's needs *well* or *very well* has also increased slightly, yet the proportion who indicate that their child uses these facilities and programs *often* or *very often* has decreased slightly over time. As observed in 2000, active parents are still more likely than the least active parents to indicate the availability of these types of facilities and programs and that these opportunities meet the child's needs *well* or *very well*. Interestingly, where there were no differences related to children's age and sex in 2000, parents of teenaged girls are more likely than parents of teenaged boys to report that there are private facilities and programs, whereas parents of younger boys are more likely than parents of younger girls to report this.

**PRIVATE FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS
by parent's participation in sport**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

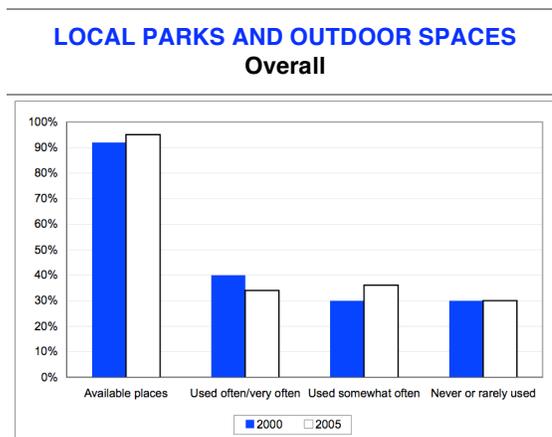
Local parks and outdoor spaces

Parks and other outdoor spaces conducive to children’s physical activity are available locally to the majority of Canadians (95%). Over half (57%) of parents report that these parks and spaces meet their children’s needs *well* or *very well*, and 34% use them *often* or *very often*. A further 36% use them *somewhat often*, while 30% use them *rarely* or *not at all*. Parents in Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories are less likely than parents nationally to indicate the availability of local parks and outdoor spaces. Parents in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick are less likely than parents overall to state that these places meet their children’s needs *well* or *very well*. Parents residing in Nova Scotia are more likely to report that their children use these places *often* or *very often* compared to parents on average.

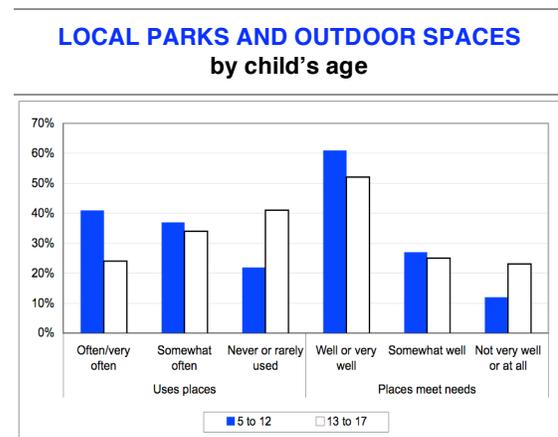
Child’s age and sex Although there are no significant gender or age-related differences in the reported availability of local parks and outdoor spaces, there do appear to be some discrepancies in the use and suitability of such facilities. Parents of teenagers are more likely than parents of younger children to report that their children *rarely* or *never* use these facilities, and to report that these facilities *do not* meet their needs *well* or *at all*.

Child’s participation in sport Parents of sport participants are no more likely than parents of non-participants to indicate that there are local parks and outdoor spaces available. However, parents of sport participants are more likely to indicate that these meet their children’s needs *well* or *very well* and to report that their children use local parks and outdoor spaces *often* or *very often*.

Parent’s age and sex There are no significant differences between mothers and fathers in reporting the availability of local parks and outdoor spaces; however, mothers are more likely to report that these meet their children’s needs *well* or *very well*, and that their children use them *often* or *very often*. While parental age is not a significant factor in reporting availability, parents aged 25 to 44 are more likely than parents aged 45 to 64 to indicate that the local parks and outdoor spaces meet their children’s needs *well* or *very well*, and that their children use them *often* or *very often*.



