

What's Happening in Alberta Workplace Wellness Programs?

EDMONTON, AB, August 16, 2004—According to Health Canada, the health of over sixty per cent of Canadians is at risk because of physical inactivity. Recent figures from the Conference Board of Canada estimate that a one per cent increase in physical activity could save \$10.2 million for heart disease, \$877,000 for adult-onset diabetes, and \$407,000 for colon cancer each year.

Health Canada surveys also show that more than one-third of Canadians realize that they need to become more active, but see time as the biggest barrier to increasing their physical activity. At the same time, more than 15 million Canadians spend half of their waking hours at work, making the workplace an excellent place to get employees moving.

To find out more about the existing workplace wellness programs in Alberta (especially programs that include physical activity), the Alberta Centre for Active Living surveyed both private and public workplaces across the province. *An Environmental Scan of Workplace Wellness Programs in Alberta* gives a snapshot of Alberta workplace wellness programs, including aspects such as

- the kinds of workplaces that offer programs (e.g., public vs. private sector, size of organizations);
- how long the programs have been running;
- how many employees participate;
- whether organizations involve employees in planning the programs;
- whether organizations charge employees a fee to participate in the programs;
- how organizations make staff aware of the programs;
- whether organizations have established partnerships organizations with community or private fitness facilities;
- how many organizations offer flexible work schedules to allow their employees to be active during the workday;
- whether companies promote active commuting to and from work;
- how employees perceived the benefits of workplace wellness programs.

Our report found that many smaller organizations find it difficult to offer in-house exercise facilities. Many of these companies had also not explored partnerships with other organizations to access exercise facilities. In addition, many organizations saw physical activity only in terms of fitness-oriented exercise. For example, only fifty per cent promoted active commuting and only thirty per cent encouraged using the stairs at work. The full report is available at www.centre4activeliving.ca/research/Reports/2004EnviroScan/index.htm.

The Alberta Centre for Active Living is a non-profit research and education centre affiliated with the Faculty of Physical Education at the University of Alberta. The centre is supported by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Alberta Community Development, and the University of Alberta.

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