SummerActive 2001 (May 11-June 22)

Join Us in Moving Millions

Kim Schmidt, Recreation Coordinator, Alberta Community Development

The “Pluses” of Physical Activity

The pioneers who used strenuous physical labour to settle our country would find the modern notion of an organized movement to promote regular physical activity amusing, if not absurd. How times have changed!

Technological innovations and other environmental changes mean that inertia has replaced exertion as a common characteristic of modern life. Today’s high levels of inactivity (along with nutritional deficiencies, stress, and other factors) are known risks to health. Fortunately, these risk factors are also modifiable.

Scientists have proved that adequate physical activity helps prevent chronic, disabling conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer, and high blood pressure. Moreover, physical activity can help to maintain functional capacity and extend independent living—two other benefits for Canada’s ageing population (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Committee on Fitness and Recreation Communications Working Group, 1999, pp. 13, 14).

Federal and Provincial/Territorial Initiatives

In 1995, the federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for fitness, active living, recreation, and sport recognized that “physical inactivity represents a major health risk and that physically inactive Canadians are a priority for government attention” (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation, 1997, p. 1). This common aim provided the foundation for government initiatives to reduce physical inactivity among Canadians by 10 per cent by 2003 (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness and Recreation, 1997).
Given the complexities involved in effecting social change, this 10 per cent initiative is an ambitious goal. To achieve success, reducing inactivity must be embraced as a shared undertaking, involving many partners working together at all levels.

Governments and other organizations agree that we need a balance of strategies to encourage, reinforce, and support our efforts to integrate physical activity into our daily lives. These strategies include:

- community mobilization;
- supportive social and physical environments, programs, and services;
- public education; and
- promotion (Craig, Russell, Cameron, & Beaulieu, 1999, pp. 41–44).

**SummerActive: Origins and Present Purpose**

In an environment overwhelmed by competing issues and worthy causes, how do we support citizens and key decision-makers to promote active living?

Enter SummerActive, a major, nationwide, community-based campaign designed to increase awareness of the importance of physical activity to health. To be effective, SummerActive needs to be integrated with other social, political, and economic agendas. Primarily a public education and promotional strategy, SummerActive provides a focused opportunity to promote positive physical activity messages and participation opportunities during a six-week period each year.

SummerActive **targets:**

- leaders in communities, schools, workplaces, and health;
- decision-makers with budgetary or policy responsibilities;
- the Canadian public, especially those who are currently inactive (a unique feature of the 2001 campaign is its focus on the physically inactive and its emphasis on creating supportive environments for change).

SummerActive has three main **purposes:**

- to support governments, organizations, and agencies at all levels to increase public awareness of the benefits of an active lifestyle;
- to call attention to the wide range of local-level trial opportunities, programs, events, and services that will support inactive Canadians in taking the “first step” to an active lifestyle; and
- to promote physical activity at a time of year when people are receptive to this message (Fitness/Active Living Unit, 2001, p. 1).

Since its origin in 1992, over 4 million Canadians have participated in SummerActive campaigns. Before 1992, National Physical Activity Week (1985) and Canada’s Fitweek (1987) encouraged Canadians to put on their running shoes and participate in fun competitions—often arranged between rival jurisdictions. SummerActive relies much more on the ability of local leaders to determine appropriate events for their communities.

**Communicating SummerActive**

Communications strategies play an essential role in persuading individuals and society to support physical activity. SummerActive, itself a communications campaign, builds on existing communications strategies to increase public awareness of physical activity issues and to create support for action. One important function of SummerActive is to encourage local leaders to place active living on social and political agendas by informing decision-makers both about the importance of physical activity and the public demand for programs and services.

Organizations can use SummerActive’s communications objectives, key themes and messages, and audience analysis to determine their audiences, messages, and the best media to use to reach those audiences. Leaders can promote SummerActive initiatives by tapping into physical activity messages designed for five population age-groups.

