

Programming Tips for Rural, Remote and Indigenous Communities

Finding ways to maintain and improve health is more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. And while physical activity can prevent disease¹, enhance mental health², and reduce the risk of upper respiratory tract infections by up to 50%³, less than 1 in 5 Canadian adults are currently meeting Canada's physical activity guidelines⁴.

On top of the stress, restrictions, and closures associated with COVID-19, promoting physical activity in rural, remote and Indigenous communities is challenging for several reasons. Common barriers to physical activity include limited access to recreational facilities, lack of sidewalks, uneven road surfaces, wildlife, and inclement weather⁵. Physical activity may also be viewed as something that is “nice to do” — rather than a “need to do” — for health and wellbeing⁶.

Accordingly, programs, policies and other initiatives aimed to increase physical activity in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities need to address these challenges. Research suggests the following strategies can help:

CULTIVATE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AND A SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK⁷

- ▶ Encourage regular check-ins, such as a phone or video call, between staff and program participants. Regular check-ins with a familiar person provide participants with a source of social support and encourages accountability to the program.
- ▶ Offer group-based activities (e.g. a fitness class or a walk/run club) and social events (e.g. post-activity coffee or potluck dinner) — following the guidance of public health officials — to help participants develop and maintain relationships. When a person has a social support network of four or more people outside the home, they are more likely to be active.

CREATE SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY⁸

- ▶ Identify and address safety concerns that prevent physical activity. For example, install fences around outdoor physical activity spaces (e.g. sports field, walking track) to keep out animals such as bears or stray dogs.
- ▶ Ensure community members have access to recreation facilities by considering costs, location/transportation, the nature of programming, and the inclusiveness of the environment.

COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE CULTURAL RELEVANCE⁹

- ▶ Engage Indigenous leadership in the design and delivery of physical activity programs for Indigenous groups.
- ▶ Incorporate Indigenous cultural values, beliefs, and practices — including traditional activities and customs like smudging, berry picking, or hunting — into Indigenous physical activity initiatives.
- ▶ Consult with local individuals and groups to tailor the program to community needs and preferences. For example, at-home physical activity kits could be distributed in a community that does not have access to recreational facilities.



Canada's Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) unites and empowers the sport community through credible knowledge and world-class expertise.

For more information: visit sirc.ca, sign up to receive our daily newsletter — the Canadian Sport Daily, or follow us on social media.



1 Warburton, D. E., Charlesworth, S., Ivey, A., Nettlefold, L., & Bredin, S. S. (2010).

2 Rebar, A. L., Stanton, R., Geard, D., Short, C., Duncan, M. J., & Vandelanotte, C. (2015); Wiese, C. W., Kuykendall, L., & Tay, L. (2018).

3 Strasner, A., Barlow, C. E., Kampert, J. B., & Dunn, A. L. (2001).

4 Clarke, J., Colley, R., Janssen, I., & Tremblay, M. S. (2019).

5 Kirby, A. M., Lévesque, L., Wabano, V., & Robertson-Wilson, J. (2007); Macniven, R., Richards, J., Gubhaju, L., Joshy, G., Bauman, A., Banks, E., & Eades, S. (2016); Pelletier, C. A., Smith-Forrester, J., & Klassen-Ross, T. (2017).

6 Barnidge, E. K., Radvanyi, C., Duggan, K., Motton, F., Wiggs, I., Baker, E. A., & Brownson, R. C. (2013).

7 Cai, Y., & Richards, E. A. (2016); Moore, M., Warburton, J., O'Halloran, P. D., & Shields, N. (2016).

8 Barnidge, E. K., Radvanyi, C., Duggan, K., Motton, F., Wiggs, I., Baker, E. A., & Brownson, R. C. (2013); Kirby, A. M., Lévesque, L., Wabano, V., & Robertson-Wilson, J. (2007); Macniven, R., Richards, J., Gubhaju, L., Joshy, G., Bauman, A., Banks, E., & Eades, S. (2016).

9 Sushames, A., van Uffelen, J. G., & Gebel, K. (2016); Teufel-Shone, N. I., Fitzgerald, C., Teufel-Shone, L., & Gamber, M. (2009); Pelletier, C. A., Smith-Forrester, J., & Klassen-Ross, T. (2017).