

Workplace Physical Activity Framework

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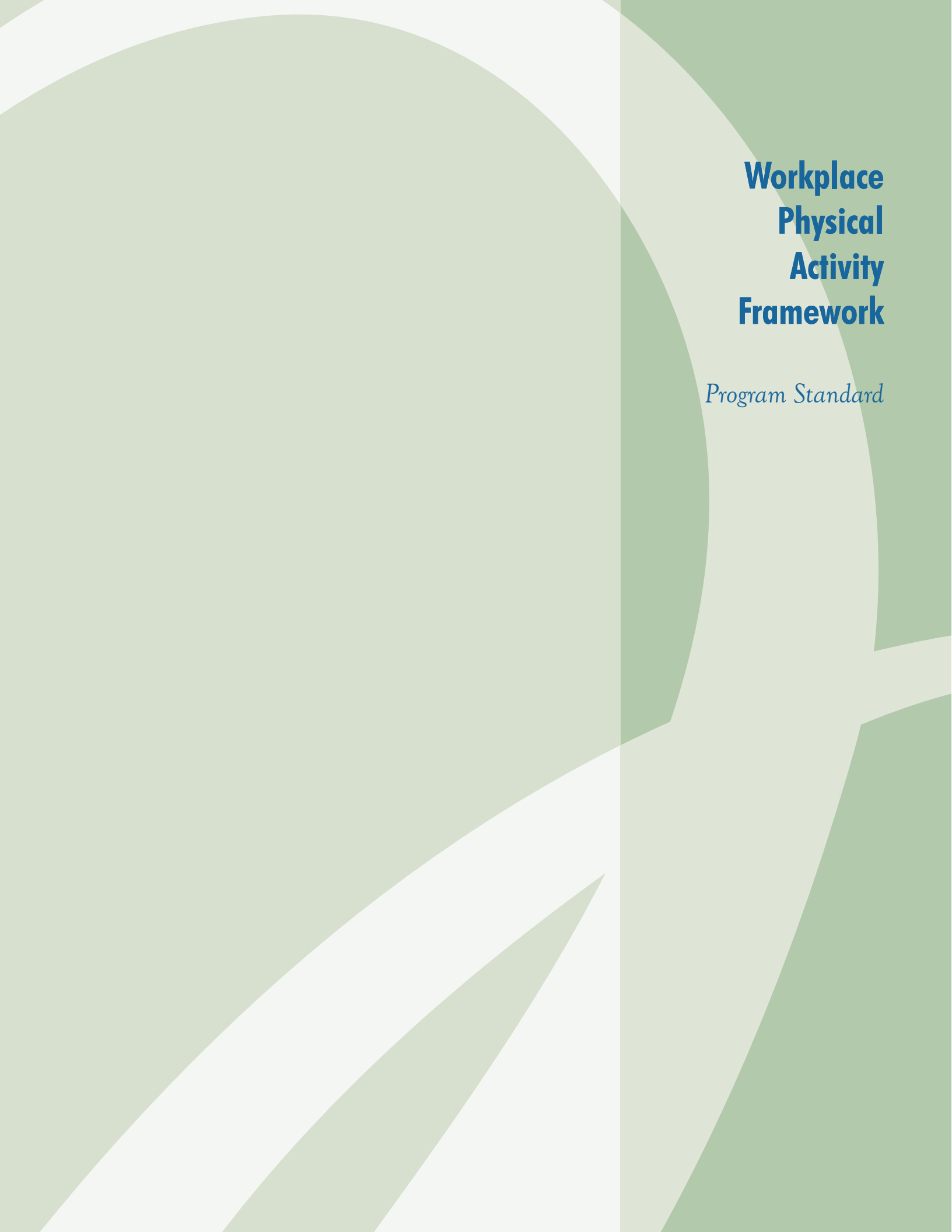
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Workplace Physical Activity Framework

Program Standard

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Before You Start

Introduction

Welcome to the *Workplace Physical Activity Program Framework*! This tool provides a blueprint for a workplace physical activity program that targets the workplace at multiple levels. This standard represents best practices and was developed in response to a needs assessment request from the Alberta government (part of the government's Active Living Strategy). This document is also based on a format used for occupational health and safety in workplaces.