Professionally developed public service announcements in print and audio format are another available communications tool (you can download these from the national SummerActive web site at www.summeractive.canoe.ca).

With a three-year strategic plan now in place, momentum for this year’s SummerActive campaign is building. New national partnerships with the Sun Media Network, Footlocker Canada, and PharmaAssist Pharmacies will boost publicity and offer much-needed prizes as participation incentives. Provinces can capitalize on the existing awareness of SummerActive in the field and the media to make best use of future SummerActive opportunities.

Nearly two-thirds of Albertans are not active enough to benefit their health (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1999). Despite the provincial strategy to promote active living, progress in raising activity levels appears stalled. Recreation, sport, and health promotion...
practitioners are all seeking increased supports for physical activity. An investment in SummerActive by all partners in this province has never been more needed.

Here’s what physical activity practitioners or professionals can do to show support:
- use SummerActive resources to advocate for physical activity and to help demonstrate a growing grassroots movement in support of active living;
- communicate the importance of active living, recreation, or sport to economic, health, and social decision-makers;
- communicate the growing need for supportive environments, programs, and participation;
- encourage and support SummerActive activities for inactive Albertans, especially activities that can be sustained throughout the year;
- form partnerships that maximize resources or reach new target audiences (Fitness/Active Living Unit, 2001).

**How Is the Alberta Government Supporting SummerActive?**

**Alberta Community Development** has taken a leadership role in supporting the Alberta SummerActive campaign. With funding from the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation, Community Development has sent out over 5,000 SummerActive information kits to schools, workplaces, recreation and sport organizations, health promotion groups, and other organizations interested in promoting physical activity.

In addition, Alberta Community Development is sponsoring a major participation event at Edmonton’s Rundle Park on May 11.

Alberta libraries also plan to be involved by promoting SummerActive in their displays during the event.

Get involved this May and June—SummerActive is a great opportunity to promote your policies and programs. Remember that participating in SummerActive means that you are also improving the health and quality of life of Albertans and the vitality of our communities.

Citation references for this article are available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Well-Being web site (www.health-in-action.org/Well-Being).

**What Is Activity Anyway?**

**“Active”**
- Active Canadians (i.e., those whose energy expenditure from physical activity exceeds an average of 3 kilocalories per kilogram of body weight per day, or more than 1,400 kilocalories per week) get the full benefits of physical activity for cardiovascular health.
- This activity is roughly equivalent to 60 minutes of brisk walking most days of the week.

**“Moderate Activity”**
- Moderately active Canadians are those whose energy expenditure from physical activity ranges from an average of 1.5 to 3 kilocalories per kilogram of body weight per day.
- At this activity level, people receive some health benefits from participating in physical activity.
- This activity equals a minimum of at least 30 minutes of brisk walking most days of the week.

**“Inactivity”**
- Inactive Canadians are those whose energy expenditure from physical activity is less than 1.5 kilocalories per kilogram of body weight per day.
- These people are at significant health risk due to their low levels of physical activity.
- They are accumulating less than the equivalent of 30 minutes of physical activity of adequate intensity most days of the week.

Source: Federal-Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Fitness, 1997. For more information, see also the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute web site (www.cflri.ca).
Active Living: Making It Easy and Popular
(In Other Words: People Want to Be Active, But May Find It Difficult)

François Lagarde (Social Marketing and Communications Consultant, Montréal) and Stephen Grundy (Executive Director, Go for Green—The Active Living and Environment Program).

According to surveys, almost half of Canadians are “on their way” to becoming physically active (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1995). While they are likely to see the health-related or other benefits of an active lifestyle, some may lack the necessary “willpower” to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives. Others may not see being active as a priority. Still others will encounter unexpected barriers that, unless overcome, can prevent them—sometimes permanently—from taking the “first step” towards an active lifestyle.

