

Active Living in the Workplace Toolkit

**Population Public Health:
Wellness Program**

February 2024

Background on Active Living

What is Active Living?

- Active living is an approach to life that values and includes physical activity (PA) as part of the daily routine⁶.
- Active living in the workplace may look like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, participating in walking or standing meetings, utilizing active transportation to commute to and from work, going to the park, or participating in an exercise class before or after work, or during lunch hour⁶.

How Much Activity is Enough?

- The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology has created [24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#) that integrate PA, sedentary behaviour, and sleep to define what a healthy 24 hours looks like.
- Specifically for PA, it is recommended that adults aged 18+ participate in a variety of types and intensities of PA, including^{6,9}:
 - 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per week
 - Muscle strengthening activities using major muscle groups as least twice per week
 - Several hours of light PA, including standing
 - For those who are 65+, balance activities are additionally recommended
- These guidelines can be met by participating in moderate or vigorous physical activity* throughout the day for any length of time²⁰.
- Evidence is still emerging on whether bouts of light physical activity under 10 minutes influence health outcomes, but any amount of movement adds to the hours of light PA that is recommended for each day.²⁰

Benefits of Active Living

- Increases energy levels, self-esteem and feelings of confidence^{1,17,18}
- Improves ability to cope with stress, mood, feelings of pleasure and happiness, and satisfaction in life^{1,17,18}
- Creates new opportunities for social connection¹
- Strengthens bones and muscles, improves balance and posture, and decreases the risk of many chronic diseases and cancers¹

Active Living and Mental Health

Mental health and physical health are closely linked because moderate PA releases endorphins, dopamine and serotonin in the brain, which creates feelings of happiness and contributes to the overall benefits of active living^{17,18}. For those living with certain types of mental illness, PA has also been shown to help manage symptoms and improve mood regulation¹⁷. Participating in active living helps supports both mental and physical health.¹

* Moderate: A person can talk but not sing during activities of this intensity. Vigorous: a person cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

Why Support Active Living in the Workplace

Benefits to Employers

- Improves employees' morale, job satisfaction, ability to cope with stress, productivity, effectiveness at work, and health and well-being^{2,6,8,13};
- Reduces levels of absenteeism, injuries, turnover, disability compensation, and health care and life insurance costs^{2,6,8};
- Can enhance company image and create a more positive workplace culture⁶.
- Can decrease costs long-term for the organization⁶.

How to Support Active Living in the Workplace

Policies and Programs

Policies can create environments and opportunities for employees to make choices that promote active living in an equitable way¹³.

Programs support policies by creating actionable ways to implement them. Programs can be educational or activity based to create opportunities to both learn and apply learning¹³.

It is important when planning any policy or program to include feedback from employees and ensure equitable and inclusive access of all abilities and in all work environments^{4,15}. Some types of employment may be more physically demanding (e.g. construction, farming) and may require different types of PA throughout the day (e.g. stretching).

Policy Actions and Programs

Policies can be created based on specific goals, can be put into one active living policy, or can be incorporated into other policies, through a [health in all policies](#) approach. Extended health benefits packages and current policies may also support active living goals. Identify these, promote them, and update as needed.

Below are some examples of policy actions and programs, separated by the goal they can help achieve.

Create opportunities to make decisions that support active living during the work day.

- Support and incorporate stretch breaks, and standing and walking meetings^{6,7,10,11}
- Support employees taking a break at lunch and encourage employees to use their break times to participate in PA⁴ - ensure meetings aren't set during lunch or break times
- Allow for flexible work hours or flex time to be accrued for active living^{5,6,10}
 - E.g. flex time accrued and used for a PA class or adjusting work hours to accommodate active commuting.
- Place point-of-decision-prompts in the form of motivational signage at appropriate places around the workplace and distribute to employees to encourage active living behaviours. Examples include signage at the elevators that point toward the stairs, or posters that can be placed near employee desks to encourage stretch breaks^{7,13,15}

Create physical and social environments that support active living throughout the work day.