Use this program standard alongside the *Audit Tool* to create a cycle of continuous improvement for your workplace physical activity program. This program standard represents a high standard—an ideal. Not all workplaces will be able to achieve all aspects of this ideal. However, we encourage all workplaces to use the ideas and resources in this standard to begin working towards the physical activity program most appropriate for them.

Why Be Physically Active?

Lack of physical activity contributes to heart disease, adult-onset diabetes, colon cancer, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis, depression, and stroke (Health Canada & CSEP, 1998). The most recent statistics report that 57% of Canadian adults do not get enough physical activity for optimal health benefits. Because of sedentary lifestyles, most Canadian adults are also still at risk for preventable chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2002).

Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity (e.g., activities such as brisk walking that make you feel warm and breathe faster, but which still allow you to carry on a conversation) on most days of the week can lead to significant health benefits. Employees should choose a variety of activities from three groups (flexibility, strength, and endurance) every week.

Flexibility Activities

- How much? Four to seven days a week.
- Benefits. Gentle reaching, bending, and stretching activities keep your muscles relaxed and joints mobile.
- Sample exercises. Stretching breaks, yoga, martial arts, and other activities that make you bend and reach.

Strength Activities

- How much? Two to four days a week.
- Benefits. Activities against resistance strengthen muscles and bones and improve posture.
- Sample exercises. Lifting weights, carrying supplies, climbing stairs, moving furniture.

Endurance Activities

- How much? Four to seven days a week.
- Benefits. Continuous activities benefit your heart, lungs, and circulatory system.
- Sample exercises. Active commuting, brisk walking, cycling, jogging, swimming, racquet sports, skating.

The guidelines above are from Health Canada & CSEP's (1998) *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*. For more information about the health benefits of physical activity, visit Health Canada's physical activity guide web site at www.paguide.com.

Why Bring Physical Activity into the Workplace?

The Changing Nature of Work

The nature of work has changed tremendously over the last fifty years. For example,

- people generally work longer hours;
- it is now common for parents to have jobs outside the home, creating more work and home conflicts;
- many employees hold down more than one part-time job, as full-time contracts are less usual;
- jobs are significantly more inactive—many employees sit for long periods of time (e.g., sitting in front of computers, answering phones, driving);
- many employees have limited leisure time during the workweek.

These changes in the nature of work contribute to inactive lifestyles, stress, and alarmingly high rates of preventable diseases (Fielding, Pelletier, & Stokols, 1996; Heaney & Goldenhar, 1996).

Because most Canadian adults spend so much time at work, Health Canada (1999) has identified the workplace as a central setting for encouraging physical activity. Health Canada's *Business Case for Active Living at Work* (Health Canada, 2001) includes information on the benefits of physical activity (both in itself and at work) and is available from the Health Canada web site at www.activelivingatwork.com. The information in the following section comes from this source.

A Sound Investment

The workplace benefits from healthy, happy, and balanced employees. Health Canada reports that results from selected studies show that physically active employees take 27% fewer days of sick leave. For example, BC Hydro estimated that it reduced sick leave costs annually by \$1.2 million as a result of physical activity initiatives.

Our ageing population means that the employee population is also often older. As employee health relates directly to the costs of benefits and sick leaves, workplace health promotion initiatives are a good investment. For instance, evidence suggests that active living programs reduce the costs of short-term disability programs. This is in part because physically fit workers have fewer injuries (and when injuries occur they tend to last less long and be less costly).

For example,

- physically active employees report 14 to 25% fewer disability days;
- physical activity programs can reduce the incidence of injury by 25%;
- per capita, workers' compensation costs can be reduced by 45% if employees are regularly active.

Physical activity at work also results in greater employee satisfaction and improved performance. Health Canada states that individual work performance can be improved by a factor of 4 to 15% when people participate in regular physical activity. Participants in physical activity programs report that exercise helps them to

- improve their mental concentration, stamina, reaction time, and memory;
- be more alert;
- experience a better rapport with co-workers; and
- enjoy work more than non-participants.