Bill Smith, from the Academy for Educational Development, summarized social marketing and behaviour change approaches as making things “fun, easy and popular” (Smith, 1999). This idea is part of creating social and physical environments that support active living. In creating these supportive environments, we go beyond just urging people to “be active,” to actually helping them to become and stay active.

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (1996) listed the most common barriers (as reported by Canadians) to active living:

- lack of ability and skills;
- lack of access to information;
- inconvenient programs and services;
- not enough/all-suited programs and services;
- cost of programs and services;
- lack of social support;
- unsafe environments;
- lack of proper maintenance of facilities.

Creating Environments that Encourage Activity

Many inactive Canadians intend or want to be active. But they face either real or perceived barriers, such as the ones outlined above. By understanding these barriers, we can begin to help inactive Canadians to act on their good intentions. Below are three concrete examples of these barriers.

Bicycling is a fun and popular activity. Sixty per cent of Canadians would like to bicycle more. But 53 per cent of Canadians believe that cycling is dangerous because of vehicle traffic (Go for Green, 1999). Our programs and services need to deal with this perceived barrier.

We lament the alarming implications of physical inactivity among our children and youth, e.g., the hours they spend in front of televisions and computers. Yet we do little to address parents’ perceptions of the outdoor environment as insecure or unsafe. Although abduction is the greatest fear of parents, traffic injuries are the leading cause of serious injury and death among school-aged children and youth (Go for Green, 1999).

Walking remains the number one activity choice of Canadians. Encouraging people to walk around the block as a first step to active living seems simple enough. But when the sidewalks are covered in snow and ice, older Canadians and those with other physical restrictions can be confined to their homes for weeks. In addition, 25 per cent of Canadians are afraid to walk in their neighbourhood at night (Statistics Canada, 1995). Barriers such as these keep some Canadians from participating in even basic and popular physical activities.

The following are some practical ideas for making your physical activity event or program “barrier-free.”

Location, Location, Location…

When urban functions exist within a reasonable distance from each other, there is more likely to be an “active” response from the user (Sherwood & Bradshaw, 2001).

You might host activities that use facilities located close to target audiences in order to shorten distances and encourage participants to walk, cycle, or use public transit (be sure to provide information on bus routes or shuttles). Since we want people to integrate active living into their daily routine, we need to encourage travelling by active forms of transportation.

Neighbourhood-based programs also increase opportunities for social interaction and ongoing participation.

Convenience is important. Along with distance, consider the time constraints on today’s families. Scheduling activities in locations that are complementary to other family activities increases the likelihood of participation. Use community schools, places of worship, and locations near workplaces, shopping, and other daily destinations.

Social Networks: Making Active Living Popular

The sociocultural environment is a determinant of health and physical activity (Health Canada, 2001).

If you are aiming to convince a segment of the population to become active or to participate in your programs, find out which friends, family members, or others have the most interpersonal influence. Ask these influencers both to encourage your audience to become active and to reinforce positive behaviour.
Social norms are another very powerful way of promoting active living. Showing people that most people in their community are active may encourage them to become active themselves.

Since people seek out opportunities to establish social networks, locating active living opportunities near community meeting places—outdoor markets, community centres, shopping malls, cafés—increases the likelihood of participation. By providing spaces and opportunities for people to socialize and interact, we can position active living as a social tool for community building.

Neighbourhoods with high-density housing, such as high-rise apartment buildings, require special attention and effort in order to engage residents. High-density areas usually produce reduced social interaction and less active living. The availability of communal or public spaces and parks is vital to encouraging recreation and social activities in these areas (Oldenburg, 1989).

Safety and Attractiveness Count

An environment that is unsafe, polluted, or unattractive will not induce active living lifestyles (Sherwood & Bradshaw, 2001).

To promote a safe and attractive environment:
• ensure a clean, safe, chemical-free environment that is appropriate for the activity;
• plan a “barrier-free” environment for all potential participants, regardless of age or ability;
• encourage participants to use safe routes to events or programs, including dedicated bicycle lanes and sidewalks that are continuous, well lit, well maintained, and visible.

