



## Investing in Workplace Physical Activity Policies: A Business Case for Hamilton Employers

January 2012



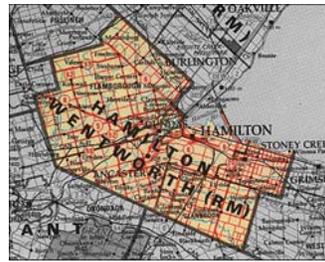
**Hamilton**  
Public Health Services

# Investing in Workplace Physical Activity Policies: A Business Case for Hamilton Employers

## WHY is physical activity important?

Regular physical activity plays a role in the prevention of several chronic diseases<sup>1</sup> including:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Some cancers
- Obesity
- Depression
- Osteoporosis

Worldwide	In Canada	In Hamilton
<p>The World Health Organization estimates global deaths from inactivity at <b>2 million</b> people annually<sup>2</sup>.</p> 	<p>The economic burden of physical inactivity has been estimated at <b>\$5.3 billion</b> (\$1.6 billion in direct healthcare costs and \$3.7 billion in indirect costs), representing 2.6% of total health care costs<sup>3</sup>.</p> 	<p><b>\$40.7 million</b> in direct health care costs are attributable to obesity and obesity related diseases<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Only <b>27.6%</b> of Hamilton residents, 12 years and over self-reported they are physically active in their leisure time<sup>5*</sup>.</p> 

\*This statistic may actually be lower than estimated as poor recall and social desirability have been identified as factors that may limit self-reported data.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

A **10%** increase in the number of physically active Canadians has the potential to reduce direct health care expenditures by **\$150 million** a year.<sup>9</sup>

HOW much daily physical activity are we talking about?  
The 2011 Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic physical activity per week for adults aged 18-64.<sup>10</sup>



## WHY should this matter to YOUR workplace?

2.

The Public Health Agency of Canada states that work performance improves up to **15%** amongst physically active people with employees reporting improved concentration, stamina and memory; and increased energy.<sup>11</sup> Employees in poor health are **20%** less productive than those in good health - this is comparable to a productivity reduction of one day per week.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, promotion of physical activity through a workplace policy can help enhance an organization's reputation; helping to attract and retain quality staff.<sup>13</sup> Being an 'employer of choice' is a powerful way to attract talented people in a competitive marketplace.

Research shows many other potential benefits of workplace physical activity policies for both employers and employees<sup>14</sup> (See Figure 1).

Benefits for Employers	Benefits for Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Cost effectiveness/return on investment</li><li>■ Decreased turnover</li><li>■ Decreased absenteeism/presenteeism and sick leave</li><li>■ Decreased disability and workers' compensation costs</li><li>■ Improved productivity and job performance</li><li>■ Improved employee health and morale</li><li>■ Improved company reputation</li><li>■ Improved labour relations and recruitment and retention of quality staff</li><li>■ Creation of corporate culture that values employee well-being</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Improved job satisfaction and team spirit</li><li>■ Improved health and decreased chance of chronic diseases related to inactivity</li><li>■ Improved work-life balance</li><li>■ Improved psychosocial well-being and decreased stress</li><li>■ Improved cognition, concentration and memory</li><li>■ Increased likelihood of meeting daily physical activity recommendations and decreased weight</li><li>■ Improved productivity</li><li>■ Increased self-confidence</li></ul>

Figure 1: Potential Benefits of a Workplace Physical Activity Policy

## Canadian Workplace Physical Activity Success Stories:

Canadian businesses that have invested in getting employees more active have realized financial savings<sup>15</sup> (See Figure 2). The examples below highlight the importance of combining workplace physical activity policy and environmental support strategies with programming that provides opportunities for employee physical activity.

Return on Investment	Decreased Turnover	Lower Absenteeism	Reduced disability payments
Canada Life in Toronto showed a return of <b>\$6.85</b> for every \$1 invested in its Workplace Wellness program; while the Canadian government realized <b>\$1.95-\$3.75</b> per employee per \$1 spent. <sup>15</sup>	Canada Life Assurance Co. employees who participated in physical activity programs had a <b>32.4%</b> lower turnover than the average over a 7-year period. <sup>15</sup>	Participants in City of Toronto's Metro Fit program missed <b>3.35</b> fewer days in 6 months than non-participants. <sup>15</sup>	Hours lost due to short and long term disability have decreased by <b>42%</b> at the Vancouver International Airport. <sup>16</sup>

Figure 2: Examples of Canadian Success Stories

Your organization could be the next success story!

