



**SECTION A: ACCESSING, USING AND
DISTRIBUTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
INFORMATION**



Introduction

The Task Force on Community Preventive Services of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States conducted systematic reviews of physical activity interventions at a community level.³ Based on this review, they recommended or strongly recommended six interventions, as they were shown in the research to be effective. One of these six interventions was the creation or enhancement of access to places to be active, combined with *information outreach activities*. The provision of information can be important for Canadians when overcoming barriers to physical activity. Earlier research reveals that almost half of Canadians agree to some extent (33% strongly agree, 14% agree) that the provision of a toll-free (1-800) number which they could call to obtain information on local activities, child care services, and so on would help them be more active.⁴ Moreover, 30% agree to some extent that information via the media or Internet would help them become more active. Clearly, ensuring accessible information on community opportunities is important to Canadians.

This section examines the availability and sources of information that municipalities obtain on physical activity, whether municipalities find physical activity guidelines useful, and whether, in turn, municipalities provide information to their residents and if so, what types of information are made available. The factors are examined by region and community size. A comparative analysis with data collected in 2000 is also presented. For the purposes of these analyses, small towns and cities are categorized as having between 1,000–9,999 residents, mid-sized municipalities include 10,000–99,999 residents, and larger municipalities have over 100,000 residents.

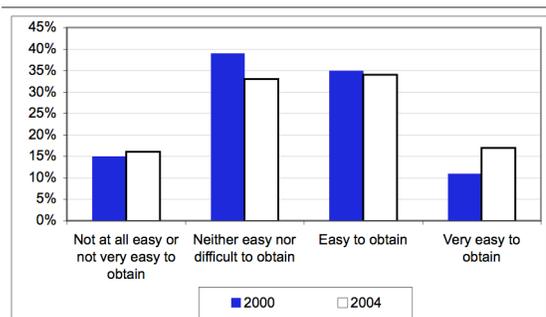
Availability of information about physical activity

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Just over half of Canadian municipalities (51%) report that they find it either *easy* or *very easy* to obtain information about physical activity to meet the needs of the citizens in their community; however 16% of the municipalities state that it is *not very* or *not at all* easy to find these types of resources. The remaining 33% indicate that they find it *neither* easy nor difficult to find this type of information. Municipalities with small populations are less likely than their larger counterparts to report that it is *easy* or *very easy* to obtain resources about physical activity that meet their citizens' needs. Only 45% of small municipalities find such information easily accessible compared to over 69% of large municipalities. Among large municipalities, none report that it is difficult to obtain physical activity information.

Region Compared to Canadian municipalities overall, Quebec municipalities are less likely, whereas those in Ontario and Atlantic and Western Canada are slightly more likely, to report *easy* or *very easy* access to information about physical activity for their citizens.

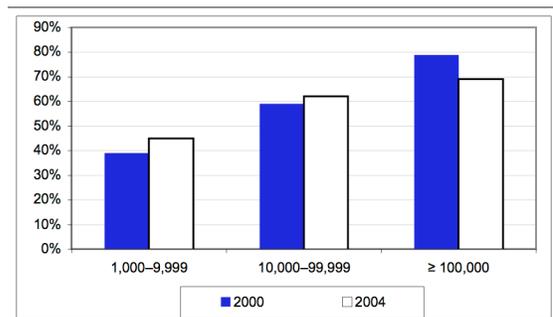
Trends Since 2000,⁵ there has been a *slight increase* in the proportion of municipalities that report that they find it *easy* or *very easy* to obtain resources about physical activity to suit their residents' needs. This has been accompanied by a *slight decrease* in the rates who indicate it *neither* easy nor difficult, with the result that during both time periods, a constant minority of municipalities state that it is difficult to obtain this type of information (<20%). Small municipalities are now *slightly more likely* to report that it is *easy* or *very easy* to obtain this information that meet the needs of their residents compared to 5 years ago. However, large municipalities are now *substantially less likely* to report that they find it *easy* or *very easy* to find this information compared to rates reported in 2000.