Over the longer term, advocates of active living increasingly need to point out the relationship between the built environment and the lifestyles of that environment’s residents. We can work together by making the health and urban planning fields and the public aware of how the built environment positively or negatively influences healthy lifestyles.

Conclusion

As decision-makers, professionals, and leaders working at the local level, consider the implications of policies and actions related to physical and social environments. Wherever possible, work with people who can make changes to the physical and social environments in your community. These people can help remove some common barriers or make it easier to integrate physical activity into all aspects of our daily lives.

For more information on retrofitting physical environments, visit www.goforgreen.ca. To find out more about SummerActive 2001, visit www.summeractive.canoe.ca.

Citation references for this article are available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Well-Being web site (www.health-in-action.org/Well-Being).

The Benefits of SummerActive

SummerActive is an ideal opportunity to promote policies and programs that make active living fun, easy, and popular. SummerActive can be an ideal time to:
• advocate, announce, or show the progress of policies and programs that remove some of the most common barriers to active living in your community;
• promote the concept that everybody’s first step to getting active is different (e.g., talking to a health professional or physical activity expert, is a first step for many people);
• combat the myth that getting started on regular physical activity is hard;
• advocate for new, value-added partnerships to address common barriers to physical activity in your community;
• organize physical activity opportunities and demonstration events that call attention to common barriers and offer solutions to these barriers;
• take advantage of tools and information about proven approaches and strategies for addressing common barriers faced by different population groups in your community;
• highlight physical activity participation rates in your community;
• involve community groups that have a strong and positive influence on your audiences in the planning and delivery of your SummerActive activities.
SummerActive—Be Fit For Life!

Connie Walker-Dymianiw, BPE, PFLC (Director, Kevin Sirois Fitness Resource Centre, Be Fit For Life Network, Red Deer College).

About the Be fit for Life Network
The Be Fit For Life (BFFL) Network provides services, education, and resources to encourage Albertans to become responsible for being physically active. The Provincial Fitness Unit and the Network’s eight centres are listed below:

• The Provincial Fitness Unit (780) 492-4435;
• Edmonton (780) 492-0758;
• Fort McMurray (780) 791-8916;
• Grande Prairie (780) 539-2816;
• Vermilion (780) 853-8474;
• Calgary (403) 220-8011;
• Lethbridge (403) 382-6919;
• Medicine Hat (403) 529-3839;
• Red Deer (403) 342-3140.

The BFFL Network, as part of the Active Lifestyles Portfolio (ALP), has been actively involved in promoting and planning SummerActive events over the past five years (and was also involved with SummerActive’s predecessor, Canada’s Fitweek, for many years).

This article discusses some of the events that BFLL centres have hosted in the past year (2000)—both our success stories and the lessons we have learned.

Success Stories
Some of our SummerActive activities were one-day events, e.g., the Lakeland Runaway in Vermilion (which attracted 109 runners and walkers last year) and the 22nd Rattler Run in Medicine Hat (this event involved 352 runners and walkers in either a 3-km family fun run/walk or a 5- or 10-km run).

Other projects, such as the Lethbridge Ride Your Camel or the Edmonton Commuter Challenge events, involved participants during the whole six weeks of SummerActive. During Ride Your Camel, Lethbridge city employees accumulated points by using alternative forms of transportation that involved physical activity. The Edmonton Commuter Challenge and Clean Air Campaign Day were also excellent ways to communicate the active living message—at the same time, promoting environmentally friendly means of transportation.

Here at Red Deer College, our centre promoted both events already scheduled during the SummerActive weeks…and other opportunities to become physically active…"

Lessons Learned
We have experienced some growing pains in Red Deer over the past five years in moving from the one-week Fitweek to the six-week SummerActive campaign. In the past, Red Deer had a very active, multi-partner committee that met throughout the year to plan events in schools, communities, and workplaces for the one-week campaign. We have found it more difficult to keep committee members involved over a longer time frame.

