

# mothers *in* motion

## Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes

Women in the 19–50 year-old age group make up almost one-half of the population of women in Canada. These women are coping with the competing demands of motherhood, childcare responsibilities and work outside the home.

A growing body of evidence indicates that socioeconomic status (SES) (e.g. income, education, occupation, family structure and social support) is a strong predictor of health, including overweight and obesity.

Low socioeconomic status (not just low-income) mothers and their families are disadvantaged with respect to accessibility of physical activity opportunities.

**LSES mothers identified many different barriers and issues that kept them from being physically active:**

Barriers to Participating in Physical Activity and Recreational Sport	
Internal Issues	External Issues
Fatigue	Built environment
Guilt	Costs
Culture	Climate
Racism/Discrimination	Subsidies
Bodyweight/image	Marketing
Skill level	Transportation
Priority	

Impacting Issues for Being Physically Active	
Personal Level	Community Level
Life transitions	Lack of childcare
Family influence	Isolation
Spousal support	
Health issues	

Supporting Issues for Being Physically Active	
Interpersonal	Organizational
Champions	Family
Friends	Partnerships
Spousal support	Professional support

*"When I say my band, nobody asks me what instrument I play."*  
- Aboriginal mother, Halifax

*"Some of us don't know how to swim, so we let the kids go in the pool and then watch while they're swimming."*  
- Multicultural mother, Ottawa

*"Sometimes we need help. I need some time for me, at least thirty minutes. I want to do something for me."*  
- Immigrant mother, Calgary

# The A<sup>4</sup> Approach

## Assessment to ensure Accessibility, Availability, and Affordability for successful program planning and delivery

*“We need, as professionals, to find ways not only to promote the benefits of physical activity but to offer programs that benefit the women in terms of affordability and accessibility.”*

- Public health nurse, Ottawa

<p><b>Assessment</b> [of mothers, staff &amp; community partners]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess current knowledge of physical activity promoters and providers to ensure up-to-date knowledge of health vs. fitness benefits of physical activities. Refer to <a href="http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html">http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html</a></li> <li>• Involve mothers by assessing their physical activity levels, beliefs, behaviours, barriers, and types of desired activities and sport.</li> <li>• Collaborate and/or partner with other groups/organizations for sharing of space, sporting equipment, instructors, and childcare opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accessibility</b> [of outdoor &amp; indoor facilities]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal access, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or culture.</li> <li>• Facility/program space or venue should be located on public transport route(s).</li> <li>• Well-lit safe walking route(s) all year round.</li> <li>• Safe, well-lit bike racks and parking for cars.</li> <li>• Mother-friendly facilities (e.g. parking close to doors, ramps for strollers, wide doors to accommodate strollers, playpen in change room, change stations, breastfeeding area, play area for toddlers).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Availability</b> [of programs &amp; services]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women-only programs and traditional physical activities, such as traditional dance and culturally appropriate games and/or sports.</li> <li>• Early morning and evening programs WITH childcare for working mothers.</li> <li>• Mother-friendly sport programs &amp; recreational opportunities (e.g. learn to run, learn to play soccer, etc.) at same times as children’s programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Affordability</b> [of programs &amp; services]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combined costs of physical recreation/fitness programs, equipment, childcare and transportation that TOGETHER are affordable.</li> <li>• Volunteer opportunities for mothers to subsidize program costs (e.g. childcare support, resource translation, etc.)</li> </ul>

Refer to the Accessibility, Availability, and Affordability checklists to successfully plan physical activity programs for LSES mothers in your community.

# Physical Activity Beliefs and Behaviours of Low Socioeconomic Status (LSES) Mothers

It is well known that a sedentary lifestyle plays a significant role in the health of Canadian women, in particular, the risks of overweight and obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. A sedentary lifestyle is a health concern in the low socioeconomic status (LSES) population of Canadian women, and in particular mothers, yet there is a paucity of research on physical activity levels, beliefs and behaviours of this population. To help further understand and address this issue, CAAWS used a women-specific Physical Activity Survey Tool to assess the physical activity levels of LSES mothers.

## What We Heard

### *Meaning of physical activity and exercise*

- The themes of physical movement and overall health emerged as the key meanings.
- The mothers categorized some physical activities as activities they had no choice but to do. They also indicated that they had a degree of control over the energy expenditure of some of these activities.
- LSES mothers also deemed physical activity and exercise important for weight loss and for dealing with disease and/or chronic conditions.
- The “feeling good” and social aspects of being active in sport and other physical activities as well as the opportunity to have time for oneself, to be healthy and feel good, were important to mothers.

*“...physical activity includes activity that is part of our daily life. Activity around the household — mopping the floor, cleaning, cooking, washing, looking after the baby, feeding her, changing diapers, pushing the stroller, walking, washing, lifting.”*  
- Immigrant mother, Calgary

*“I don’t watch what I eat but I like to go out there and do exercise to lose the weight.”*  
- Immigrant mother, Ottawa

### *Trends in physical activity throughout their lives*

- Walking emerged as the predominant contributor to physical activity levels in many of the mothers.
- Participation in sport and exercise was highest throughout the school years, particularly in high school.
- Life changes linked to transition into motherhood impacted the level and type of habitual physical activities. Motherhood meant that childcare and family responsibilities took priority.
- Household chores and childcare were ranked as contributors to their daily physical activity levels throughout their adult years.
- LSES mothers who worked outside the home had consistently higher levels of physical activity levels than those mothers who were not employed, primarily due to additional occupational physical activities.