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION
overall, trends from 2000–2004



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION
trends (easy or very easy) by community size



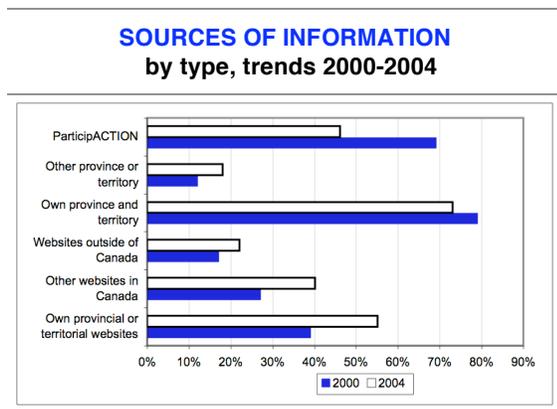
2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

Sources of information about physical activity

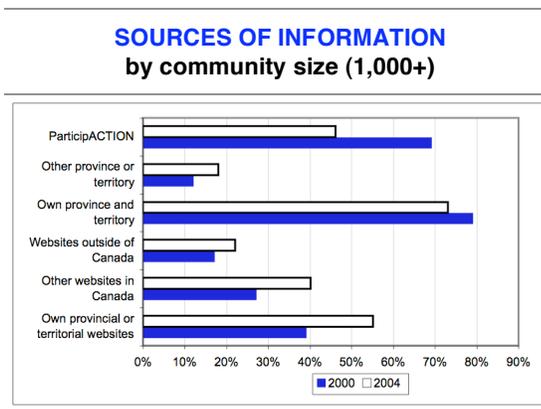
Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Almost all (90%) of the municipalities indicated that they have obtained *some* form of information on physical activity. The most common source, cited by nearly three-quarters of municipalities, is provincial or territorial governments. Other common sources are federal government departments (Health or Fitness Canada, now known as the Public Health Agency of Canada), local Health Units or Centres locaux des services communautaire (CLSC), and provincial and territorial websites. At least 40% of municipalities reported that they also obtained information from ParticipACTION, not-for-profit organizations within their province or territory, and other Canadian websites. Slightly more mid-sized and large municipalities report having access to resources on physical activity, compared to small municipalities. Large municipalities are more likely than small or mid-size ones to obtain resources through Health and Fitness Canada (now known as the Public Health Agency of Canada), provincial or territorial websites, other Canadian websites, not for profit organizations, and Canadian or International magazines and mass media. Small municipalities are less likely than others to access information from heart health coalition and private companies.

Region Compared to Canadian municipalities generally, municipalities in Western Canada are more likely, whereas those in Quebec are less likely, to obtain information on physical activity through the federal government, provincial or territorial websites, and other Canadian websites. Municipalities in Atlantic Canada are more likely to gather information from their own provincial governments, the federal government, other Canadian websites, and the Heart Health Coalition. Municipalities in Ontario are more likely to obtain information from local Health Units and the Heart Health Coalition.

Trends The proportion of municipalities that accessed *some* form of information on physical activity has remained unchanged between 2000⁵ and 2004, although there are significant changes in the sources accessed. Since 2000, there have been *substantial increases* in the proportion of municipalities who state that they received information from their own provincial or territorial websites and other websites within Canada. There have also been *slight increases* in the percentage accessing information from websites outside of Canada and from other provinces or territories. Over the past 5 years, there have been *slight decreases* in the proportions indicating that information was obtained from magazines and mass media, and a more *substantial decrease* in citing obtaining information from ParticipACTION.



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

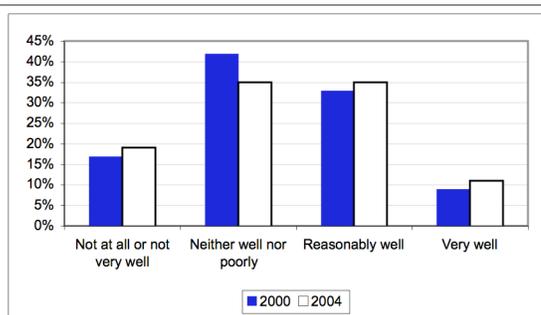
Usefulness of information about physical activity

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Less than half of Canadian municipalities (46%) report that the information they obtain meets their needs *well* or *very well* for the purpose of informing their citizens about physical activity. However, 19% of the municipalities indicate that it does not meet their needs *very well* or *at all*. Small municipalities are less likely than mid-size and large municipalities to report that the obtained resources meet their recreation department's needs.

Region Compared to others, municipalities in Atlantic and Western Canada are slightly more likely to report that the resources that they obtained meet their needs, whereas those in Quebec are slightly less likely to report this.