- Ensure stairwells are well-marked, accessible, safe, and appealing to use⁷
- Allow for a flexible dress code one or more days a week⁵
- Create spaces for PA within the workplace such as outdoor areas, fitness facilities or PA equipment¹³
- Provide amenities to support active commuting^{5,6,7,10} (i.e. bike storage, change rooms, shower facilities)
- Support management to advocate for community changes (i.e. sidewalk and lighting improvements) to support active living⁵
- Provide education and resources to employees regarding active living, its benefits, and offering opportunities for participation^{3,13}
- Support employees in creating and maintaining a remote work environment in which they can participate in PA throughout the day¹⁵
- Create and display walking routes either inside or outside of the office⁶

Provide active living opportunities before, during and after the work day.

- Offer PA programming during lunch, break times, before work or after work⁴
- Support management to receive and implement feedback from their employees and to reach out to the appropriate community partners to improve, create, or implement active living programming or initiatives⁵
- Start a walking group or organized activity program during breaks times^{4,7,10}
- Provide opportunities to employees to learn about active living, benefits, how they can participate, and available opportunities^{3,13}

Incentivize Active Living

- Provide subsidy or cost-covering opportunities for exercise facilities, PA programs, PA or active commuting equipment, or PA education programs^{5,7,10}
- Incorporate an employee movement and recognition program to reward employees' commitment to living an active lifestyle⁵
- Provide transit passes or fitness centre memberships to employees at no cost or a subsidized cost¹⁴
- Consider allocating funding for incentives or rewards for employee participation in PA¹³
- Allocate funding and staffing support for active living programs and initiatives⁷
- Support for one or multiple employees in becoming a champion for active living⁷

Initiatives

Initiatives can help kick-start and raise awareness for active living policies and programs. This can help engage all employees and management in active living. Initiatives generally have a reward or recognition component as an incentive.

Tips for Designing and Implementing an Active Living Policy, Program, or Initiative

Having a coordinated approach to support active living in the workplace is important to create effective and positive change¹⁹. Positive impact can result from small and sustainable changes¹⁶. Supporting active living does not need to replace other wellness priorities, but rather

compliment them. Here are some tips on how to effectively design and implement an active living policy, program, or initiative:

- Update current policies, programs, initiatives as needed
 - Keep active living in mind when routinely reviewing policies or programs
- Work with employees to identify priorities¹⁹
- Conduct a needs assessment and identify what already exists¹⁹
- Utilize a current occupational health and safety committee to support policy and program development.
- Create goals based on what is feasible for your organization
- Create an evaluation strategy¹⁹
- Learn together¹⁹

Resources

Policy Development Tools

- [Sample PA Policy](#)
- [PA Policy Development Tips](#)

Program and Initiative Ideas and Tips

- [Active Commuting Challenge](#)¹³
- [Stretch Break Guide and Challenge](#)¹³
- [Healthy Working at Home](#)¹⁵
- Bike to Work Week
- [ParticipACTION Community Challenge](#)
- Daily movement challenge^{4,13}
- [ParticipACTION Sneak it In](#)

Educational Resources

- [Ideas to promote PA at work, Basics of PA, Risks of a Sedentary Lifestyle](#)
- [Tip Sheet for Health Benefits of PA](#)
- [Tip Sheet for Increasing PA at Work](#)
- [Stories from Healthy Workplaces](#)
- [Basics of Active Living at Work - CCOHS](#)

Planning and Implementation Resources

- [Tips for Getting Started](#)
- [Planning for Workplace Active Living](#)

Regional Active Living Community Health Specialists (Fraser Health)

This team works for Fraser Health and can help support your organization in answering questions about this toolkit and can provide you with information on upcoming funding opportunities that may be available to cover the cost of implementing an active living policy, program, or initiative.

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