

WellSpring

Canada on the Move: Research, Evaluation, and Partnership

Walk this Way: At the Intersection of Information and Promotion



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Physical inactivity remains an important public health concern despite 20-year trends showing an improvement in physical activity levels in Canada (Craig, Russell, Cameron, & Bauman, 2004). Physical activity promotion is an endless goal, requiring constant vigilance by researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners charged with addressing the health of Canadians.

Walking for exercise is consistently the most commonly reported leisure-time physical activity (Centers for Disease Control, 2000; Rafferty, Reeves, McGee, & Pivarnik, 2002). According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, "Walking is ranked as the top physical activity in which Canadian adults participated over the three years prior to the survey (65%), followed by gardening (41%), and home exercise (24%)" (CFLRI, 2005).

Walking is therefore an important leverage point for promotion efforts. Walking is inexpensive and highly accessible, requires little skill or equipment, and is the recommended exercise prescription by physicians, public health professionals, and other practitioners.

The increased interest in active living (i.e., taking advantage of physical activity opportunities throughout the day) has led to

a greater interest in walking for transportation (i.e., walking to school or work or to do shopping and other errands). In fact, we are seeing a proliferation of research, conferences, and workshops aimed at educating policy-makers and practitioners about changing daily walking behaviours through community design and, specifically, the built environment.

Canada on the Move is an innovative platform for partnership, evaluation, and research related to Canadians' physical activity (focusing on their walking behaviours). Canada on the Move provides an important, yet often overlooked, link in the ongoing efforts carried out at every level to improve the health of Canadians.

By offering ways for individuals and groups (including workplaces) to "donate steps" and by providing feedback, Canada on the Move also facilitates research collaborations to evaluate the pooled data. These data should provide important answers to questions about Canadians' attitudes towards physical activity and their actual behaviours (and about the factors that impact these). Such information is important artillery for policy-makers and frontline practitioners engaged in continuous efforts to support healthful levels of physical activity.



Canada on the Move: Innovation in Research, Evaluation, and Partnership

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What Is Canada on the Move?

Canada on the Move, a web-based physical activity research platform, is “on the move” once again! After a successful first year as a novel, but relatively simple, data collection and research tool, the project is now ready to expand and pursue its larger vision. Canada on the Move has now set its sights on establishing itself as an innovative platform for research, evaluation, and partnership. Canada on the Move (an initiative of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research—Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism, and Diabetes (CIHR-INMD)) emerged as part of the Institute’s focus on supporting excellent and innovative research on obesity and healthy body weight.

Through partnerships among CIHR, non-governmental organizations, and for-profit companies in the food, information technology, and health promotion sectors, INMD was able to launch and disseminate information about Canada on the Move in January 2004. Since then, the project has steadily grown and is now ready for further expansion.

The public face of Canada on the Move is a web site (www.canadaonthemove.ca or www.canadaenmouvement.ca). The web site’s survey collects information on physical activity from Canadians interested in participating in the research project. Users with pedometers can also follow their own progress over time by using the online tracking tools. In this way, they donate their steps to health research each time they record their daily step counts. People



can also form their own user groups and see their user group’s average daily steps plotted on their individual step graphs. Health promotion and disease prevention groups are welcome to encourage their members to use these tools to support their efforts.

Canada on the Move as a Research Tool

The more information Canada on the Move collects from Canadians, the better we will be able to answer questions about physical activity attitudes and behaviours and the factors that impact these. INMD ensures the privacy of those who contribute information. Therefore, INMD makes the Canada on the Move database available only to approved researchers through a standard CIHR application process. In this way, top researchers from across the country can access the data, but INMD can be sure that the information stays safe.

The project has already proven its usefulness as a research platform. Results from initial research projects will be published as a supplement to the December 2005 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. Furthermore, a recent collaboration (described below) with the Canadian Diabetes Association and Dietitians of Canada highlights Canada on the Move’s capacity as a platform for partnership and potential as a source of evaluation information.

Next Steps for the Project

In March 2005, INMD, the Canadian Diabetes Association, and Dietitians of Canada (funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada) drew a

diverse audience together to discuss Canada on the Move's next steps at the "Getting Canada on the Move" meeting. Approximately 60 health promotion/disease prevention practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers offered resounding support for expanding Canada on the Move. The meeting participants strongly supported an expanded vision, particularly the potential of Canada on the Move as a source of information exchange with groups across the country, program enhancement tools, and new and innovative research.

The expanded project will continue to collect information for researchers from individuals about their levels of physical activity and barriers to physical fitness. Given sufficient resources, the project will also add ways for groups participating in the project to receive program enhancement tools and evaluation information while still contributing to health research. These new capacities will lead to richer research results, enhanced program evaluation capacity among health promotion/disease prevention practitioners, and a deeper knowledge base for policy-makers.

An expanded Canada on the Move offers a new approach for linking researchers, health promotion/disease prevention practitioners, and policy-makers for their mutual benefit. In this way, the project supports current efforts underway to create a sustainable Pan-Canadian Healthy Living Strategy (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hl-vs-strat) and the Pan-Canadian Physical Activity Strategy (www.activeliving.ca/pdf/PASstrategy%20_Feb%202004.pdf).

An enhanced Canada on the Move will also meet the growing demand for accountability within government and among non-governmental organizations working to improve the health of Canadians by offering enhanced data collection, analysis, and knowledge exchange.

Expanding this project will require significant new resources—we are currently building partnerships to support the project's next steps. The obvious enthusiasm at our March meeting bodes well for the future of Canada on the Move.

To join Canada on the Move, please visit www.canadaonthemove.ca or www.canadaenmouvement.ca. For more information about the project, visit www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/25687.html.

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Pedometer Information Sheet

For helpful information about pedometers (including how they work and how to wear them), access the Alberta Centre for Active Living's Pedometer Information Sheet (www.centre4activeliving.ca/Education/Resources/Pedometers/PedolInstructions.pdf).

Working with practitioners,
organizations, and
communities to improve the
health and quality of life of
Albertans through physical
activity.

News from the Centre

Centre Director Co-Chair of the Alberta Healthy Living Network (AHLN)

Judith Moodie was recently named co-chair of the AHLN. The AHLN is a coalition of Alberta health-promotion groups whose mission is to provide “leadership for collaborative action to promote health and prevent chronic disease in Alberta.” For more information on the AHLN, visit www.health-in-action.org/content.asp?catid=37&rootid=7.

Our New and Improved Web Site (www.centre4activeliving.ca)

The centre's web site has extensive information on physical activity, both our own information and links to resources from other organizations. Examples of topics include workplace, children and youth, older adults, chronic disease prevention, and pedometers and walking. We're redesigning our web site to make all of this information easier to find. Watch for the launch of our new web site this fall!

E-Bulletin

The centre produces a regular e-bulletin to update clients and stakeholders about what's coming up for the centre and its staff. Find out about our upcoming activities at www.centre4activeliving.ca/new.html.

Health Aging Community Workshops

The Alberta Centre for Active Living is offering educational workshops on older adult physical activity and healthy eating across Alberta in partnership with Alberta Regional Health Authorities. For more information, visit www.centre4activeliving.ca/Education/OlderAdults/Workshops.pdf.

Resources from the Canadian Health Network (CHN)

Visit CHN Active Living (go to www.canadian-health-network.ca and click on the Active Living topic). You'll find featured resources in the highlight box and key resources section. Try some of our quick searches (e.g., active living and diabetes) in English or French. If there are any other quick searches you would like to see, please contact pauline.poon@ualberta.ca.

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The Alberta Centre for Active Living is the
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www.canadian-health-network.ca

IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR
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YOU.

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