

Working to become active

Increasing physical activity in the Canadian workplace



Ensuring a supportive environment at work for physical activity

The physical environment includes the physical make-up of the workplace, availability and access to facilities, and opportunities for active transportation. The 2007-08 *Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey* examines the availability of these types of supports in Canadian workplaces.

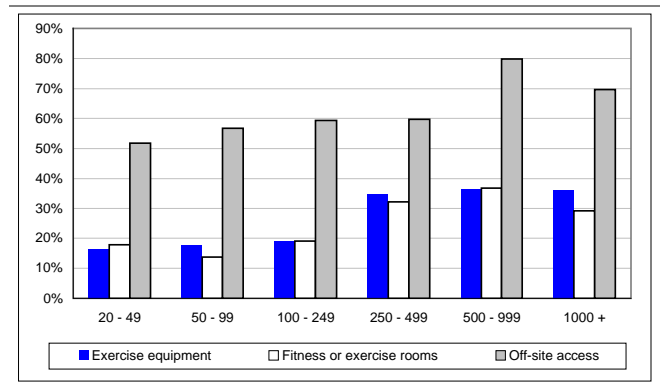
Exercise and fitness facilities Relatively few companies in Canada have physical activity equipment and facilities at the workplace. One-fifth (20%) of companies with 50 or more employees report employee access to exercise equipment, such as weights or stationary bicycles, and 17% state that they have fitness facilities or exercise rooms on-site. Of companies with 50 or more employees, roughly three out of five (58%) report that employees have access to off-site physical activity and fitness facilities.

Region Companies in Quebec are less likely than all others to state that off-site fitness facilities are available to employees. Workplaces in the North are more likely than the national average, and specifically those in Ontario to report this.

Workplace characteristics Generally speaking, the larger the company, the more likely it is that their employees have access to exercise and fitness facilities. Access to off-site facilities appears to increase with company size; only 52% of the smallest companies report access to such facilities compared to 80% of larger companies (500–999 employees). In addition, companies with 250 or more employees are generally more likely than those with fewer employees to have access to on-site facilities and exercise equipment. The availability of exercise and

fitness facilities varies by occupation. Companies with predominantly labour positions ($\geq 50\%$ in the company) are less likely to report having access to exercise equipment, on-site fitness and exercise facilities, and access to off-site facilities compared to companies with fewer labourers ($< 50\%$). In contrast, companies with relatively more professional positions are more likely to have access to each of these types of exercise and fitness facilities. Companies that have relatively more women ($\geq 50\%$ in the company) are more likely to state that fitness facilities or exercise rooms at work are available compared to those with fewer women.

EXERCISE AND FITNESS FACILITIES
by company size, 2007-08



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

Sports and recreation opportunities at work

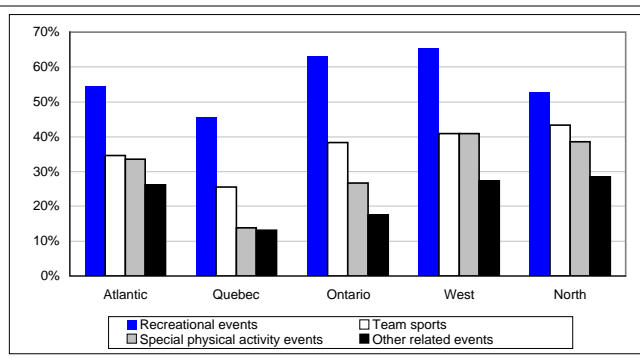
There are a variety of sport and physical recreation opportunities offered to employees through workplaces in Canada. These include recreational events like golf tournaments or ski trips, which are available in 69% of mid-to large sized companies, and team sports such as softball, hockey, or soccer, which are available in 47% of these companies. Special physical activity events, like *Sneaker*



Day or Corporate Challenge for Physical Activity, are held in 31% of mid-to-large workplaces, and 22% participate in other related events such as *Healthy Workplace Week*.

Region Workplaces in Quebec are less likely to offer team sports compared to those in the West, and are less likely than the national average and specifically those in Ontario and Western Canada to offer recreational events like golf tournaments. Companies in Quebec are also less likely to be involved in special events involving physical activity compared to all other regions. Companies in Western Canada are more likely than those in Ontario (and also more likely than the national average) to indicate the availability of special physical activity events. Companies in Western Canada are more likely than those in Quebec to participate in other types of events.

**SPORTS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES
by region, 2007-08**



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

Workplace characteristics Sport and recreation opportunities at work are related to the size of the company. Only 20-30% of smaller companies (with 20–49 employees) provide opportunities to participate in each of team sport, special physical activity events, and other related events, whereas roughly 40-70% of larger companies offer each of these types of opportunities. Recreational events are cited more frequently (55%) among small companies than the other opportunities; however they are also more prevalent among larger companies (70%). Companies with a predominately male population ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to offer recreational events than those with relatively fewer men, whereas companies with a mostly female population are more likely to offer special physical activity events or other related events. Workplaces with relatively more professional

positions ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to offer special physical activity events and other related events than those with a smaller proportion of these positions. Companies with relatively more general labour positions ($\geq 50\%$) are less likely to offer special physical activity events or other related events.

