



Understanding Reported Rates of Physical Activity: Comparing Results of the Alberta Survey on Physical Activity and the Canadian Community Health Survey Executive Summary

Context

Two recent major surveys have examined physical activity levels in Alberta:

- the 2002 *Alberta Survey on Physical Activity* conducted by the Alberta Centre for Active Living (2002) reported that 57% of Albertans were active;
- the 2002 *Canadian Community Health Survey*, a national survey conducted by Statistics Canada (2006) that includes provincial data, reported that 52% of Albertans were at least moderately active.

Based on the 2002 results, there is up to a 5% difference in results between the surveys.

Comparing the Two Surveys

Three components are required to measure physical activity behaviour: frequency, duration, and intensity. However, the two surveys use different definitions of physical activity (intensity) and differ in the timeframe studied (*Alberta Survey on Physical Activity*: one week; *Canadian Community Health Survey*: three months).

We cannot say, with absolute certainty, that x% of Albertans are sufficiently active to achieve health benefits because both surveys report on the proportion of people who meet energy expenditure criteria (in kilocalories) as opposed to physical activity behaviour. The *Alberta Survey on Physical Activity* uses METS,¹ while the *Canadian Community Health Survey* uses a cut-off of 3 KKD.² That is, instead of talking about what people are doing, the surveys tell us how many calories they are burning.

The two surveys use two different questionnaires, both of which are among the best available. Both surveys should continue to use the same questionnaire because the results can then be compared from year to year.

Both surveys use a random digit dialling telephone technique to call people to interview (a very strong method). However, it is hard for people to remember exactly how much activity they did. In addition, it is impossible to know if those who are answering the survey are doing so because of greater interest in the topic than those who do not respond to the survey.

The Alberta Centre for Active Living is supported by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, Alberta Government, and the University of Alberta. To view the full report, visit the Alberta Centre for Active Living's web site at www.centre4activeliving.ca.

¹ A MET is the ratio of energy expended in kilocalories divided by resting energy expenditure in kilocalories. Survey answers are multiplied by METS to determine if the individual is meeting a cut-off of 2,000 kcals/wk of energy expenditure.

² KKD = Kilocalories per day per kilogram of body weight due to physical activity.