A workplace that supports employees' physical activity can also attract and maintain quality employees, improving the social environment and corporate image.

Health Canada reports the following results from some Canadian companies that have introduced company fitness programs.

- Canada Life in Toronto showed a return on investment of \$3.40 on each corporate dollar

invested in reduced turnover, productivity gains, and decreased medical claims.

- BC Hydro employees enrolled in a work-sponsored fitness program had a turnover rate of 3.5%, compared with the company average of 10.3%.
- Municipal employees in Toronto missed 3.35 fewer days in the first six months of their "Metro Fit" fitness programs than employees not enrolled in the program.
- The Canadian Life Assurance Company found that the turnover rate for fitness program participants was 32.4% lower than the average over a seven-year period.
- Toronto Life Assurance found that employee turnover for those enrolled in the company's fitness program was 1.5% versus 15% for non-participants.

A New Approach to Physical Activity Promotion

Many different factors affect employees' daily activities. Current research has found that taking a multi-level approach most effectively promotes physical activity within the workplace (Fielding, Pelletier, & Stokols, 1996; Heaney & Goldenhar, 1996). This multi-level approach is also called an "ecological approach" (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988; Sallis & Owen, 1997).

An ecological approach, in this context, means acknowledging the different environmental levels within the workplace that can affect physical activity behaviour. Multi-level approaches to physical activity promotion can reach the most employees and create a cycle of continuous improvement when regularly evaluated. The five different environmental levels of physical activity programs in a workplace include the following:

- *Individual level:* Individual factors such as employees' fitness level, skills, knowledge, confidence, age, and gender;

- *Social level:* The corporate culture, social relationships, and peer/boss/family influences;
- *Organizational level:* The organization's infrastructure, leadership, and desire to promote physical activity;
- *Community level:* How the organization interacts or partners with other organizations, community-based programs, or government bodies;
- *Policy level:* Organizational and governmental policies on physical activity.

Note: The physical environment level is incorporated into the other levels.

This document provides a framework for implementing a multi-level physical activity program in your workplace. This program standard will lead you to the elements needed to ensure that your workplace can implement and sustain a physical activity program.

How to Use this Program Standard

This program standard includes three main parts: Groundwork, Construction, and Detailing.

Part 1. Groundwork

This part contains information about how to ensure that your workplace is committed to and ready for a physical activity program. Part 1 includes two sections:

- Management and Employee Commitment;
- Environment and Needs Assessments.

Part 2. Construction

Construction includes information on the areas you need to assess when planning the physical activity program. This framework is based on the work of McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988, and Sallis & Owen, 1997. Part 2 contains information from a variety of points of view:

- The Individual Level: Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills;
- The Social Level: Enhancing Relationships;

- The Organizational Level: Leadership, Capacity, Will, and Infrastructure;
- The Community Level: Assets and Partnerships;
- The Policy Level: Current Physical Activity Policies and Drafting New Policies.

Part 3. Detailing

This section includes the elements that must be in place to ensure a safe and well-maintained physical activity program. Part 3 includes the following sections:

- Program Administration;
- Safety and Risk Management.

Each section contains two subsections: What It Means and Questions to Ask Yourself. (The Questions to Ask Yourself are also included in the *Audit Tool*.)

Where to Find Out More

- *Alberta Centre for Active Living*
www.centre4activeliving.ca
Visit the centre's web site for recent research, reports, and resources related to physical activity and workplace activity.
- *Active Living at Work*
www.activelivingatwork.com
Health Canada has produced a resource for information about workplace physical activity topics, including statistics, trends, returns on investment, and case-study examples.
- *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/paguide
This guide describes how much activity to strive for and how to get started, as well as listing the many benefits of physical activity and the health risks of inactivity.
- *Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute*
<http://www.cflri.ca/cflri/cflri.html>
Information about the barriers to and benefits of physical activity in the workplace.

