



Make Your Move at Work

Toolkit Primer

A resource to support Nova Scotia organizations to become more active.

Make Your Move at Work Toolkit

If physical activity is not yet an organizational priority for your workplace, this easy-to-use toolkit can help you take your first steps. Or, if physical activity is already a priority, the toolkit can tell you how you're doing and help you find ways to do even better.

Moving more at work not only improves the lives of your employees. It can also boost your bottom line. Here's how.

Physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour contribute to high rates of chronic disease and negatively impact the quality of life of Canadians.¹ Physical activity, on the other hand, can reduce the risk of many chronic conditions² and improve mental health.³

Given that working adults spend 35 to 40 hours (or more) per week at work and, in many jobs, are sitting for long periods, the workplace is a prime avenue to encourage physical activity and movement.⁴ Canadian employers are paying the increasing costs of drug plans, paramedical benefits, and long-term disability coverage.⁵ However, after implementing comprehensive wellness interventions that increase physical activity,⁶ many businesses have realized a significant return on investment, achieving returns of \$2 to \$4 for every dollar they've invested.

The Nova Scotia government is committed to encouraging Nova Scotians to move more and sit less, as outlined in its Let's Get Moving framework and through its collaboration with the Healthy Tomorrow Foundation's Make Your Move campaign.⁷ The goal is to inspire people to think about movement differently and to recognize that moving more is easy to do. To promote the "Make Your Move at Work" message, a provincial committee was established to develop resources to support organizations to be more active. As researchers from Acadia University, we conducted a literature review, an environmental scan, focus groups, and a survey of Nova Scotia employers to evaluate their level of engagement in practices that promote physical activity in Nova Scotia workplaces. We also looked for opportunities to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour at work.

The following is a snapshot of the key findings and a toolkit of resources to equip employers to address physical activity at work.

A Snapshot of Physical Activity in Nova Scotia Workplaces

As researchers, we learned that for most organizations in Nova Scotia, helping their employees become more physically active and less sedentary was not a priority. In fact, most of them reported little or no action. We were encouraged to find small pockets of employers who were trying to address physical activity and sedentary behaviour, such as by providing access to off-site facilities, having insurance companies provide services, or providing flexible work hours for employees to be active on their own time. Although these actions "checked the box" for promoting physical activity, they did not always align with best practices and were often not integrated with a broader health and safety plan. As a result, the outcomes were difficult to evaluate.

Organizations identified the following primary barriers to action:

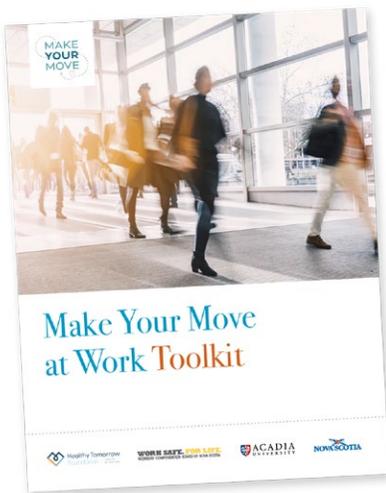
- being short staffed
- lacking amenities on site
- lacking financial and administrative resources to act
- lacking organizational awareness and understanding of how to act

Organizations identified a need for greater supports, such as the following, to help encourage physical activity:

- amenities on site to support physical activity
- education sessions and resources to help employees be more active
- incentives to encourage physical activity

The literature shows that effective physical activity practices start by creating a culture of movement that is built on policies that engage employees while also meeting the organization's objectives.⁸

This toolkit is meant to help provide support and direction for your organization to become a more active workplace. An investment in physical activity can improve the health of your organization and your bottom line.



About this Toolkit

This toolkit comprises key resources, described below, to help support the people in your organization to move more in the workplace. The goals of the toolkit are to:

- create awareness of the benefits of supporting movement in the workplace
- engage employers and employees in simple actions that can promote health and wellbeing through movement in the workplace
- engage Nova Scotia organizations that don't currently have movement on their radar, but also to complement existing resources (such as the Centre for Active Living Active Workplace Audit Tool (CAL AWA – described later) for any organizations that want to activate their workplace at a higher level.

The Toolkit Components



A Move in the Right Direction

A 5-page summary of the key evidence for investing in physical activity in the workplace and an overview of effective strategies.

Assessment Tool for Employers

A 5-page evaluation to give you a snapshot of where your organization is in supporting an active workplace. This tool can help your organization assess your individual circumstances and develop strategic plans to reduce sedentary behaviour or increase physical activity in the workplace.



Assessment Tool for Employees

This 4-page tool will help you gather information about employees' perspectives on your organization's efforts to support an active workplace.