### WHY choose a physical activity policy and not just a workplace exercise program?

In order to integrate physical activity into daily routines, changes need to occur through policy and environmental approaches in the places where people live, learn, work and play.<sup>18</sup> Workplace environmental change and policy strategies can make healthy choices easier. By modifying physical or organizational structures they target the whole workforce or population rather than individuals.<sup>17</sup>

Policy and environmental support approaches to physical activity are beneficial in comparison to programs that focus on individual behaviour changes for many reasons including sustainability, cost effectiveness and accountability.

### Sustainability:

Physical activity needs to be integrated into people's daily lives where the choice to be active is convenient, appealing, and inexpensive.<sup>18</sup> To do so we must go beyond focusing on individual behaviour change.<sup>19</sup> Physical activity interventions that build knowledge, motivation and behaviour change skills in individuals without changing the environments in which they work are unlikely to be effective long-term.<sup>20, 21</sup> In other words: programming is insufficient as a stand alone approach to bring about sustainable changes.

Workplace physical activity policies create a foundation for widespread, cost effective, sustainable changes in daily physical activity among employees.

### Cost Effectiveness:

When the cost of absenteeism, sick leave, disability, injuries, and health care claims are considered, it is clear that physical inactivity, and its impact on employee health, is an important driver of costs in the workplace.<sup>17</sup> Up to **70%** of employees' benefit costs are related to chronic diseases.<sup>19</sup> Providing a workplace environment that supports physical activity can reduce these costs.

### Accountability:

The Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act requires the creation of a safe and healthy work environment stating that employers must take "every precaution reasonable under the circumstances" to protect their workers' health and safety.<sup>23</sup> While there is no legal requirement in Canada requiring an employer to support, encourage or require a healthy lifestyle among its employees<sup>23</sup>, some employers may view the creation of policies and environments that support physical activity among employees as part of their 'due diligence'.

Note: Always consult with the appropriate legal advisors on accountability issues as they relate to your organization's policies specifically and to ensure that all appropriate due diligence requirements are in place for your jurisdiction.

### 1. Take a Policy Approach:

- Provide flexible work arrangements for employees (e.g. coming in earlier or staying later, longer lunch, telecommuting, job-sharing, etc.).
- Provide subsidies (e.g., partner with local businesses for discounted gym memberships or recreation passes).
- Introduce corporate policies that aim to reduce prolonged sitting (e.g. avoid meeting during lunch, breaks for meetings lasting longer than 1 hour, encouraging breaks, and walking to offices/workstations instead of emailing colleagues; walking meetings).
- Create/adopt policies that support active commuting (e.g. reduced cost bus passes, Smart Commute\*).
- Make an organizational commitment to advocate for an activity-friendly Hamilton (e.g. walkable/bikeable streets, mixed-use neighbourhoods, compact design, transit-oriented community).

### 2. Create a Supportive Environment:

- Provide facilities that support daily physical activity for employees such as secure bike storage, on-site showers, lockers and change rooms, safe walking paths, and access to safe, clean stairwells.
- Map out various walking/biking routes around your workplace and promote them during employee orientation and through employee bulletin boards or email (An interactive mapping tool is available from Environment Hamilton\*).
- Provide child-care before and after work hours to allow further opportunities for employee physical activity.
- Promote dress down days or casual dress code to encourage active commuting or being active during breaks and lunch hour.

\*See the 'Want to Know More?' section for links to resources

One way to identify your organization's readiness to introduce a policy or environmental change is to complete an environmental scan of your workplace. [Click here](#) to learn more about how to do so.

## KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL POLICY DEVELOPMENT:

6.

- Model your physical activity policy after existing organizational policies so it includes the type of information, language and format that is typical to your organization.
- Use easy-to-understand, clear language and be as specific as possible.
- Ask for employee input during the planning phase of your policy. This can be done via online polling/surveys or face-to-face information and discussion sessions. By working with your employees to develop a policy that fits your organization you will generate greater stakeholder buy-in and increase the likelihood of sustainability.
- Consider the diversity of the organization as well as the staff. Take into account company size, sector, product, and resources available. Also be sure to consider the range of employees' age, gender, ethnic and cultural background, and socioeconomic status.
- Demonstrate managerial support for physical activity through both words and actions. Incorporate physical activity objectives into the workplace health and wellness strategy, linking it to business objectives and encourage executives, mid-level management and front-line leaders to participate in physical activity initiatives.