Key Terms

- *Audit*: A management tool made up of a systematic documented, periodic, and objective review and evaluation of an organization's management systems, operations, practices, and equipment against pre-set criteria. The audit developed with this program standard measures the continuous improvement of the physical activity program in the workplace.
- *Champion of Physical Activity*: An individual or group who can motivate action through leadership, support, advocacy, and participation.
- *Ecological Perspective*: An ecological perspective examines the relationships between the individual and his or her environment on various levels (i.e., the social environment, organizational, community, policy, and physical levels). Ecological models recognize that environments influence behaviours by promoting or demanding certain actions and by discouraging or ruling out others. The ecological model used in this document is based on research by McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz (1988) and Sallis & Owen (1997).
- *Program*: A series of activities/initiatives supported by a group of resources intended to achieve specific outcomes among particular target groups (e.g., employees).
- *Program Provider*: Any group or individual who provides and/or leads a physical activity program. These may be internally paid employees, volunteer program leaders, contractors, or any combination of these and other program providers.
- *Program Standard*: A guide to the elements needed to ensure that the workplace is prepared to implement and sustain a physical activity program.

- *Workplace Physical Activity*: Physical activity promoted, supported, or provided by the workplace that includes physical activity during or outside of work time. For example, climbing the stairs to get to an office and a workplace-subsidized fitness pass at a local recreation centre are both considered workplace physical activity.
- *Workplace*: The workplace is the setting where an individual or group of individuals perform an occupational task. For example, the workplace can include, but is not limited to, factories, offices, and road crews.

Program Standard

Part 1: Groundwork



Part 1: Groundwork

Section A. Management and Employee Commitment

What It Means

For any workplace physical activity program to be successful, three groups of people must be committed to the program's development.

- First, an individual or group of individuals must champion workplace physical activity. These people start the process at their workplace and provide the motivation and drive to meet the goals of a program once it is in place.
- Second, management must demonstrate commitment to the program.
- Third, a representative committee needs to develop a policy on physical activity in the workplace. (Either a new or existing committee could be used.)

One of the committee's main functions is to create a physical activity policy that contains

- a written declaration of the organization's commitment to physical activity;
- realistic and measurable goals and objectives for the organization's physical activity program;
- an outline of the responsibilities of management, employees, and contractors regarding physical activity at the workplace.

The Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director, Board of Directors, or other senior management should then sign and date this policy document.

The next step is to make all employees aware of the policy and its meaning. Include a copy of the policy in the company management systems or other policy manual. This policy can also be part of a larger, already-existing occupational health and safety policy.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Has physical activity been included in an organizational policy?
2. Has senior management signed the policy?
3. Is the policy posted at all workplaces?
4. Is the policy discussed during employee orientations?
5. Does the management system manual contain a copy of the physical activity policy?
6. Has the organization written measurable and achievable goals and objectives for the physical activity program?
7. Does management communicate the following to workers at least once annually?
 - Why physical activity is important in the workplace.
 - The company's commitment to physical activity.

Section B. Environment and Needs Assessments

What It Means

Part of the initial planning of any physical activity program is to assess the employee characteristics and needs. Consider all employees' existing fitness levels and medical conditions (e.g., lower back pain), as well as demographic characteristics such as age and gender. Factors such as the organizational culture and competing demands (e.g., needs of family versus work) will also affect the physical activity preferences and needs of employees.

In addition, take into account the physical environment, which includes the

- time, space, and equipment available for activity;
- availability of showers and changing facilities to allow for proper hygiene;
- financial cost of being active.

The goal of your assessment is to determine how and when employees would like to be active and what they expect from a physical activity program.

Once you have assessed the environment and employee needs, then prioritize each need according to its influence on the physical activity program. For example, suppose a large group of employees showed an interest in biking to work. Since these people may want to shower and change after their commute each day, you could give showers and changing facilities priority in your workplace. Further, bike racks could be important to make employees' bikes secure during the workday.

For each prioritized need, continue through all the levels (individual, social, organizational, community, policy) listed in Part II ("Construction"), targeting the prioritized needs at each of the ecological levels.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Has the organization assessed the following in developing physical activity programs?