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Local parks and outdoor spaces (cont'd)

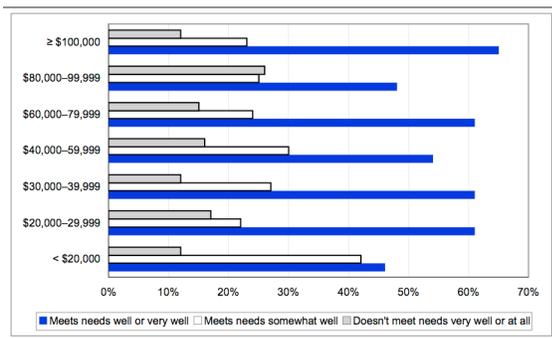
Socio-economic and demographic factors Those parents with the lowest household incomes are generally less likely than other parents to report that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well* by local parks and outdoor spaces. Those parents who have never been married are also more likely to report that their children use such facilities *often* or *very often*. Parents residing in the smallest communities are less likely to indicate that local parks or outdoor places are available in their community, that they meet the needs of their children *well* or *very well*, or that their children use these types of places *often* or *very often*, compared to those in the largest communities.

Parent's activity level Parents who are the least active are less likely than other parents to report that their children's needs are met *well* or *very well* by local parks and outdoor spaces, or to report that their children use these places *often* or *very often*.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are no more likely than other parents to report that there are parks and outdoor spaces available to their children locally, nor do they report more frequent use or that their children's needs are met differently by such facilities than do other parents. Those parents who participate in sport specifically as players, however, are more likely than other sport participants to report that their children's needs are being met *well* or *very well*.

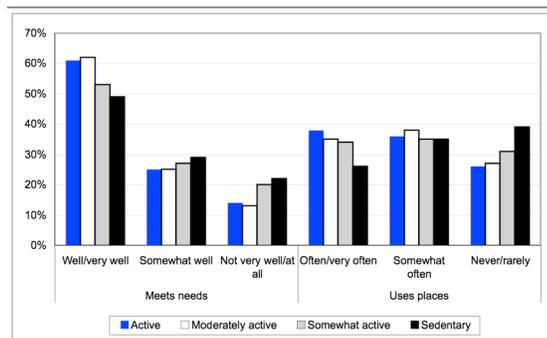
Trends The high proportion of parents who report that there are parks and outdoor spaces available locally has remained unchanged since 2000. Moreover, similar percentages of parents report that these facilities meet their children's needs either *well* or *very well* in 2000 and 2005. However, since 2000, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of parents reporting that their child uses parks and outdoor spaces *often* or *very often*. Mothers continue to be more likely than fathers to state that these types of facilities meet the needs of their children *well* or *very well* and that their children use these facilities *often* or *very often*. The trend of decreased usage of parks and outdoor spaces with increasing age of the child also persists over time. Active parents are also still more likely to state that these facilities meet the needs of their child *well* or *very well*, and that they are being used *often* or *very often* by their child.

**LOCAL PARKS AND OUTDOOR SPACES
by household income**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**LOCAL PARKS AND OUTDOOR SPACES
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Distance to parks and playgrounds

Over two in five Canadian parents (43%) report that the nearest park or playground is about one to two blocks away. A further 16% report that there is one less than half a kilometre away, while 13% report that the nearest is less than one kilometre away, and 25% report that the nearest park or playground is more than one kilometre away.

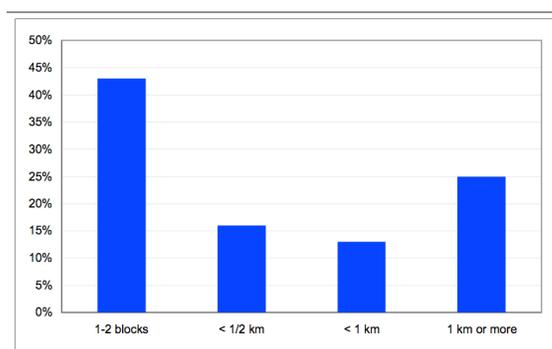
Generally speaking, parents in the Atlantic provinces and in Quebec are less likely than others to report that playgrounds and parks are located within one or two blocks of their home, whereas parents in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories are more likely to report this. Indeed, residents of the Atlantic region are more likely to state that the nearest playground and park is located more than one kilometre away.