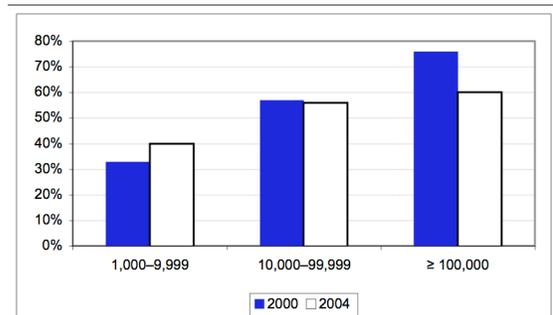
Trends Overall, the proportion of municipalities that report that the accessed physical activity information meets their needs has generally stayed the same over the past 5 years⁵. In 2004, small municipalities were slightly more likely to state that the information met their needs *well* or *very well* compared to rates reported in 2000. However, the converse is true for large municipalities – these municipalities are less likely to state that the resources met their needs *well* or *very well* compared to 5 years ago.

USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION
overall, trends 2000–2004



2000 and 2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

USEFULNESS OF INFORMATION
by community size (1,000+)



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

Provision of physical activity information

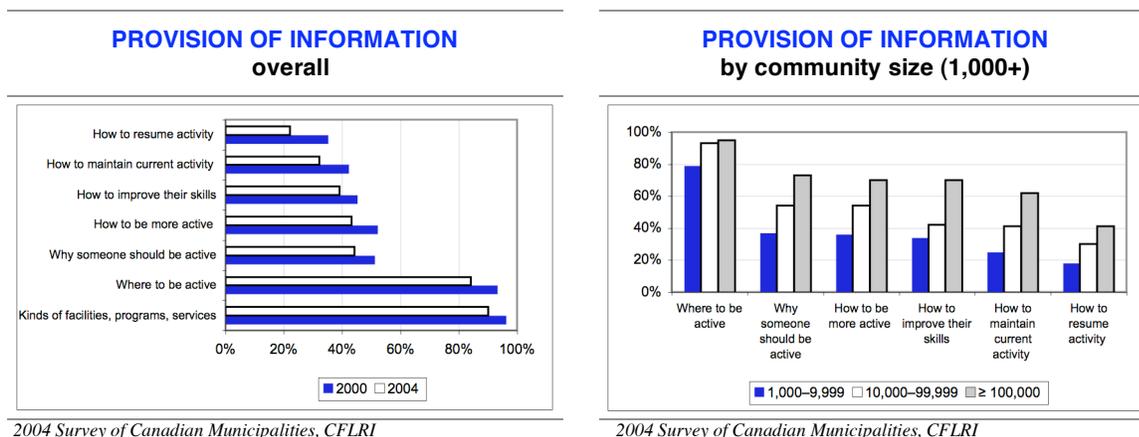
Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Previous topics explored the availability, source and usefulness of physical activity information to municipalities. The majority (88%) of municipalities report that they provide, in turn, *some* type of information to their residents. Of these,

- 90% provide information on the *kinds* of facilities, programs and services that are available;
- 84% provide information about *where* someone can go to be active in their community;
- 44% offer information on *why* someone should become active.
- 43% provide information on *how* someone can become *more* active in their daily life;
- 39% offer information on how someone can *improve* their physical activity or sports skills;
- 32% offer information on how someone who is currently active can *maintain* their activity level; and
- 22% provide information on how a previously active individual can *resume* their activity level.

Small municipalities are less likely to offer information on: *where* to go to be active in the community; how a previously active individual can *resume* their previous activity level; and what *kinds* of opportunities are available locally. Large municipalities are more likely to provide information on: how the currently active can *maintain* their activity level; how to *improve* skills; how to *become* more active; and *why* become more active.

Region Compared to Canadian municipalities overall, those in the Atlantic region are more likely, whereas those in Quebec are slightly less likely, to provide their communities with *some* type of information on physical activity. Municipalities in the Atlantic and Western Canada are slightly more likely and those in Ontario are much more likely to offer information on how the currently active can *maintain* their activity level. Municipalities in the Atlantic region are more likely to offer information on how someone can *improve* their skills, whereas those in the West are more likely to provide information on how to *become* more active daily. Atlantic municipalities are less likely to provide information about *where* to go to be active in their community, and those in Quebec are less likely to offer information on *why* someone should become active.

Trends The proportion of municipalities reporting provision of *some* type of physical activity information to their residents has remained high and virtually unchanged over the past 5 years.⁵ This trend is evident regardless of the size of the municipality. However, when examining each of the types of information independently, there have generally been *decreases* in the rates reporting each type of information since 2000.