1. Employee participation in physical activity during or outside of work hours?
2. Characteristics of employees (e.g., age, gender, social relationships)?
3. Employees' preferences in physical activity?
4. Workplace facilities employees can access in order to be physically active (e.g., bike racks, exercise room, lockers)?
5. Workplace physical resources that support physical activity (e.g., are stairwells clean and safe, are the grounds safe and attractive for walking)?

Program Standard

Part 2: Construction



Part 2: Construction

Section A. The Individual Level: Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills

What It Means

A workplace physical activity program must provide employees with enough knowledge and skills to begin and maintain physical activity. The program also needs to promote a positive attitude toward physical activity.

Knowledge includes what people know about the benefits of physical activity and how to attain these benefits. A program that promotes individual knowledge provides appropriate and accurate physical activity information through courses, pamphlets, and guides.

Attitude refers to how people feel about physical activity. Do they consider physical activity important? Do they feel able to be active? Do they want to be active?

Skills are the tools people need to begin and sustain being physically active. These skills might go beyond the ability to perform specific activities (i.e., behaviour) to include time-management strategies and the ability to make physical activity a priority during the workday.

Many theories and models are useful when trying to change human health behaviour. For example, social-cognitive theories could be used to guide the development of a physical activity program in the workplace.

The web sites below contain information on some popular social-cognitive theories:

- www.people.umass.edu/aizen/index.html
- www.uri.edu/research/cprc/transtheoretical.htm
- www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/eff.html

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Has the organization assessed employees' physical activity knowledge, attitudes, and skills?
2. Does the workplace provide information to educate employees about the benefits of physical activity?
3. Are there various physical activity program options?

Section B. The Social Level: Enhancing Relationships

What It Means

The social level includes both the relationships in existing social groups and the building of new groups. This level takes into account relationships within the workplace, as well as those outside (e.g., friends and family).

Inside the workplace, you need to examine the supportive climate within individual departments, among departments, and between employees and their supervisors. Additionally, the interactions between the program providers and the individual must be positive.

Champions have a key role to play in setting positive examples and recognizing successes.

Outside the workplace, social demands may also influence behaviour. For example, consider the influence of family members on participation in a physical activity program (such as the need for child care).

Examples of activities that can work at a social level are corporate challenges, company tournaments, and dragon-boat racing.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Is there a positive social climate that encourages being active in the workplace?
2. Do employees perceive support for physical activity from co-workers?
3. Do supervisors or management demonstrate their support for employee physical activity?
4. Does the physical activity program include families (or was this considered during the planning process)?

Section C. The Organizational Level: Leadership, Capacity, Will, and Infrastructure

What It Means

The organizational level refers to the influence of the organizational structure on current and ongoing participation in physical activity. This level includes management leadership, support, and participation, as well as physical activity champions who will lead from the “bottom-up.” Champions at the management level help to ensure that a program is maintained and sustained, even in times of cutbacks.

The organization must also be able to implement and sustain a physical activity program. In other words, organizational capacity is defined through will and infrastructure. The will is the organization’s desire and commitment to accomplish a specific goal. The infrastructure includes the human, technical, and support resources in place in the organization.

Workplace integration and equity also fall into this category. Physical activity program policies and procedures should ensure that all employees have equal access to appropriate program opportunities. For example, night-workers might have different needs than day workers. As well, supervisors should be active alongside employees, rather than being segregated. Organizations with many different work locations need to assess each workplace separately to make sure that the program is fair for all workplaces.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- 1.** Does the infrastructure (e.g., resources and/or money) in the organization support employee physical activity?
- 2.** Does the workplace leadership promote physical activity for employees?
- 3.** Is there a will or desire in the organization to promote staff physical activity?
- 4.** Is there at least one champion of physical activity at the workplace who can motivate action (i.e., someone to support and promote activities)?
- 5.** Does the organization recognize employees who champion physical activity?
- 6.** Are opportunities for physical activity available to all employees (e.g., shift, contract, and part-time workers and workers at different locations)?
- 7.** Are accommodations made for employees with special needs (e.g., people with visual impairments, people who speak English as a second language)?

Section D. The Community Level: Assets and Partnerships

What It Means

The community level refers to relationships among

- different departments in one organization;
- multi-sites of the same organization;
- the organization and other organizations;
- the organization and outside groups.