Child's age and sex Overall, parents of boys and girls are equally as likely to report that there are playgrounds and parks close to home (within one to two blocks). Parents of adolescent girls are more likely than parents of boys the same age to report that parks and playgrounds are located within one or two blocks, whereas parents of adolescent boys are more likely to state that they are half a kilometre to one kilometre away.

Child's participation in sport Parents of children who participate in sport are more likely to indicate that parks and playgrounds are located more than one kilometre away from home, whereas parents of children who do not participate indicate that these are available within 0.5 to 1 kilometre away from home. When looking exclusively at children who participate in sport, children who compete at the national level are reportedly much more likely to have a park or playground within one to two blocks of their home. The same appears to be true for children who participate in non-competitive, unstructured sport activities.

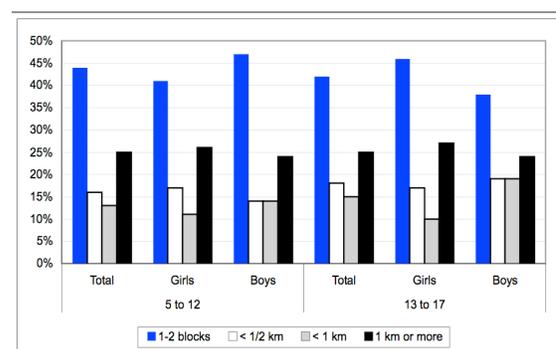
Parent's age and sex In general, mothers are more likely than fathers to report that there is a park or playground within one to two blocks of their home, and fathers are more likely to report their being further away. Younger parents are more likely than older parents to report that a playground or park is within one to two blocks of their home. For older parents, mothers are more likely to report that a park or playground is located within one or two blocks of their home, whereas fathers in the same age group are more likely to report that they are within half a kilometre to one kilometre of their home.

DISTANCE TO PARK AND PLAYGROUND overall



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

DISTANCE TO PARK AND PLAYGROUND by child's age and sex



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

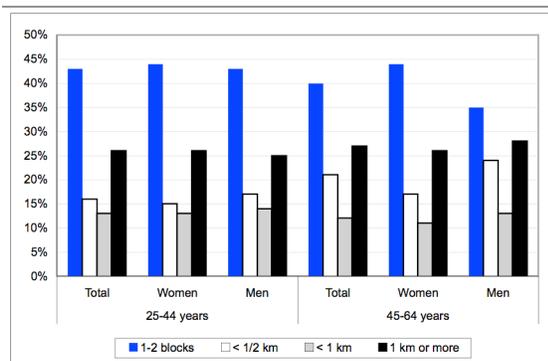
Distance to parks and playgrounds (cont'd)

Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents with less than a secondary school education are least likely to indicate that the nearest playground or park is located within one to two blocks of their home, and are more likely to state that they are located more than one kilometre away. Parents in the lowest income bracket (under \$20,000 per year) are most likely, while parents in the highest income bracket (over \$100,000 per year) are least likely, to report that the nearest park or playground is more than one kilometre away. In addition, parents living in the smaller communities are least likely, while those living in largest communities are more likely, to report that there are parks or playgrounds within one or two blocks of their home.

Parent's activity level Parents who are active are more likely to report that the nearest park or playground is located within one or two blocks from home compared to parents who are least active.