However, during the various campaigns, we have developed and maintained many good partnerships with community recreation, education, health, and workplace groups (we continue to work closely with these groups on many projects throughout the year).

Committee members have been concerned about the many other fundraising runs/walks/biking events during May and June, all of which compete for local media attention, public awareness, interest, and dollars.

Other BFLL centres report that working closely with partner agencies, schools, employers, fitness leaders, and the local media certainly enhances the effectiveness of SummerActive. Other elements that contribute to the success of an event include the following:

• pre-event planning (i.e., getting the SummerActive action plan and packages by January or February);
• involving partners in your community;
• connecting effectively with the local media;
• communicating the active living message to communities, schools, and workplaces throughout the province using the combined efforts of Alberta Community Development (ACD) and the Active Lifestyles Portfolio (the ALP is a group of five organizations that work in partnership to
increase the number of Albertans who are physically active);  
• ensuring that exercise leaders receive SummerActive information and kits—these practitioners are a vital link in getting the grassroots involved and participating;  
• targeting and choosing activities of interest for inactive people (as opposed to planning events that will only attract those already active);  
• focusing on people in the “contemplative” and “preparation” stages in the months before SummerActive (with the hope that these people would then move on to the “active” stage during the SummerActive campaign).

Where Do We Go from Here?
In Red Deer, we are hoping to work co-operatively with the Better Biking Red Deer Committee to promote both alternative forms of transportation and the SummerActive message. We are also planning to offer our SummerActive Smorgasbord again (with the same events as before) at Red Deer College. We would also like to work more closely with the college Wellness Committee, the Health Centre, and sport and lifestyle facilities to generate more advance publicity and staff involvement.

Events or projects lucky enough to get a second or third “go around” always try to improve and expand on previous efforts. SummerActive planners agree on the need for both provincial and national commitment to the project. The following specific promotional proposals came out of the SummerActive 2001 Moving Millions…Action Plan (Fitness/Active Living Unit, 2001):
• promote a national contest, complete with prizes;  
• choose a national celebrity spokesperson;  
• find major media and corporate partners to help promote SummerActive;  
• initiate a PSA/promotional campaign both locally and nationally;  
• plan a provincial launch event to create more media interest;  
• increase the awareness of physical activity opportunities and benefits (especially in those who are somewhat inactive) to motivate people to be physically active;  
• extend the target date to reduce physical inactivity to 2003;  
• encourage people to change from inactivity to activity throughout the year, not just during the SummerActive campaign;  
• emphasize the importance of supportive physical and social environments.

These proposals and recommendations will inspire the many community leaders, committees, and organizations who work so hard to excite Canadians about the benefits of physical activity. At Red Deer College, we will focus on getting more staff to “Try It!” If Moving Millions can truly help to reduce physical activity in Canada, then we must all work together to make it succeed. Come on, Canada—Try It!

Citation references for this article are available on request or from the Alberta Centre for Well-Being web site (www.health-in-action.org/Well-Being).

Physical Activity Promotion: It’s Time to Start Paddling Upstream

John Spence, Senior Research Associate, Alberta Centre for Well-Being

McKinlay (1975) tells the story of a physician who was standing by a river saving people from drowning. As soon as he pulled out one person, someone else would float by calling for help. The story ends with the physician realizing that he was so busy pulling people out of the water that he did not have enough time to go upstream to see who was pushing them in.

McKinlay uses this anecdote to make the case for population-based interventions to reduce cardiovascular risk. Instead of standing “downstream” (i.e., dealing with people who present with risk factors for cardiovascular disease), it makes more sense to head “upstream” to remove the root causes.

