

PARTICIPACTION

PULSE REPORT


POWERED BY MEC





PUTTING A FINGER ON

**WHAT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
MEANS TO CANADIANS**



**HAVING TROUBLE GETTING OFF THE COUCH?
CAN'T FIND FRIENDS TO GO HIKING WITH,
OR TIME TO GO TO THE GYM?**

YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

According to Statistics Canada, only 18% of Canadian adults are getting the recommended amount of physical activity (150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week [MVPA]). That means 82% of the adult population is not active enough.

Or, to put it another way, 8 in 10 Canadian adults are not active enough to reap the health benefits of a physically active lifestyle. Your neighbour, mother, brother, daughter, co-worker, or maybe even you could be part of the physical inactivity crisis in Canada.

But why? Why are so few people meeting the recommended physical activity requirements and what can be done to get more people moving?

To find out, ParticipACTION commissioned a survey to look at what Canadians think and feel about physical activity. Are there common feelings or attitudes toward physical activity that are keeping us from being active? Are there societal or workplace issues standing in our way? And, most importantly, how can we shift our perceptions and reality to make physical activity part of our daily lives?

In short, ParticipACTION decided to take the pulse of physical activity in Canada.

WHAT DO CANADIANS

THINK

ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

WE KNOW WE NEED TO BE ACTIVE. WE KNOW WE'RE NOT ACTIVE ENOUGH. AND, WE THINK OTHER PEOPLE FEEL THE SAME WAY.

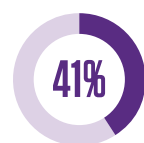
Canadians are aware there is a problem. Approximately 87% of Canadians agree that people know they need to be more physically active.

When asked to estimate what percentage of Canadians their age is active, most people have a pretty accurate idea. On average, Canadians think 34% of people their age meet the physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of MVPA each week, though the actual figure is a bit lower (18% according to Statistics Canadaⁱⁱ).

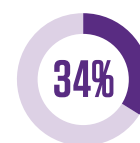
Not surprisingly, this proportion tends to decline with age, with millennials thinking 41% of people their age are meeting the physical activity guidelines, and Baby Boomers

estimating a more modest 32%. Interestingly, this is in-line with current evidence which suggests that physical activity decreases with ageⁱⁱⁱ.

Percent of Canadians who think people their age meet the physical activity guidelines



**MILLENNIALS
(18-36 YEARS)**



**GENERATION X
(37-52 YEARS)**



**BABY BOOMERS
(53-71 YEARS)**



**TRADITIONALISTS
(72+ YEARS)**

BUT HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS IT?

When asked to rate the seriousness of physical inactivity, over 8 in 10 Canadians (83%) think it's a serious health issue. Compared to tobacco use (76%), alcohol misuse (72%), unhealthy diets (82%), sitting too much (66%), cannabis use (47%) and lack of sleep (70%), **physical inactivity comes out as the top health concern in today's society.**

Physical inactivity is a major health concern that costs the Canadian economy \$6.8 billion dollars each year^{iv}, is the 4th leading risk factor for death worldwide^v and affects over 8 in 10 Canadian adults^{vi}.

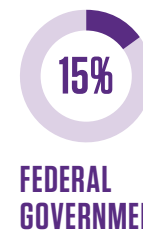
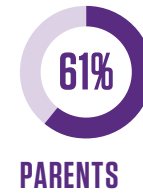
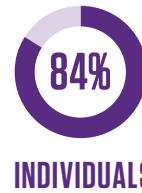
So, we know physical inactivity is a public health issue, most people aren't active enough to reap health benefits, and we need to move more. But who or what is responsible for our physical inactivity?

CANADIANS ULTIMATELY THINK THEY'RE RESPONSIBLE.

Two themes emerge when Canadians are asked what they think is the cause of the physical inactivity crisis.