Other physical activity opportunities at work

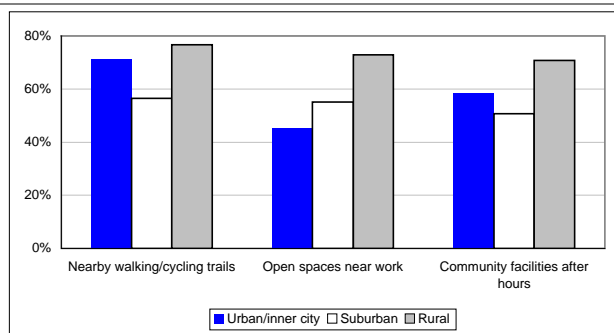
Companies state that employees have access to a range of other spaces that support an active lifestyle. Seven out of ten mid-to-large sized companies (70%) report that there is access to walking or bicycling trails nearby, 54% have open spaces for physical activity at work, and 56% have access to community facilities, such as schools after normal school hours or community centres. Furthermore, 15% of the larger companies post signs to encourage their employees to use the stairs. More than three-quarters of mid-to-large sized Canadian companies state that they have easily accessible stairwells.

Region Quebec companies are more likely than those in Ontario to report easily accessible stairwells. Workplaces in Quebec are least likely to report access to community facilities for employees. Workplaces in the North are more likely than the national average and specifically those in Ontario and Quebec to have access to nearby trails and are more likely than those in Ontario to cite access to community facilities. Workplaces in the Atlantic region are also more likely than the average Canadian workplace to report access to community facilities.

Workplace characteristics Companies located in a suburban environment are less likely than those in other areas to report access to nearby trails. Companies in rural environments are more likely than all others to have access to open spaces for physical activity at work and are more likely than those in suburban environments to have access to community facilities. Companies with a relatively higher proportion of female employees are more likely to indicate access to community facilities compared to those with more men. The proportion of companies reporting accessible stairways is related to company size, with about 70% of small companies reporting this compared to virtually all of the largest companies. Generally speaking, the larger the company, the more likely it is to report point-of-decision prompts to

promote stair use. Indeed, this practice is twice as frequent in larger companies (37% among those with 500–999 employers) than smaller ones (17% among those with 20–49 employees). Workplaces with relatively more professionals ($\geq 50\%$ of employees) are more likely to report that there are nearby trails and open spaces for physical activity at work.

OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES by location, 2007-08

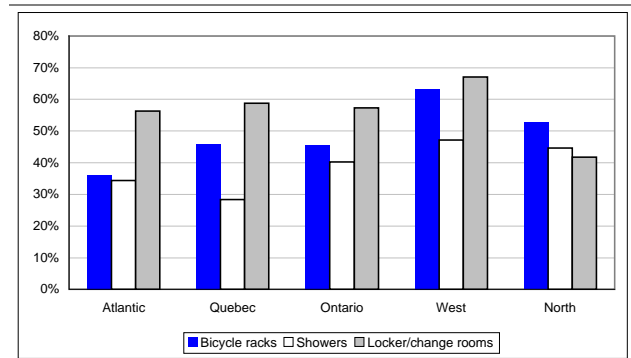


2007-08 Opportunities for Physical Activity at Work Survey, CFLRI

Amenities supporting physical activity Roughly seven in ten (69%) mid-to-large sized Canadian companies report that change areas or locker rooms are available to employees to support physical activity. In addition, 57% of mid-to-large sized companies have bicycle racks and 48% have access to showers at or near work.

Region Companies in Western Canada are more likely than those in the North to have change rooms available; in fact, those in the North are less likely than the average Canadian workplace to report available change rooms. Companies in Western Canada are generally more likely than the national average (and all other regions except those in the North) to have access to bicycle racks. Companies in Atlantic Canada are less likely than the national average to report the availability of bicycle racks. Workplaces in Western Canada are more likely than those in the Quebec to report the availability of showers at or near work.

AMENITIES SUPPORTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY by region, 2007-08



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

Workplace characteristics The more employees a company has, the more likely it is to report having amenities to support participation in physical activity. Roughly three quarters of companies having at least 500 employees report having bicycle racks, showers, and change areas or locker rooms. Although just over half of smaller companies (with 20–49 employees) report having access to change rooms or locker areas, only 36% have access to showers. The availability of amenities to support physical activity varies by composition and occupation of the workforce. Companies that have a predominantly female workforce ($\geq 50\%$ women) are more likely to have bicycle racks than others, while companies that have a predominantly male workforce ($\geq 50\%$ men) are more likely to have access to shower facilities. Workplaces with a relatively higher proportion of professional jobs ($\geq 50\%$) are more likely to have bicycle racks or showers compared to those with fewer such positions. The reverse holds true for general labour and skilled trades; companies with relatively more workers in skilled trades ($\geq 50\%$) are less likely to have access to bike racks, and those with more working in general labour positions are less likely to have access to showers.