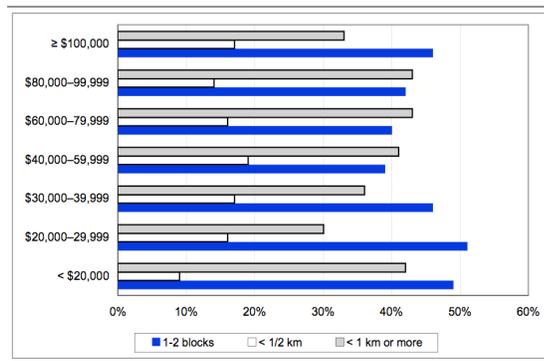
Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are less likely than those who do not to indicate that the nearest park or playground is within one to two blocks of home, but more likely to state that it is within 0.5 to 1 kilometre from home. When looking specifically at parents who participate in sport, those who are involved in some other capacity than playing, are more likely to report that their nearest park or playground is more than one kilometre away.

**DISTANCE TO PARK AND PLAYGROUND
by parent's age and sex**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**DISTANCE TO PARK AND PLAYGROUND
by household income**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Other local places for physical activity

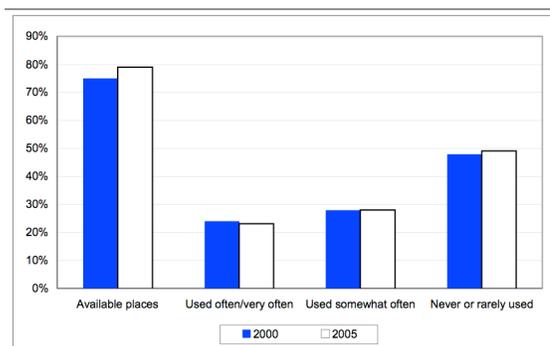
More than three-quarters of parents (79%) report that there are other local places available for their children to be physically active, such as school yards that can be used after hours. While 41% indicate that these facilities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*, a further 31% feel they meet their needs *somewhat well*, and 27% feel they *do not* meet their needs *well* or *at all*. Less than one quarter of parents report that their children use these facilities *often* or *very often*, while 28% say that they are used *somewhat often* and 49% say they are used *rarely* or *not at all*. Parents residing in Newfoundland and Quebec are least likely, while parents residing in Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories are most likely, to report that such facilities are available. Parents living in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island are less likely than parents overall to state that these places meet the needs of their children *well* or *very well*.

Child's age and sex Parents of boys are more likely than parents of girls to indicate the availability of other places to be active in the community. This gender difference is particularly evident among younger children. Regardless of gender, parents of younger children are more likely than parents of teenagers to report that their children use other local places *often* or *very often*, and are also more likely to indicate that these places meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*.

Child's participation in sport Parents of sport participants are more likely than parents of non-participants to indicate that their children use other local facilities *often* or *very often*, and that these facilities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*.

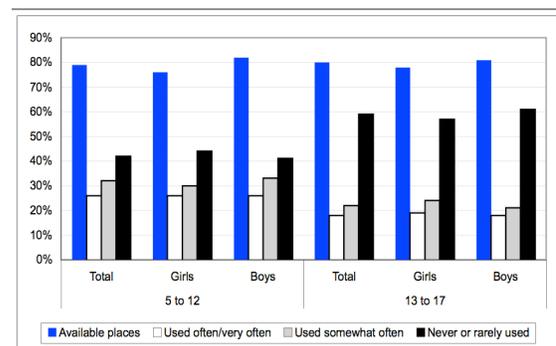
Parent's age and sex There are no significant differences between mothers and fathers or older and younger parents in reporting the availability of other local places for physical activity. When examining how well these facilities meet their children's needs, mothers are more likely than fathers to indicate that their needs are met *well* or *very well*, and parents aged 25 to 44 are more likely than parents aged 45 to 64 to indicate this. The same pattern (mothers more likely than fathers, and younger parents more likely than older parents) is apparent in parents reporting that their children use these facilities *often* or *very often*.