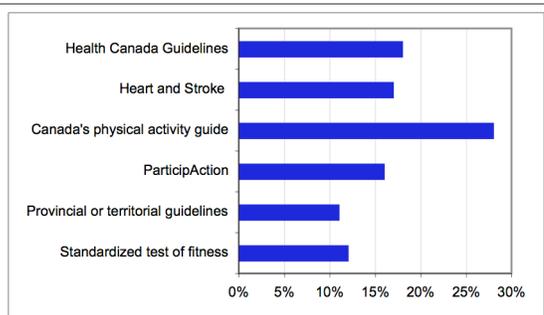
Use of physical activity guidelines in programming

Towns and cities (1,000+ residents) Just under half of municipalities (48%) indicate that they use physical activity guidelines for their municipal programming. The most widely cited guideline used among the municipalities is Canada's Physical Activity Guide (28%). Less than one in five municipalities report using guidelines from the Standardized Test of Fitness, provincial or territorial activity guides, ParticipACTION, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, or federal government departments (Health or Fitness Canada). Small municipalities are the least likely to use *some* type of physical activity guidelines in the local programming and provision of services. Compared to large municipalities, small and mid-size municipalities are more likely to cite the use of provincial and territorial activity guidelines, and are also slightly more likely to cite the use of guidelines from ParticipACTION for their programming. Compared to their larger counterparts, small municipalities are less likely to indicate use of Canada's Physical Activity Guide, guidelines from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, federal government departments (Health and Fitness Canada), or the Standardized Test of Fitness in their municipal programming.

Region Compared to Canadian municipalities overall, municipalities in Atlantic and Western Canada are most likely to use some physical activity guidelines in their municipal programming, whereas those in Quebec are least likely to do so. Canada's Physical Activity Guide is most likely to be cited by municipalities located in Atlantic Canada and Ontario compared to municipalities in general.

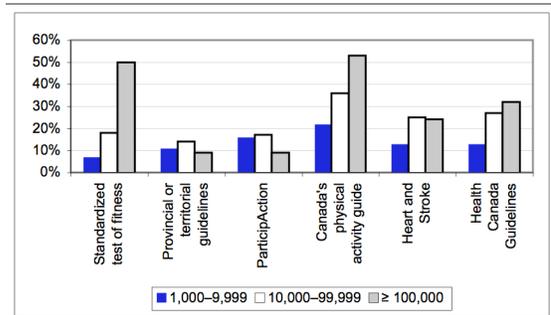
Trends A change in question wording to eliminate international guidelines and the addition of a category 'no guidelines' precludes direct comparison of the overall percentage of municipalities reporting the use of physical activity guidelines.⁵ Although over the past 5 years, there has been a decrease in the proportion of municipalities reporting that they use Canada's Physical Activity Guide, this may also be due in part to the change in question wording.

**GUIDELINES USED IN PROGRAMMING
by type**



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

**GUIDELINES USED IN PROGRAMMING
by community size (1,000+)**



2004 Survey of Canadian Municipalities, CFLRI

Summary of section

This section examined how municipalities obtain information on physical activity and sport, how easy it is to obtain this information, the primary source for this information, and whether or not the information is suitable for the municipality's need in promoting physical activity to its citizens. Virtually all (90%) municipalities have received *some* form of information on physical activity. Sources of this information include the provincial or territorial governments, federal government departments, local Health Units or Centres locale des services Communautaires (CLSC), provincial and territorial websites, ParticipACTION, not-for-profit organizations, and Canadian websites. A notable one in five municipalities find it difficult to find information on physical activity and sport, and a similar percentage find the information that they have obtained does not meet their residents' needs very well or at all.

In addition to the types of information they receive, municipalities were asked about the types of information on physical activity and sport that they in turn provide to their residents. The majority (88%) of municipalities indicate that they provide *some* type of information to their residents. More specifically, the majority provide information on the *kinds* of facilities, programs, and services that are available and *where* someone can go to be active in their community. In addition, roughly two in five municipalities provide information on *why* someone should become active, *how* someone can become *more* active in their daily life, and how someone can *improve* their physical activity or sports skills. Generally speaking, there have been *decreases* in the rates reporting each type of information in comparison to data collected in 2000.

Finally, municipalities were asked whether they use physical activity guidelines for their programming, and if so, what guidelines were used most often. Indeed, less than half of municipalities use physical activity guidelines for their municipal programming. The most widely cited guideline used among the municipalities is Canada's Physical Activity Guide. Other guidelines mentioned include the Standardized Test of Fitness, provincial or territorial activity guides, ParticipACTION, the Heart and Stroke Foundation guidelines, and federal government guidelines.

One prevalent finding from this section was that small municipalities are less likely than larger ones to access, use, and distribute information. Small municipalities are less likely to:

- report obtaining information;
- report that it is *easy* or *very easy* to obtain resources about physical activity that meet their citizens' needs;
- report that the resources they obtain meet their recreation department's needs to inform their community about physical activity;
- offer information on *where* to go to be active in the community, how a previously active individual can *resume* their previous activity level, and what *kinds* of opportunities are available locally;
- use *some* type of physical activity guidelines in the municipal programming and provision of services.