These tips have been adapted from Play, Live, Be... Tobacco Free: A Guide for Developing Tobacco-free Sport and Recreation Policies and By-laws<sup>22</sup>

### Want to know more?

Visit the Hamilton Public Health website below for more information and resources on developing and promoting organizational physical activity policies:

[www.hamilton.ca/workplace/physicalactivity](http://www.hamilton.ca/workplace/physicalactivity)

Interactive Mapping Tool from Environment Hamilton available from:

<http://environmenthamilton.org/walkthere/>

SmartCommute Hamilton: <http://www.smartcommutehamilton.ca/en/membership>

1. Warburton, D., Nicol, C., & Bredin, S. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: the evidence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*: 174(6), 801-809. doi:10.1503/cmaj.051351.
2. World Economic Forum (2010) *The New Discipline of Workforce Wellness Enhancing Corporate Performance by Tackling Chronic Disease*, Geneva: World Economic Forum
3. Katzmarzyk, P., & Janessen, I. (2004). The economic costs associated with physical inactivity and obesity in Canada: An update. *Canadian Journal of Applied Physiology*, 29(1), 90-115.
4. Richardson, E. (2005). *Obesity trends*. Hamilton, ON: City of Hamilton, Social and Public Health Services Committee, Unpublished. Retrieved on April 12, 2011 from <http://www.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D7A50798-521D-484A-8E9E761F4A7C5236/0/Nov22SPH05056ObesityTrends.pdf>
5. Gilmour, H. (2007). *Physically active Canadians*. Health Reports (Statistics Canada, Catalogue no 82-003) 18(3). Retrieved July 8, 2011 from part11(Health matters - Physically active Canadians)\_e.p65
6. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care [MOHLTC] (2004). 2004 Chief Medical Officer of Health Report *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
7. Katzmarzyk, P., & Tremblay, M. (2007). Limitations of Canada's physical activity data: Implications for monitoring trends. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, 32, S185-S194
8. Tjepkema, M. (2006). Adult obesity. *Health Reports (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-003)*, 17(3), 9-25.
9. Katzmarzyk, P., Gledhill, N., & Shephard, R. (2000). The economic burden of physical activity in Canada. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 163(11):1435-1440.
10. Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (2011) *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines 2011 For Adults - 18-64*. Retrieved August 5, 2011 from <http://www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP-InfoSheets-adults-ENG.pdf>
11. WalkBC (2008) *Business Case for Workplace Walking Programs*. Retrieved August 4, 2011 from <http://walkbc.ca/business-case-workplace-walking-programs>
12. European Health and Productivity Management (2004) Vol. 1, No. 4, Retrieved July 2005 from [http://www.vielife.com/our\\_company\\_pdf/e-HPMNewsletter4.pdf](http://www.vielife.com/our_company_pdf/e-HPMNewsletter4.pdf).udies/vancouverairport.pdf.

13. Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2008) Building the case for wellness, London: Pricewaterhouse Coopers
14. Curry, R. (2011) Workplace Physical Activity: A Review of Literature Examining Policy and Environmental Approaches. City of Hamilton, Unpublished.
15. Middlesex-London Health Unit (2004) Building a Healthy Workplace: Blueprint for Success, London, Ontario: Middlesex-London Health Unit
16. Lochhead, C. (2002). Case Study: Vancouver International Airport Authority. The Canadian Labour and Business Centre. Retrieved August 5, 2011 from <http://www.clbc.ca/files/CaseStudies/vancouverairport.pdf>.
17. Anderson, L.M., Quinn, T.A., Glanz, K., Ramirez, G., Kahwati, L.C., Johnson, D.B., Buchanan, L.R., Archer, R., Chattopadhyay, S., Kalra, G. P., & Katz, D. (2009). The Effectiveness of Worksite Nutrition and Physical Activity Interventions for Controlling Employee Overweight and Obesity: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 37(4), 340 – 357.
18. Godin, L. (2009). Creating active-friendly communities in Hamilton: Making the active choice the easier choice. City of Hamilton, Unpublished.
19. Coalition for Active Living. (2006). Investing in prevention: A business plan to increase physical activity in Canada. Retrieved March 3, 2009 from <http://www.activeliving.ca/pdf/PABusinessplanfinal.pdf>
20. Golaszewski, T., Allen, J., & Edington, D. (2008). Working Together to Create Supportive Environments in Worksite Health Promotion. *The Art of Health Promotion*, March/April 2008, 1-10
21. Sallis, J.F. & Glanz, K. (2009). Physical Activity and Food Environments: Solutions to the Obesity Epidemic. *The Millbank Quarterly*, 8(1), 123-154.
22. Feltracco, A. (2011) Play, Live, Be...Tobacco Free: A Guide for Developing Tobacco-free Sport and Recreation Policies and By-laws. Retrieved October 9, 2011 from [www.playlivebetobaccofree.ca](http://www.playlivebetobaccofree.ca)
23. Burton, J. (2008) The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace. Retrieved January 2012 from [http://www.iapa.ca/pdf/fd\\_business\\_case\\_healthy\\_workplace.pdf](http://www.iapa.ca/pdf/fd_business_case_healthy_workplace.pdf)