OTHER LOCAL PLACES
overall trends, 2000-2005



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

OTHER LOCAL PLACES
by child's age and sex



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Other local places for physical activity (cont'd)

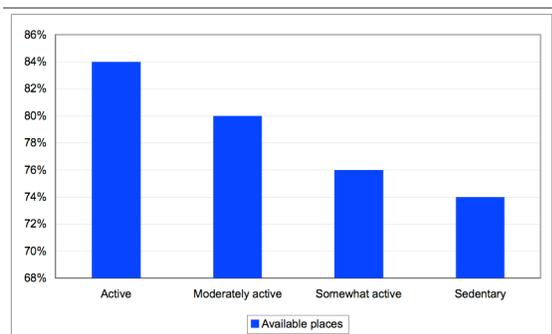
Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents with less than secondary school education are less likely than others to indicate the availability of other places to be active in the community, to report that their children use these *often* or *very often*, or to indicate that such facilities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*. Parents with the lowest household incomes are less likely to indicate the availability of other places to be active. Parents who have never been married are more likely than other parents to report that their children use other local facilities *often* or *very often* and to report that such facilities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well*. Generally speaking, parents from smaller communities are less likely than those from larger communities to indicate the availability of other places to be active, to indicate that these places suit the needs of their children *well* or *very well*, and to report that their children use them facilities *often* or *very often*.

Parent's activity level Parents who are active or moderately active are more likely than parents with the lowest levels of activity to report the availability of other local places for physical activity; however, this pattern is not evident between parents in reporting how well these facilities meet their children's needs or how often their children use them.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are more likely than other parents to report that there are other places available locally to their children. There is no difference between those who participate in sport and those who do not in reporting the frequency of use or satisfaction with these facilities. However, parents who participate in competitive, structured sports are more likely to report that these facilities meet their children's needs *well* or *very well* compared to those who participate in non-competitive, structured sports.

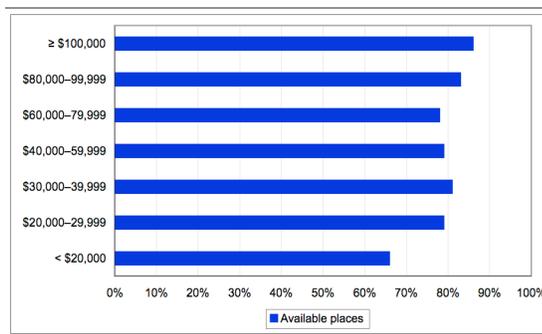
Trends There has been a very slight increase in the proportion of parents who indicate the availability of other local places in the community where their children can be active. However, there are no differences over time in the percentage of parents who state that these places meet the needs of their children or in reported usage. The pattern of decreased usage of these places and decreased satisfaction in terms of meeting needs with increasing age of the child has remained unchanged over time. Moreover, active parents are still more likely to report the availability of such places. However, in 2000, active parents were more likely to state that these places met the needs of their children *well* or *very well* and that their children used these facilities *often* or *very often*. These two relationships no longer appear in 2005.

**OTHER LOCAL PLACES
by parent's activity level**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

**OTHER LOCAL PLACES
by household income**



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Summary of section

The majority of Canadian parents indicate that there are public and private facilities and programs, parks and outdoor spaces, and various other places available locally for their children to be physically active. The resources differ considerably in how well they meet children's needs and are used with varying frequency, as can be noted below:

- 92% of parents report that there are public facilities and programs available locally; 60% report that these meet their children's needs well or very well and 23% report that their children use them often or very often.
- 72% of parents report that there are private facilities and programs available locally; 35% report that these meet their children's needs well or very well and 15% report that their children use them often or very often.
- 95% of parents report that there are parks and other outdoor spaces available locally; 57% report that these meet their children's needs well or very well and 34% report that their children use them often or very often.
- 79% of parents report that there are other places available locally, such as school yards which are open after hours; 41% report that these meet their children's needs well or very well and 23% report that their children use them often or very often.