Physical inactivity is one of the main risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Any intervention or program that reaches many people and promotes greater activity would be considered upstream (see Table 1 on p. 8). For example, environmental initiatives (such as ice-free sidewalks in cities with cold climates and walking trails and pedways in major urban areas) can influence the activity choices of many people at a relatively low cost. Population-based promotion of physical activity is a mid- to upstream intervention. National campaigns that support Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living (CPAG) and SummerActive are good examples of mid- to upstream programs. However, if these programs are to be effective, they need to be promoted and understood.

How Far Do We Cast the Net?
In 1998, Health Canada, in association with the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, released the CPAG. This publication for adults was the first in a series of Canadian physical activity guides. Within a year, Health Canada released a second guide aimed at older adults and will soon publish a guide for children and youth. The purpose of the CPAG is to inform Canadians about the benefits of physical activity and to encourage participation in appropriate activities. Although Health Canada (2000) has some information on the distribution of these guides (which went mainly to professional organizations), no information is available on whether Canadians are aware of and using the CPAG. If we are to judge the effectiveness of the CPAG, then such information on its use needs to be collected.

Recognizing this gap, on a large survey of recreation participation in Alberta, the Alberta government included two questions relating to awareness and use of the CPAG. The government received replies from 2,719 households. Results showed that 20 per cent of Albertans were aware of the CPAG and that
5.5 per cent have followed the CPAG’s recommendations (Spence, 2000). Interestingly, females and those with higher levels of education were most aware of the CPAG.

It is encouraging that approximately 20 per cent of the Alberta population is aware of the CPAG. The fact that women and those with higher levels of education demonstrated the greatest awareness suggests that as health promoters we may need to target awareness campaigns and distribution of the CPAG to males and those with lower education levels. For example, programs such as SummerActive could be promoted to families in low-income neighbourhoods.

It is difficult to judge how effective the CPAG has been because so little Canadian information exists on population-based physical activity promotions. In contrast, one year after the release of the Surgeon General’s report on physical activity and health, approximately 32 per cent of Americans stated that they were aware of the report (Morrow, Jackson, Bazzarre, Milne, & Blair, 1999). With sufficient promotion, we might hope that 30–40 per cent of Albertans would be aware of the CPAG within the next five years. SummerActive is one vehicle for getting the message out.

To evaluate the effectiveness of these various campaigns, future surveys of physical activity, both at the provincial and national levels, should include questions about the awareness and use of the CPAG, as well as about participation in SummerActive. Ultimately, if these interventions are to be effective, they will need resources (e.g., financial support) from both national and provincial governments. Physical inactivity is a public health issue that must be addressed at many levels and by multiple sectors of our society.

Table 1 Level of Physical Activity Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upstream</td>
<td>Insurance reimbursement for physician counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tax incentives for physically active people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing environment to facilitate activity (e.g., bike paths, safe walking areas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insurance coverage for athletic facility membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involving community leaders in physical activity campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media campaigns and community events that target whole communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worksite programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midstream</td>
<td>Training primary-care physicians in activity counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise training studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinical exercise interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downstream</td>
<td>Cognitive-behavioural interventions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes at the Alberta Centre for Well-Being!
This fall, the Alberta Centre for Well-Being (ACFWB) will change its name to the Alberta Centre for Active Living (ACAL).

The ACFWB’s primary mandate relates to the determinants and benefits of and barriers to active living. The previous name did not convey this mandate clearly.

As part of this process, the ACFWB surveyed its major stakeholders and clients, and found them overwhelmingly in favour of the proposed name change. Judith Moodie, Director of the ACFWB, comments, “We deal with serious health research and education. Sometimes our former name got in the way—people may have misunderstood what it is we do.”

The ACFWB will launch its new name in the fall with a reception. For further details about our mandate and name change, please contact the ACFWB (780 427-6949) or visit our web site (www.health-in-action.org/Well-Being).

The ACFWB would like to thank the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation for its continuing support.