Trends in opportunities for physical activity

Access to environmental supports for physical activity have increased within certain company sizes since 2003. There have been increases in the proportion of companies indicating access to off-site physical activity and fitness facilities among small, mid-sized, and large companies. Similarly, there have been increases in the proportion indicating accessible stairs

with each company size. Moreover, the use of point-of-decision prompts to use the stairs (similar to the *Stairway to Health* program) has increased significantly in companies with more than 100 employees. Since 2003, there has also been an increase in the proportion indicating access to nearby walking or bicycling trails or to community facilities, as well as participation in events such as *Healthy Workplace Week* among companies with 250 or more employees. There has been a decrease over time in the proportion of companies with less than 100 employees that permit employees to participate in special physical activity events like *Sneaker Day* or *Corporate Challenge*. In contrast, the prevalence of team sports, recreational events, access to fitness facilities or exercise rooms at work, access to change rooms or locker areas, access to showers, availability of bicycle racks, and availability of open spaces for physical activity have not changed over the period.

Region The proportion citing easily accessible stairs has increased in Western Canada. An increase in access to trails and paths has occurred over time in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and Ontario. Increases in the proportions of companies reporting access to off-site physical activity and fitness facilities and access to community facilities for physical activity have occurred in the Atlantic, Ontario, and Western Canada. In Ontario, there has been a decrease in the proportion that report employee access to exercise equipment, such as weights or stationary bicycles, since 2003. There has been a decrease in the proportion of Quebec companies reporting the availability of recreational events, like golf tournaments and ski trips, over time. There have been no other significant changes by region.

Recommendations for action Generally speaking, access to fitness facilities at work is moderate to limited in Canadian workplaces; however, access to amenities that support physical activity is more prevalent. In order to increase opportunities to be active at work, companies can be encouraged to:

- **Promote active commuting** Workplaces can continue to promote active commuting of employees to and from their workplace. Census data indicate that a mere 7% of Canadians walk as

their usual mode of travel to work, and only about 1% bicycle. Lower income Canadians are more likely to walk and bicycle to work than other Canadians. Research shows that majority of Canadians (75%) would like to bicycle more if circumstances were ideal, indicating that there are key motivators that would help them walk or bicycle more often including improved safety, maintenance of trails, paths, and road ways, better and more pleasant routes, a well linked network of pathways, facilities, showers, lockers or change rooms at their destination, and bicycle storage. Workplaces can advocate with local planning, transportation and public transit departments to construct active transportation corridors and to promote and improve environments supporting active commuting. They can provide on-site facilities such as secure bicycle parking, showers, lockers, and change rooms.

- **Promote easy and economical options for physical activity** Workplaces can be encouraged to continue to promote stair use at work by posting highly visible and attractive signs near elevators, which prompt individuals to use the stairs, as this type of intervention can be effective in increasing stair climbing.^{1,2,3} Posters encouraging stair use can be downloaded from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/downloads/index.htm>. Given the reported increase in access to trails, companies could consider programs such as walking clubs, pedometer programs,^{4,5} or walking “trails” that can be established within the worksite premises to accommodate seasonal barriers. Workplaces can consider using other rooms such as meeting rooms, cafeterias, or other open spaces for stretch breaks and for other physical activities.
- **Investigate sharing of facilities** Workplaces can consider using off-site physical activity facilities in the community as well as those not specifically designed for this purpose (i.e., community centres, schools, or church halls). This can be accomplished by establishing agreements with local off-site physical activity facilities for group discounts for employees, such as memberships with nearby health clubs, golf courses, swimming pools, and so on.

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- **Promote physical activity in small companies**
Small companies are less likely to have access to physical activity facilities and amenities, requiring alternative solutions for promoting employee physical activity. Workplaces could consider permitting flexible work arrangements allowing employees to participate in physical activity during typical work hours, encourage active commuting, network with other workplaces, or use community opportunities for team sports for their employees (cross-company leagues within an industrial park or entering a team in a nearby community recreation league).



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 - ⁴ Faghri PD, Omokaro C, Parker C, Nichols E, Gustavesen S, & Blozie E. (2008). E-technology and Pedometer Walking Program to Increase Physical Activity at Work. *J Prim Prev*. 2008 Jan 23
 - ⁵ Thomas, L., & Williams, M. (2006 Aug). Promoting physical activity in the workplace: using pedometers to increase daily activity levels. *Health Promotion J. Austr.* 17(2):97-102.