Physical activity as part of daily active living is often seen as an individual behaviour. However, there are many ways to increase physical activity by addressing the population as a whole.

One example of a population-level approach is the Alberta Walkability Roadshow (the Roadshow), launched in early 2011 by Alberta Health Services. The Roadshow project involved five Alberta communities with a keen interest in walking and walkability.

There is ample evidence demonstrating a need to boost physical activity levels of Albertans. For instance, physical activity among adult Albertans declined to 54.3% in 2011 from 58.5% in 2009 (Loitz et al., 2012). Given such evidence, Alberta Health Services (AHS) has made a commitment to physical activity participation through upstream health promotion initiatives, such as the Roadshow.

The Roadshow is based on a process created by Walk21 and adapted by Green Communities Canada with Canada Walks. It brings together local and international experts to build a framework of local strategies, plans, and actions for each of the participating communities.

The Roadshow follows Walk21’s strategic framework to assess and promote walking within a community. Five Alberta communities were chosen as Roadshow participants, from a pool of 17 applicants.
The Roadshow included:

- An initial questionnaire appraising current walking activities and plans, as well as walking opportunities and challenges.
- A webinar and preparation work used to develop the agenda for each community.
- Community activities such as keynote presentations, professional workshops, walkabouts, community meetings and feedback sessions.

It’s interesting to note that each community’s uniqueness was expressed in the process, through community-specific recommendations and solutions. Community Reports for each community are published at www.canadawalks.ca as Best Practices.

The next section offers some brief Roadshow highlights from the five communities.

**City of Red Deer, population 90,000**

City administrators included the Roadshow as a part of their Integrated Movement Study in 2011, which identified how, where, why and when Red Deerians travel. Walking was the first mode of transportation addressed within the study. Through the Roadshow process (e.g., workshop, community meetings, and walkabout), many recommendations were identified.

One initiative triggered by Red Deer’s Roadshow was called the Ross Street Experiment. This free event was promoted widely to citizens and took place in a busy part of downtown Red Deer, on one block of Ross Street. The event started at noon and lasted into the evening.

- The essential element was to close off some of the street traffic; two lanes were closed to vehicles, including the curbside parking lane and one lane of traffic. This made the street much more walkable and provided more space for pedestrian traffic.
- The City turned part of the street into a lively café setting. People were encouraged to bring friends or family, have a coffee, enjoy a meal, do some shopping, and listen to live music. Free parking was provided at a local downtown parkade, and shops and stores stayed open late.
- During the evening, an internationally-known speaker spoke to City residents about what makes great streets. The presentation took place in the street, with temporary seating and a large viewing screen.

Positive responses from this event have helped pave the way for a larger pilot; the City subsequently approved the selective closure of two lanes (curbside parking lane and one lane of traffic) in parts of downtown Red Deer.

**City of Lethbridge, population 90,000**

Representatives of the City’s Planning Department and other City administrators helped to engage community stakeholders in a successful interactive workshop. The Roadshow’s community report contributed to the following actions:

- The City reviewed future development application plans to ensure that they address the walkability of the development and/or how the

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**Strategic Principles from Walk21’s International Charter for Walking:**

1. Increased inclusive mobility
2. Well designed and managed spaces and places for people
3. Improved integration of networks
4. Supportive land-use and spatial planning
5. Reduced road danger
6. Less crime and fear of crime
7. More supportive authorities
8. A culture of walking

walking environment can be improved.

• The Roadshow recommendations contributed to the City’s 2012 Master Transportation Plan. For the first time, the plan will address walking and cycling, along with public transit and roadway planning.

Town of Strathmore, population 12,000

In Strathmore, the Roadshow worked with HEAL Our Future, a community coalition that promotes healthy eating and active living in Strathmore. HEAL Our Future has encouraged Town administrators to use the Roadshow’s community report in future community plans.

For instance, new housing developments in Strathmore have increased their emphasis on walkability. The focus has been on connecting recreational pathways with existing community infrastructure, for seamless community connectivity. The result: new walking routes are already being used by community members.

Recommendations from the community report will be put forward as the Town proceeds with redevelopment of its downtown area, with the aim to create a more walkable downtown.

HEAL Our Future is also working to boost walkability by advocating for clear pedestrian signage. The aims are to increase the number of people walking between the downtown core and residential areas, and to better direct residents to specific sports and recreation facilities. Since the completion of the Roadshow, several new signs have been put in place.

Town of Carstairs, population 3500

In Carstairs, the Roadshow’s community report helped to pinpoint ways to improve walkability.

• Pedestrian signs, walking maps, and outdoor fitness equipment (e.g., placed in public spaces) have been considered.

• The community wants to work towards improvements and connections for local walking paths and networks; this is partly to support older adults and children by ensuring safe walking environments.

• Better linking of paths/networks to local destinations was identified as a way to increase the number of people who would use the networks.

Hamlet of Plamondon, population 350

Plamondon is located within the County of Lac La Biche. The Roadshow community report offers a good illustration of barriers faced by a small community. A list of walkability priorities has been created, but funding is a big challenge.

Plamondon residents must work with the County each fiscal year to request funding for priorities that can increase walkability. For instance, the County has recently committed funding for sidewalk repairs and one kilometre of new concrete walkways within the community.

The Roadshow not only helped to raise awareness about the need for more walkways, but also connected community members. A new committee of interested community members was set up to work with the County on walkability issues.
Some examples of current priorities include:

- connecting pathways
- walking school bus program
- improved sidewalk maintenance
- improving and ensuring accessibility
- developing municipal support
- getting community member buy-in
- walking survey
- walkability audit

Conclusion

In our experience, the Roadshow approach has helped each community to assume greater ownership of the programs, efforts or strategies that are specific to the community’s walkability needs. Ultimately, we hope the process helps communities to make walking more accepted and accessible, thus making healthy, active living more common.

Based on the positive results from the Alberta Walkability Roadshow, a “next-step” pilot has already begun, called Walkable Alberta. This pilot will focus on a different group of freshly selected communities who are keen to increase walkability.

Graham Matsalla is a Health Promotion Facilitator for Alberta Health Services; he works on provincial projects in the area of Active Living. He also supports communities that wish to promote and improve active living opportunities in their area. As a facilitator, Graham provides guidance and tools to Albertans to help them continue to improve their health. Graham is a graduate of the College of Kinesiology from the University of Saskatchewan.

Reference