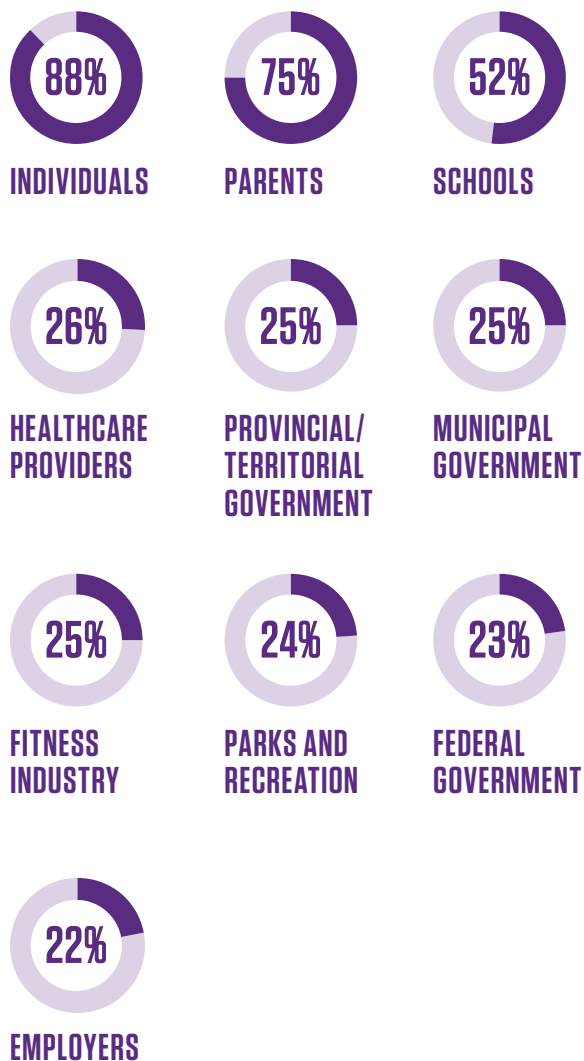
Canadians think that just about everyone, to some extent, contributes to the problem including individuals, parents, employers, schools, health care providers, the fitness industry, parks and recreation services, and every level of government. No one seems to escape blame.

Percent of Canadians who believe these groups are mostly or completely responsible for causing the problem



However, the second, and probably most interesting, theme is that individuals are thought to be at the heart of the problem. When it comes to the cause (84%), and the solution (88%) of physical inactivity, Canadians think individuals are the most responsible. We ultimately think **we** should take a lead role in fixing the problem – that the responsibility rests squarely on **our** shoulders.

Percent of Canadians who believe these groups are mostly or completely responsible for solving the problem



While just over half of Canadians (56%) think that the daily grind (i.e., commuting, busy schedules, screen-use and excessive sitting) gets in the way of being physically active and wish they could find a way to work more physical activity into their day (49%), surprisingly many Canadians (51%) aren't overwhelmed by the prospect of leading a more active life.

Canadians do not view significant barriers getting in the way of becoming more physically active. There is widespread agreement that most Canadians think they wouldn't need to change much (61%), wouldn't need a gym membership (88%), and certainly wouldn't need to be thin (85%), to be physically active. Most Canadians think they're healthy enough to start (70%) and that they have enough time to be physically active (60%).

Most tellingly, Canadians think that individuals have the power and the responsibility to solve the problem. About 82% of us think the only way to be physically active is for it to become a habit and more than half of Canadians (54%) think there's no good excuse for not being physically active.





HOW DO CANADIANS

FEEL

ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

It appears that we think we need to be more active, so is how we **feel** about physical activity the real barrier? Maybe the inactive 82% of Canadians just don't like being physically active? However, that's not the case. In fact, the findings tell a different story.

CANADIANS DESCRIBE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS PLEASANT, JOYFUL, AND EVEN THE BEST PART OF THEIR DAY.

When asked which words best describe how they feel about physical activity, **pleasant** (90%) is the most common feeling. **Joyful** (26%) also appears near the top of the list, while almost 1 in 5 Canadians feel that it's the **best part of their day** (18%).

A whopping three quarters of Canadians (74%) say they enjoy being physically active and over 8 in 10 (86%) say it's worth the effort.

Canadians generally have positive feelings toward physical activity. They enjoy it while they do it and believe it's worth the effort.

IN FACT, CANADIANS ARE RELUCTANT TO DESCRIBE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN A NEGATIVE WAY.

A small minority of Canadians describe physical activity as **dreadful** (4%), **impossible** (4%), or **not for them** (5%). Furthermore, only a few describe physical activity as a **source of anxiety** (9%), **unpleasant** (10%), **boring** (11%), or a **burden** (12%).