As might be expected, wide variation persists between various populations in reporting the availability, suitability, and use of these resources, as noted in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics associated with greater availability, suitability, and use of physical activity resources

	Child's characteristics	Parent's characteristics	Child's participation in sport	Parent's participation in sport and activity level	Socio-economic and demographic factors
REPORTING GREATER AVAILABILITY					
Public Facilities/ Programs			-Sport participants	-Sport participants	
Private Facilities/ Programs	-Teen girls -Young boys	-Mothers	-Sport participants		
Parks/Outdoor Spaces					
Other Places				-Active	
REPORTING CHILD'S GREATER USE OF FACILITIES					
Public Facilities/ Programs		-Young parents -Mothers	-Sport participants	-Sport participants (especially those who participate in competitive, or unstructured sports)	
Private Facilities/ Programs		-Never married		-Sport participants	
Parks/Outdoor Spaces		-Mothers -Young parents -Never married		-Players -Use coach	-Lower income
Other Places	-Young children	-Mothers -Young parents -less than high school education or high school only -Never married	-Sport participants		-Lower income

REPORTING THAT OPPORTUNITIES MEET THEIR NEEDS WELL OR VERY WELL					
Public Facilities/ Programs			-Sport participants	-Sport participants (especially those who participate in competitive, or unstructured sports) -Active	-Higher income
Private Facilities/ Programs		-Mothers -less than high school education or high school only -Never married	-Sport participants	-Sport participants	
Parks/Outdoor Spaces		-Mothers -Young parents		-Players	-Lower income
Other Places	-Young children	-Mothers -Young parents -less than high school education or high school only -Never married	-Sport participants	-Players	

While similar proportions of parents in 2005 indicate the availability of public facilities and programs and local parks and outdoor spaces as did in 2000, *slightly more* parents now state that there are other local places for physical activity available and *substantially more* parents now report that there are private facilities and programs available.

In 2000, child age and sex was not related to the reported availability of local private facilities and programs. By 2005, parents of adolescent girls and young boys were more likely to indicate their availability. There have been few notable similarities over time in the relationships of parent and child characteristics with reporting local opportunities for physical activity; however, it can be noted that the relationship where active parents were more likely to cite the availability of public, private, and other types of facilities and programs persists over time. The trend of decreased usage of parks and outdoor spaces with increasing age of the child also persists.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overall, the majority of Canadian children appear to have a variety of local physical activity resources available to them, but relatively few have their needs met by these resources, and even fewer use them regularly. This pattern was also evident in 2000. The low levels of sufficient activity among children and youth indicate that a comprehensive approach to the promotion of physical activity and sport, including an examination of the adequacy of existing local physical activity resources, is warranted, and appropriate action taken to make them more suitable for the needs of the public. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services in the United States reviewed the evidence on effective approaches and recommended that creating or enhancing access to places for physical activity in combination with distributing of information contributed to greater levels of activity. Based on the review of documents, this was recommended as an effective way of increasing activity, and can include the creation of walking trails, building physical

activity facilities, or accessing local existing facilities as examples. In terms of information, this can include information on how to use the resources, education items on health, exercise programs or information on networking opportunities for physical activity.⁴⁵