A large organization needs to recognize the different needs of its various departments. For example, programs might require different schedules so that each group can be active during work. The same might be true for an organization with multiple locations. Again, the needs of one geographical location might differ from those in another location (e.g., urban versus rural).

Each organization should examine ways to connect with other organizations and community-based services to provide physical activity or even the space to be physically active. Collaborations among government agencies, other corporations, and unions can also help support the program. For example, organizations could work with city planners to develop walking/bike paths and/or work to change union policies as well as organizational policies.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Have the needs of various departments and/or geographical locations been considered in planning the physical activity program?
2. Has the organization accessed any community-based services (e.g., the YMCA or a local recreation centre) to support the program?
3. Does the workplace use physical activity information from external resources (e.g., Health Canada, Alberta Community Development, the Alberta Centre for Active Living)?
4. Do the partnerships within the organization work together on physical activities in the community?

Section E. The Policy Level: Current Physical Activity Policies and Drafting New Policies

What It Means

The policy level includes the organizational policies related to supporting and facilitating workplace physical activity. Issues might include

- allowing time for physical activity;
- formally recognizing participation in programs;
- commuting policies;
- requiring qualified personnel for the program;
- involving all employees, including non-permanent and shift workers.

On a broader level, consider any legislation (e.g., municipal, provincial, federal, professional society) that may impact workplace physical activity when planning, implementing, and evaluating a workplace physical activity program. For example, Working Alone legislation may affect flex-time options. Allowing more part-time or flex-time work might also give employees more opportunity to participate in physical activity.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do the organization's policies or procedures promote and/or support physical activity for employees (e.g., no scheduled meetings over lunch, allowing flex-time)?
2. Does the organization formally recognize employees who participate in physical activity?
3. Do the organization's policies encourage commuting to and from work (e.g., are employees allowed time to change before work if they make up the time later in the day)?
4. Is it company policy to hire qualified and experienced people to manage the physical activity program (i.e., people with appropriate training in physical education)?

Program Standard

Part 3: Detailing



Part 3: Detailing

Section A. Program Administration

What It Means

Good program administration ensures quality and makes it possible to measure successes. Program administration includes the program's design, implementation, and evaluation.

- *Design:* Includes facility use and the activities involved in the program.
- *Implementation:* Takes in recruiting of program participants and leading the activities.
- *Evaluation:* Can include individual evaluations (e.g., attitudinal changes and gains of strength, aerobic capacity, and flexibility), satisfaction levels, indicators of productivity gains (e.g., decreases in absenteeism due to injury and illness, increased morale), and attendance statistics.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Does the organization keep records of workplace physical activity initiatives?
2. Does the organization evaluate the physical activity program at least once a year?
3. Is there an action plan to deal with the results of this evaluation?
4. Have employees been asked to provide feedback on the physical activity initiatives?
5. Does the organization distribute the evaluation results to all employees and management?

Section B. Safety and Risk Management

What It Means

Developing safety and emergency policies and procedures is important so that every physical activity program can anticipate and respond to any emergency. This preparation reduces the risk of loss, both to individuals and your organization.

Risk management plans are not necessarily complicated or expensive. For example, part of the plan might require that employees complete fitness appraisals and sign statements accepting the possible risks involved in physical activity. The following web site provides additional information on risk management issues: www.sportlaw.ca/index.htm. (This site contains useful information about waivers. To access the material about waivers, please visit www.sportlaw.ca/waivers.htm.)

Making sure that program staff is adequately trained and that necessary first-aid supplies and services are available can also help ensure safe activity. In addition, regularly assess the physical environment to identify broken equipment and unsafe conditions and facilities.

Visit the following web site for information and links related to occupational health and safety regulations: www3.gov.ab.ca/hre/whs/index.asp.

Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Does the organization have a risk management plan?
2. Are emergency response procedures posted?
3. Do the first-aid supplies/services and facilities meet the requirements of first-aid regulations?
4. Are all incidents reported?
5. Does the organization take steps to prevent incidents happening again?
6. Does the organization carry out regular inspections of equipment and facilities?

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