AT WORST, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS DESCRIBED AS SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE.

A common feeling is that physical activity needs to happen, whether it's enjoyable or not. That said, only 30% of Canadians view physical activity as **a priority**, 28% approach it like any other **chore** that needs to get done, and only 28% see it as **a necessary part of daily living**.

FEELINGS ABOUT BEING ACTIVE AND INACTIVE.

When asked to describe active people, Canadians say they're **motivated** (89%), **healthy** (85%), **dedicated** (79%), **strong-willed** (79%), and **balanced** (70%). Other top adjectives include **encouraging** (68%) and **busy** (63%).

Although many described inactive people as **lazy** (48%) and lacking a **strong will** (45%), they were conversely described as **busy** (40%) and did not feel that being active was **out-of-reach** (35%).

Both physically active and physically inactive people are perceived as being busy but somehow only physically inactive people are also tagged with being lazy and lacking a strong will. We need to address the way we describe individuals who are physically active and physically inactive and make our language more inclusive and encouraging.

These descriptions encompass the accepted social value and stigma of active and inactive people, respectively. Active people are seen as

dedicated and motivated, armed with the will and determination necessary to lead a healthy, balanced life. Inactive people, on the other hand, are seen as lacking in motivation and drive, with either too little willpower or not enough grit to lead a healthier, more balanced life.

It's possible that the negative stigma and stereotypes surrounding physical inactivity could be the reason people are hesitant to even try to be active. If we change the narrative describing individuals who are active and inactive, physical activity may not seem out of reach for those wishing to make a change. It is also promising to note that being active was not seen as something solely reserved for the "athletic-type", and that with the right supports in place, physical activity is within everyone's reach.

CONSISTENT WITH THE WAY PEOPLE THINK, PEOPLE ALSO FEEL THAT BEING INACTIVE IS AN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY BUT RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL FACTORS BEYOND THEIR CONTROL.



Beliefs about the causes of physical inactivity

- 63%** Physical inactivity is both an individual's fault and caused by other factors beyond an individual's control
- 28%** Physical inactivity is an individual's fault
- 5%** Physical inactivity is caused by other factors beyond an individual's control
- 2%** Physical inactivity is neither an individual's fault nor caused by other factors beyond an individual's control
- 2%** Don't know

This belief is mirrored in Canadians' feelings about the support required to combat physical inactivity – almost 67% of Canadians agree it's both public and private, while a minority (20%) says it's solely a private matter.

Beliefs about support required to combat physical inactivity

- 67%** Physical inactivity is both a private matter and a public health matter that society needs to solve
- 20%** Physical inactivity is a private matter that people need to deal with on their own
- 5%** Physical inactivity is caused by other factors beyond an individual's control
- 2%** Don't know
- 1%** Physical inactivity is neither a private matter nor a public health matter that society needs to solve

DO CANADIANS REALLY WANT TO MOVE MORE?

While Canadians say they enjoy being physically active (74%) and say it's worth the effort (86%), half (50%) say there's nothing better than being curled up on the couch, and almost half (42%) of us struggle with getting motivated to be physically active and/or have to psych ourselves up to get moving (57%). There are those among us that even feel physically uncomfortable when getting active (hot, sweating, out of breath) (34%).

Despite all of this, we feel that **being more physically active is attainable.**

In fact, not only do Canadians believe increased physical activity is attainable, they largely support public policy to encourage it. About 89% of Canadian adults like the idea of providing mandatory daily physical education or physical activity requirements in all schools, 86% support improving universal accessibility of all recreation facilities, and 87% approve of enhancing the quantity and quality of green spaces in all neighbourhoods.

Canadians know they need to be more physically active. We understand the health benefits associated with physical activity and the health risks associated with physical inactivity. Furthermore, we enjoy it and feel that it's worth the effort. And, even though we take primary responsibility for our lack of physical activity, we support social, infrastructure, and educational changes that would promote and/or support this behaviour. **So why are the majority of Canadians still on the couch?**



*HOW CAN WE MAKE
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AN*

ACCEPTED AND EXPECTED

PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN CANADA?

