Most Albertans know physical activity is good for their health, but only 59% of them are active enough to get health benefits (Loitz, Berry & Spence, 2013). It is no surprise that enabling people to be more physically active can be challenging. As many workplaces tend to be sedentary (e.g., sitting at a desk), commuting to work and school is often done by car, and we seem to have busier and busier schedules, finding time to be active can be difficult.

Given such factors, UWALK aims to increase opportunities for people to find ways to be more active through their day and celebrate success, as even small steps count!

At the heart of the UWALK initiative is UWALK.ca, a fun, free, interactive website. UWALK.ca is designed to encourage and inspire people to walk more. The website and web-based tools are simple and accessible, to encourage participation and interactions.

Evidence has shown that Internet-delivered interventions can be used to implement positive changes in target populations (Davies et al., 2012). UWALK.ca is designed to:

- engage the public, by encouraging walking or other physical activity; and
- be useful for a range of health practitioners who are working with clients and communities to boost their physical activity.

The UWALK initiative is led by the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta and funded by the Government of Alberta. Dr. Kerry Mummery, Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, is the principal investigator for this initiative. Dr. Mummery was also the principal architect of the highly successful 10,000 Steps program in Australia.

UWALK models a whole-of-community approach, as demonstrated in the 10,000 Steps program. Our approach involves working closely with partners and stakeholders throughout the province; building capacity from past and
current walking initiatives; and collaborating with traditional and non-traditional partners.

All of these efforts inform UWALK’s strategies to engage Albertans. *UWALK.ca* is not only available to the public, but is also intended for use by health practitioners. UWALK gives practitioners another “tool in their toolbox” to help them engage their clients and offer resources to individuals, groups or communities.

**UWALK for Individuals**

Albertans are invited to “find their stride” and connect with others in their social network. Online they can:
- log steps and flights of stairs;
- set goals;
- log other types of physical activity (time and intensity); and
- participate in UWALK challenges.

Walking and other activity can be tracked online by:
- manually entering steps
  - using a pedometer to count your steps, or
  - entering time and intensity of physical activity (e.g., walked for 20 minutes at a moderate pace); or
- using a WiFi-enabled tool to sync with *UWALK.ca* automatically.
  - The *Moves* smartphone app and *Fitbit* activity monitor are compatible with *UWALK.ca*.

**UWALK for Groups**

*UWALK.ca* is ideal for group challenges, such as school, community or workplace challenges.

Research has shown that employees who are more active miss less days of work and have less job stress (Conn, Hafdahl, Cooper, Brown, & Lusk, 2009). In addition, some people may feel more motivated to track activity when they are working as a team or competing with others (Davies, Spence, Vandelanotte, Caperchione, & Mummery, 2012).

At *UWALK.ca*, participants can sign up as a large group and create teams. Teams can use the UWALK challenges from the website or develop their own custom challenges.

Challenges can be an effective and inclusive way to support and motivate team members, while promoting physical activity to the group as a healthy choice. For instance, group members can be challenged to add more steps into their day or to take the stairs instead of the elevator. A separate stair-climbing challenge is specifically aimed at encouraging people to take the stairs.

Groups (or individuals) can also take the “11,000-Footer Challenge.” This fun challenge allows users (at their own pace or schedule) to virtually climb the 15 mountains in the Alberta Rockies that are over 11,000 feet.
Groups can buy pedometers via UWALK.ca, or use their own pedometers or activity monitors. Groups can also easily access promotional materials at UWALK.ca to support a group and group challenges. These include:

- short promotional videos (15 to 30 seconds);
- posters for teams, groups, workplaces, libraries, etc. (these can be modified, to include the group’s name and/or logo);
- access to UWALK logos and other branding elements for cross-branding;
- an implementation guide: How to start a walking group or challenge; and
- support in developing a walking challenge.

**UWALK for Communities**

UWALK aims to be present in communities across Alberta. UWALK.ca is a great tool for community champions! Whether you are looking for resources to build awareness of the benefits of walking or planning a group or community challenge, our project team can help.

We recognize that “community” is a broad term. We invite all communities, such as non-government organizations, clubs, schools and community leagues, to connect with us and use the tools and resources UWALK.ca has to offer.

**UWALK Pedometer Library Loan Program**

UWALK recognizes that not everyone has a pedometer or physical activity monitor. We are working with libraries across the province to develop a Pedometer Library Loan Program in as many communities as possible. Several library systems are already on board, and we’re looking for more to join in the effort.

**Taking Another Step Forward**

UWALK is an evidence-based program that aims to increase activity through an engaging experience, both online and in the real world.

We are building on the momentum and efforts already seen in the province to support Albertans to walk more and be physically active. Visit UWALK.ca to see how UWALK may help your efforts to get Albertans moving!
UWALK Offers Inspiration to be Active

Honourable Dave Rodney, Associate Minister of Wellness

Looking for some additional autumn inspiration? Look no further than the new UWALK initiative featured in this issue of WellSpring.

By encouraging participants to set walking goals and track their progress, UWALK will inspire Albertans of all ages to walk more – and to walk farther – than they ever have before. The ultimate goal is that by participating in UWALK, and being part of a dynamic online community at UWALK.ca, more Albertans will choose to make walking part of their daily routine.

Whether it’s inspiring people to start walking, or adding a boost to a regular walking routine, getting people excited and motivated to do more walking is a great outcome for Albertans!

We know that walking has many physical and mental health benefits. It’s a great way to build stronger hearts, bones and muscles; achieve and maintain a healthy body weight; maintain flexibility; and build confidence and greater self-esteem.

The Alberta government is committed to creating opportunities for more Albertans to become active and lead healthier lifestyles, and we are pleased and proud to provide funding to programs like UWALK that are designed to help Albertans achieve greater wellness for themselves, their families and our communities.

Thank you to all of our health champions who make a difference for Albertans, and congratulations to the UWALK team on an outstanding new initiative.

If you haven’t already done so, now is the time to sign up at UWALK.ca, and don’t forget to invite your friends, families and co-workers to join as well. Happy walking!