When looking more specifically at the availability of public facilities and programs, almost all Canadian parents (92%) indicate that they are available in their community. However, two in every five children *rarely* or *never* use these facilities. This appears to be the case for girls and teens in particular, which are also the groups less likely to be active. Similarly, the overwhelming majority (95%) of parents reported available parks and green spaces in the community. However, of these, 30% indicate that their children *rarely* or *never* use these places to be active. Again, this lack of usage is more apparent among teenagers, and in particular, adolescent girls. Generally speaking adolescent girls do not appear to use these types of facilities and are also not active. One study in North Carolina looked at the association between the perceived neighbourhood factors with the activity levels, sedentary behaviours and BMI of sixth grade girls.⁴⁶ This study found that the existence of other walkers and bikers on neighbourhood streets, other children playing outdoors, low neighbourhood crime, trails in the neighbourhood, and access to facilities, were associated with lower BMI. Moreover, the researchers found that having more places to be active contributed considerably to activity levels. These findings are similar to other research that found that for adolescent girls, living near more parks with walking and other active choice amenities was associated with increased physical activity levels.⁴⁷ Interestingly, however, data from this section show that parents of adolescent girls are more likely to report that there are parks and playgrounds within one to two blocks, whereas parents of adolescent boys are more likely to state that they are located further away (0.5 to 1 km). Data from this section also show that parks and outdoor spaces are reportedly used by younger rather than older children. The proximity of parks and facilities therefore, may play a role in facilitating physical activity for adolescents in general, as their activity is often restricted to places that can be easily reached by walking or bicycling. However, offering *appropriate* facilities and programming that specifically target the needs of older children (e.g., pickup soccer) may be particularly useful for increasing usage among this group. In addition, providing safe and well-maintained equipment and facilities, lighting, water fountains, adequate shade, limited vehicular traffic, and neighbourhood safety programs may also contribute to increased park and outdoor space usage.

A clear pattern also exists, that if children or parents participate in sport, or if parents are generally active, children are reportedly more likely to actually use publicly available facilities and programs and to use local parks and green spaces. Parents can play an important role in influencing the activity-related behaviours of children during childhood through their adolescent years. Although there is a lack of consensus about how social influences, such as parents' activity levels, are associated with children's activity patterns, some research suggests that parental support and direct assistance from parents (such as encouragement and support or payment of fees and memberships as examples³⁹), especially for adolescents, may help to support physical activity.^{39,48} Parents and other family members are in a potential position of modeling appropriate active behaviours for their children by playing sports with their children in a local park, participating in sport or physical activity themselves, or encouraging family participants. Strategies to inform and engage parents by increasing knowledge about the benefits and sufficient amount of

physical activity for their children, increasing awareness of local opportunities and facilities for their children to be active, and providing solutions on how to overcome barriers associated with their child's physical activities are part of strategies for increasing levels of activity among Canada's younger population.

In a U.S. based study of children aged 4 to 18, parents reported on the places where their children are most active.⁴⁴ Researchers found that homes of friends, their own yards, parks, and playgrounds were most frequently used by children compared to streets, gyms, or other paid facilities. In a survey of Canadian parents, results were similar.⁴⁹ Almost all school aged children participate in physical activities at school.⁴⁹ Home is frequently cited as a popular venue for physical activity by 91% of parents of 5 to 12 years olds; however, this drops significantly to 76% among parents of teens, who are more likely to use public facilities. Indeed, teens that reportedly use private or public facilities spend 4 to 4.5 more hours engaged in physical activity per week. Interestingly, the U.S. researchers found that the number of places a child went to be active was positively related to the number of facilities close to home and to their level of physical activity. However, the number of places attended decreased with increasing child age. Researchers concluded from their study that children's activity levels benefit from an increased variety of places to be active and increased convenience of these places. Moreover, they concluded that the environment which may be supportive for adult physical activity may not necessarily translate into a supportive environment for children to be active. Therefore, understanding the physical environments that are suitable for both adults and children are essential when developing strategies to increase physical activity.

Promoting the use of local facilities and programs in collaboration with schools, in addition to undertaking various needs assessments related to various local and school facilities, would likely help service providers to effectively create a variety of programs to reach and meet the needs of boys and girls in every age group across Canada. In addition, community facilities that are not specifically designated for physical activity can also play an important role among populations with limited access to opportunities (such as rural or smaller communities), and should play a part in a comprehensive plan to promote physical activity to children and youth in all communities. Such spaces include the use of non-designated sport and physical activity facilities such as open fields, church halls, school classrooms, community centres, or workplaces.