When the thoughts and feelings of Canadians are viewed as a whole, Canadians know what the problem is, want to find a solution, and don't believe physical inactivity is an insurmountable challenge. Though we acknowledge that some external factors play a role and that we require the will and dedication to make it happen, we tend to think that a more active life is within reach.

There's no doubt that individuals must take responsibility for their health, but physical inactivity is better understood in a broader context that takes into account social, cultural and environmental factors.

People ultimately must make the active choice, but collectively as a society, we must make that choice easier.

This is where we need support. The choice will be easier if there is a national understanding of physical activity guidelines and the benefits of physical activity, as well as through the implementation of physical activity policies at all levels of government, in our workplaces and in our schools. There need to be policies and the creation of accessible spaces that support active living and transportation, increased training of physical education specialists, and further funding of programs that encourage sports participation, as well as a physically active workplace.

The fact that Canadians believe the problem can be solved and are willing to take responsibility is an important step to getting us moving. With support from governments, schools and workplaces, there is a higher likelihood of success.



WE NEED MORE THAN MOTIVATION, WE NEED A MOVEMENT.

A movement involves changing from one position to another. And, a movement occurs when a group of people work together to advance a shared social or political idea. We need both to address the physical inactivity problem.

A movement brings the individual's need to move into the social discourse. A movement starts with you 'being the change' you want to see, and then encouraging others to make it happen with you. To make physical activity accepted and expected, it's important for us to understand that the need to be more physically active applies specifically to us – it needs to be a priority and a necessary part of our daily lives. As a movement, we can make a broader impact, emphasize positivity, develop collective responsibility, and create better support systems.



Movements have stopped wars, won women the right to vote, eliminated smoking from public spaces, and pressured governments to protect the environment.

To help set the stage for better, happier and healthier lives for all Canadians, we need a movement that:

- Establishes social values and beliefs that promote physical activity
- Creates spaces that make physical activity fun and accessible to all
- Encourages public engagement and partnerships across multiple sectors and institutions to help advance the movement of better, active living.

A physical activity movement makes active choices easier. A movement that supports Canadians when they fall off track. A movement that makes our schools, workplaces, and communities more active. A movement that shifts the way we think and feel about physical activity in Canada, that paints the problem as a collective responsibility rather than a personal failing. We need a movement that makes the pulse of each Canadian beat that much stronger.





ABOUT THE PARTICIPATION PULSE REPORT

A questionnaire was generated and reviewed by ParticipACTION's Research Advisory Group, an 8-person panel comprised of national physical activity experts, and led by Dr. Guy Faulkner (Professor, University of British Columbia). The questionnaire aimed to gather information about Canadians' attitudes, perceptions, responsibilities, causes, participation, prioritization, and solutions related to physical (in)activity. Several demographic questions (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity, etc.) were also asked.

The questionnaire was tested online with approximately 10% of the sample to ensure the questions asked and language used were clear and logical. Additional reliability analyses were conducted with a small sample of participants.

ParticipACTION partnered with Maru/Matchbox, a research marketing firm based in Toronto, to conduct the online survey with a representative sample of 100,000 Canadians (18 years and over) from the Angus Reid Forum – Canada's leading online market research community.

A total of 2,519 Canadian adults (18+ years) completed the survey between January 19 and 24, 2018. All data were analyzed by Dr. Guy Faulkner and ParticipACTION research staff.

ParticipACTION acknowledges the support and financial contributions of MEC – Canada's go-to place for outdoor gear, know-how and inspiration – whose partnership was key to the success of this project. MEC exists to inspire, enable and connect Canadians to outdoor activity – to learn more about how MEC programs support ParticipACTION's recommendations visit:

www.mec.ca/en/explore/events

Special thanks are also extended to Maru/Matchbox for their assistance in programming and deploying the online questionnaire and to Dr. Guy Faulkner for his research support and expert contributions.

For additional information and access to creative materials and added data points, please visit: **participACTION.com/pulsereport**

- i <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170419/dq170419e-eng.htm>
- ii <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170419/dq170419e-eng.htm>
- iii <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10994911>
- iv <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22667697>
- v <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/pa/en/>
- vi <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170419/dq170419e-eng.htm>