*“I need the socialization. When we do things here, we play baseball, we go swimming, we do all this stuff for my sense of fun and play and competitiveness.”*  
- Aboriginal mother, Halifax

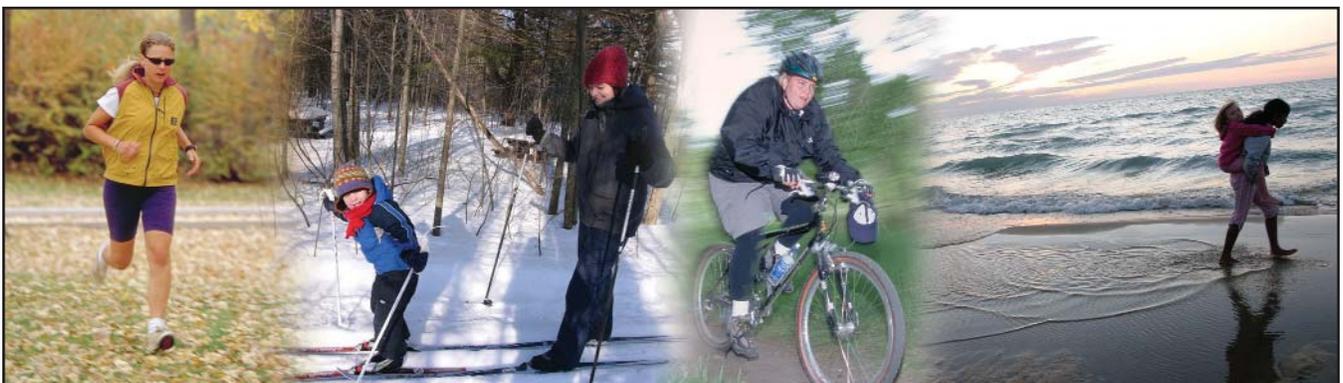
*“When I was school age or teenager, I never thought about losing weight. When I got pregnant, I gained lots of weight. Now I think ‘oh my god how can I lose the weight?’ That’s the thing working all the time in my mind. So I do physical activity more, like walking.”*  
- Immigrant mother, Calgary

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## Equal Opportunities, Equal Outcomes

- Provide affordable childcare.
- Re-introduce traditional activities, such as dances & games.
- Offer culturally appropriate, women-only physical activities.
- Offer sport programs for women only – learn to play a sport and/or improve your sport skills.
- Offer free or low-cost programs for those women who are in financial need (e.g. subsidies).
- Organize neighborhood-based physical activity programs to minimize travel and associated travel costs.
- Use education and awareness to encourage mothers' participation in physical activities and recreational sport.
- Promote available activities in the community with translation of materials into the languages prevalent in your community.
- Develop family-based activities to ensure that childcare is not a barrier.
- Organize spousal support groups to educate men about the importance of physical activity and recreation for women's health.
- Offer women-only physical activity programs at times that fit into working as well as non-working mothers' schedules.

**SOLUTIONS**



## About the Project

Women in low socioeconomic status (LSES) circumstances are more likely to report that there is not enough information provided about local opportunities for physical activities and sport and/or they lack awareness on how to go about building physical activities in their lives. Many barriers, including *financial* (e.g. childcare, transportation, program costs), *social* (lack of flexible programming), *language and cultural* (lack of awareness, lack of social and family support systems), impact upon the physical activity habits of LSES mothers and ultimately, their families. A new initiative focusing on increasing physical activity and sport opportunities for LSES mothers was developed with these objectives:

- to identify barriers and antecedents that prevent and limit participation;
- to identify solutions and best practices for increasing physical activity;
- to develop physical activity program development resources for multi-sectoral practitioners; and
- to increase community capacity for physical activity and sport opportunities.

Over a two-month period, CAAWS conducted a series of cross-Canada focus groups to: hear from LSES mothers and physical activity promoters about their physical activity challenges and solutions; and to assess physical activity levels of LSES mothers using a women-specific Physical Activity Survey Tool. CAAWS has developed physical activity tools to assist physical activity promoters better address specific community issues and barriers with respect to accessibility, availability and affordability of physical activity opportunities for LSES mothers.

To download all tools and resources, including a video conference discussing the project findings and learnings done in partnership with the Alberta Centre for Active Living, please visit: [http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/home\\_e.html](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/home_e.html).

## Acknowledgements

CAAWS would like to thank all the women from across Canada who participated in the Focus Group sessions. We were honored that everyone took the time to share their experiences and perspectives on physical activity so openly with us. CAAWS also wishes to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the partners involved on the Advisory Committee, including: Canadian Institute of Child Health, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, Canadian Public Health Association, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Native Council of Nova Scotia, Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health (Ontario) and Sandy Hill Community Health Centre (Ontario). Funding for this project is provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada, through the Population Health Fund.

## About CAAWS

As a leader in Canadian sport and physical activity, CAAWS fosters quality experiences and equitable support for girls and women. It has a vision to see a sport and physical activity system where girls and women are actively engaged.

A not-for-profit organization, CAAWS offers a number of services, programs and resources to a variety of clients, including sport and physical activity organizations, teachers, coaches, health professionals and recreation leaders. CAAWS works in close co-operation with government and non-government organizations on activities and initiatives that advocate for positive change for young girls and women in the sport and physical activity communities. Visit [www.caaws.ca](http://www.caaws.ca) for more information.



**Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity**

N202-801 King Edward Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5667 • Fax: (613) 562-5668 • [www.caaws.ca](http://www.caaws.ca)



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