Best Moves Guide

This 8-page summary highlights the 5 best practices, policies and programs to help you integrate physical activity into your workplace. All of them are backed by evidence. Each section starts off with steps that will be reasonably easy for your organization to adopt. From there, the sections progress to more complex interventions that produce greater outcomes in the long term. Each item is cost-rated to help your organization make informed decisions about what initiatives to pursue.



- Best Practices*: an overview of strategies in key areas of social support, organizational support and employee awareness.



ii. *Best Policies*: an outline of key policies ranked from easiest to most complex with the objective, actions, rationale and investment. A sample policy provides direction to create your own.

iii. *Best Programs*: best programs, from easy awareness and education approaches to multi-layered and comprehensive approaches for both reducing sedentary behaviour and increasing physical activity.



A Healthy Investment: ROI business case

What’s the business case for movement? This 1-page infographic highlights the health and cost benefits of moving more at work for the employees and the employer.

Move More Working From Home

These 2-page tools provide ideas for:

- i. employers to motivate and support their workforce in moving more, and
- ii. employees to increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behaviour while working from home. Each resource includes suggestions to integrate activity into their day.



Fast Facts

Key evidence, messages, resources and actions to refer to when engaging management or employees in initiatives to move more at work.



Centre for Active Living’s Active Workplace Audit Toolkit

An additional tool, if your organization has the resources to engage more fully, is the Centre for Active Living’s Active Workplace Audit Toolkit (CAL AWA).⁹ The CAL AWA outlines how to build the case for an active workplace, assess current workplace practices, find resources for action, and plan for change and improvement.⁹

The CAL AWA describes many processes of who, what, where, how and why to implement strategies to increase physical activity in the workplace. It also provides many links to other existing tools and resources. Because of that, it can be used as a primary resource for Nova Scotia organizations that are already doing some physical activity promotion, as identified in the Organizational Assessment. The CAL AWA may not apply to all organizations, however, as it is focused on office-based employees, and it may be missing some elements identified through our provincial assessment.

The CAL AWA refers to many comprehensive tools and guide-books for developing policies, infrastructure, social environments, and programs for a physically active workplace.

Additional resources are also available to you:

- The final third of the CAL AWA contains many “best practice” ideas focusing on social support, organizational support, community assets & partnerships, and policies & programs.
- The Conference Board of Canada’s “Moving Ahead” report¹⁰ includes criteria for effective initiatives.
- A linked document from Johns Hopkins University¹¹ mentions the importance of a multi-pronged approach.
- The Alberta Healthier Together toolkit¹² and the Hamilton Public Health Services Toolkit for Policy Development¹³ describes how to build a physical activity policy.
- The Alberta Health Services Healthier Together web page¹⁴ includes tips for “quick wins,” a physical activity strategy kit, and ideas for initiatives that are accessible to small and large organizations.

Laying the Groundwork

One key finding from our work is the importance of changing the environmental context to make healthy choices easier. You can make positive changes through employee awareness and education by delivering messages about the importance and simplicity of moving more and providing prompts to move throughout the day if your workplace is typically sedentary by nature. If your workplace is active by nature, educating employees about healthy postures may be relevant.

As an employer, you can provide organizational support by, for example, providing sit-to-stand desks and improving stairwell access to encourage stair climbing, or supporting employees to be active and fit with flexible hours to fit in physical activity or exercise. In this way, you will make it accessible, acceptable and expected for workers to change their work position regularly and to take active breaks. Evidence tells us that the biggest bang for your buck is through helping employees get out of the sedentary category, both at work and outside of work.

Recent literature promotes an integrated health approach, which brings together the domains of occupational health and safety and employee wellness. This approach builds on the importance of your organizational culture and norms. The key facilitators to this approach are leadership buy-in and a balanced plan that addresses the needs of both employees and employers. Managers must embed physical activity initiatives into the workplace culture and strategic direction of an organization through organizational support, policies and programs, employee awareness and education, and leading by example.^{8,13}

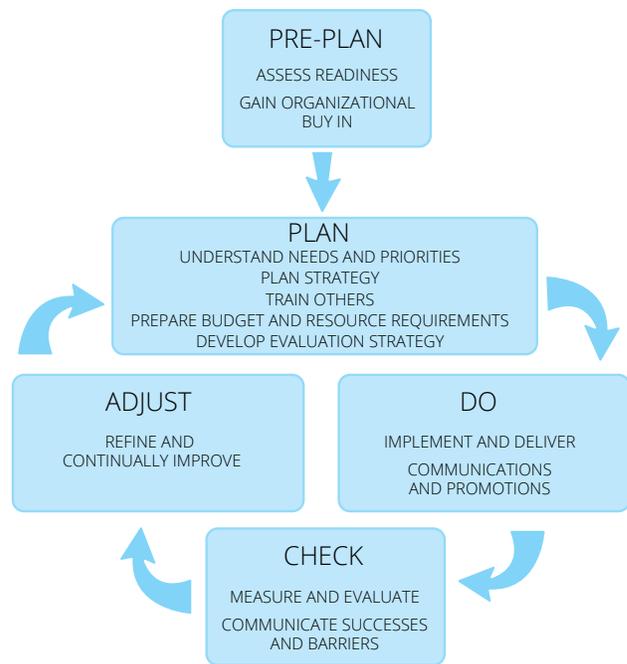
Within these plans for Nova Scotia workplaces, there is an opportunity to:

- facilitate the development of workplace cultures that encourage physical activity
- enhance uptake of nearby physical environments and increase availability of onsite physical environment supports
- promote use of existing tools and resources to overcome organizational barriers

A Step-by-Step Framework to Follow

Our recommendations flow from the following framework developed by Avi Biswas at the Institute for Work & Health (2020): “Developing practical recommendations for integrating workplace safety and wellness initiatives.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FRAMEWORK



From Biswas, 2020; Institute For Work & Health
Developing practical recommendations for integrating
workplace safety and wellness initiatives

Recommendations for Nova Scotia organizations to Move More at Work

Pre-plan

Assess your individual situation. What are your organization’s needs, priorities, gaps, barriers and opportunities? Our Assessment Tools can help with this. Your overall assessment should also emphasize employee needs and context to ensure your employees are engaged with any interventions you are planning.

Plan the strategy

Best practices encourage a culture of movement supported by comprehensive and integrated plans. Therefore, before initiating any interventions, you will need

to develop physical activity policies that integrate with your organization's strategic priorities, including occupational health and safety. Your physical activity policy becomes your foundation for action. When your organization has a solid physical activity policy, you won't quit when an individual intervention doesn't work. Rather, you can return to the policy and choose a new intervention. Our Best Moves Guide can help you take the first steps in developing organizational policies to support movement in your workplace.

The key to success is to lead by example and create a positive culture for employees to follow. This helps pave the way to make it acceptable and expected that your employees will move more. Integrated within this plan is the need to train others, prepare budget and resource requirements, and develop an evaluation strategy. Our Best Moves Guide can help you here as well.

Do

Communicate, promote and engage. This is where you'll ensure that your employees are aware of opportunities for greater engagement in the integrated health process and in the programs and plans that consider their individual needs. Here, physical activity can be promoted as a primary contributor to employee health, quality of life, and presenteeism as well as to reducing absenteeism and risks for workplace injury and disability. Engaging your employees in identifying the personal and organizational benefits of being more active can help you build a positive culture of health through movement, especially when combined with approaches to reduce stress, improve eating, and reduce risk for injuries at work.

To provide this tie-in, you need a communications strategy that encourages movement as an easy first step toward better health and highlights the information, resources, and supports that are already available. For example, resources or messaging can encourage the use of amenities that already exist (such as stairwells, hallways, and walking paths) as opportunities for non-traditional physical activity

“snacks.” Evidence supports that the most cost-effective workplace interventions are ones that help the least active become more active. Resources and messaging can promote small amounts of physical activity or exercise as beneficial; even 2 minutes of physical activity done 5 times a day improves mood, productivity, and health.

Regardless of the approach or specific actions you choose to take, your plans should all integrate back to your organization's strategic priority to promote an active culture for the health and wellbeing of employees and your organization. For example, providing education and/or training and workshops can improve employee awareness. They can also be opportunities to address workplace culture and facilitate engagement and buy-in to the plan by the whole organization – especially when attended by both leadership and employees. Any actions you take to support more physical activity and less sedentary behaviour should be part of your long-term vision to sustain an active workplace.

Check and Adjust

Evaluate the process and celebrate the results! Our Make Your Move Assessment Tools or the CAL AWA tools are designed to give you baseline and follow-up measurements of existing physical activity and sedentary behaviour supports in your workplace, along with areas for improvement. In addition, before you implement a physical activity policy or program, we recommend you collect baseline data of employee and manager physical activity and sedentary behaviour. Once your policy or program is in place, it is important to again measure employee and manager participation and the objective outcomes of their physical activity and health. These evaluation results will provide evidence for the business case, support employee progress, and boost morale.

Physically active employees are happier, healthier and more engaged. Your support, with the help of this toolkit, is a positive investment in their health and the health of your organization. *Let's get moving!*

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Much of the data used in this Toolkit can be found in the full *Physical Activity in the Workplace Final Report*. This project is directed by **Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia**, the provincial government's plan for encouraging Nova Scotians to move more.