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

What do Canadians think? National population data reveal that lack of information on the opportunities for physical activity and sport in the community was the second highest ranked barrier to physical activity (out of 13 probed barriers), second only to the dollar cost of physical activity.⁴ In addition, 14% of Canadians strongly agree that they don't know how to go about building more physical activity into their lifestyle. Adults with lower educational attainment and lower levels of income are more likely to report both of these barriers. Inactive Canadians are more likely than Canadians with higher activity levels to report that they are unaware of ways to incorporate more physical activity into their lifestyle. Indeed, a relatively modest amount (41%) of Canadians have recently received information or spoken to someone about physical activity and sport. Again, adults with lower education, lower income, and lower levels of activity are less likely to report receiving information.⁴ Roughly half of Canadians have felt that this information has helped them become more active, and this proportion is lower among those who are currently less active. Interestingly, however, adults with higher levels of education and income are more likely to report that the information has helped them become more active. These figures taken together suggest that the provision of information can be important for many Canadians to become active or when overcoming barriers to physical activity, but that the provision of this type of information may currently be lower among groups that are typically less active and who may therefore need it the most: lower income, lower educated, and less active adults. The data also suggest that adults with lower income and lower education may be more receptive to the information to help them become more active.

Previous research has shown that the majority of Canadians find their information on physical activity and sport information through the media, such as television, newspapers, and radio.⁶ Furthermore, the use of technology can be used for increasing physical activity awareness, as 30% agree to some extent that information via the media or Internet would help them become more active.⁷ Moreover, almost half of Canadians agree to some extent (33% strongly agree, 14% agree) that the provision of a toll-free (1-800) number which they could call to obtain information on local activities, child care services and so on would help them be more active.⁷ These data demonstrate that the availability of accessible information on community opportunities is important to Canadians and that the use of technology seems viable.

What's available to and from municipalities? It is reassuring to see that almost all municipalities have obtained some form of information on physical activity and generally most municipalities find the information easy to obtain. The most frequently reported sources appear to be from provincial or territorial governments, federal government departments, and local Health Units or CLSCs. It is very interesting to note the substantial increases in the proportions of municipalities who state that they received their information from provincial or territorial websites and other websites within Canada, and the *slight decreases* in the proportion indicating receiving information from magazines and mass media. The increase in accessing government sources may parallel the increased focus on the promotion of physical activity by federal, provincial, and

territorial governments through strategies to address the 2003 and now the 2010 goals to increase population levels of physical activity.

The higher level of municipal internet use for gathering information seems to echo data regarding Canadians in general (see above). The internet is a relatively economical way of finding a vast amount of information when needed. Technology is a useful tool for implementing physical activity interventions, as it is important to communicate in a cost-effective manner and reach as broad a distribution of the population as possible.⁸ Sport and recreation facilities and municipalities may also find using local media and the internet useful for listing community facilities, advertising programs and schedules, advertising registration dates, and so on.

Although most municipalities obtain information on physical activity and sport, just under half of municipalities report using physical activity guidelines for their municipal programming. Could this be the result of a focus on getting the inactive to be more active as a first step in achieving increased levels of ‘sufficient’ activity rather than focusing on attaining recommended levels activity among all members of the population? Of municipalities using physical activity guidelines in programming, the most frequently reported guideline is Canada’s Physical Activity Guide (28%). Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living⁹ was released in the fall of 1998 by the Public Health Agency of Canada (part of Health Canada) and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. The purpose of this initiative was to provide a guide that would help Canadians determine how much physical activity is important for health, assist in choosing suitable activities through the provision of examples, and to provide information on how to build physical activity into daily life. National data reveal that 37% of Canadians have heard of Canada’s physical activity guide when prompted, but that this percentage drops dramatically when recall is unprompted.⁴

It is somewhat disconcerting that less than half of Canadian municipalities (46%) state that the information they obtain meets their needs *well* or *very well* in informing their citizens about physical activity, and that roughly one in five municipalities state the information that they obtained does not meet their needs very well or at all. It is somewhat positive, however, to see that there is an increase in the proportion of small municipalities that state that the information meets their needs *well* or *very well* compared to rates reported in 2000. One can speculate that perhaps this is attributable to the finding that more communities are accessing information on physical activity on the internet, which contributes to greater accessibility regardless of community size. However, it is important in future research to find out *why* the information available does not meet municipalities’ needs and what information would in fact be helpful for different types of communities.