



2025 ADULT REPORT CARD SPOTLIGHT: SUPPORTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG ADULTS IN CANADA WITH DISABILITIES

Canada is home to eight million people aged 15 years and older with a disability.¹ The [2025 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults](#) revealed that **adults (18 years and older) with a disability are substantially less active across nearly every daily behaviour**, from moderate-to-vigorous physical activity to muscle strengthening and sport participation. Yet, motivation to be active remained relatively high among this population, with 74% of adults reporting having a disability saying they want to be active, compared to 81% of adults without a disability. **These findings demonstrate that participation gaps exist despite relatively small differences in motivation.**

A new national report by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and Active Abilities Canada, [Access, Participation, and Opportunity: A National Status Report on Physical Activity and Sport for Persons with Disabilities](#), found that **adults in Canada who report having a disability(ies) accumulate an average of 113 minutes per week of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity**, compared to 168 minutes per week among adults who do not report having disabilities.² This gap also extends to sport: only 21% of adults with a disability participated in sport in the past year, compared to 30% of adults without a disability.² The report also provides important context for understanding these participation gaps, finding that adults with disabilities are more likely to perceive local sport, physical activity and recreation opportunities as unaffordable, inaccessible and unwelcoming.² Yet among adults who do participate in sport, individuals with a disability are more likely to compete, train and work with a coach than adults without a disability. This is a powerful signal that when access exists, commitment follows.²

Together these reports **suggest that participation gaps may be driven less by motivation and more by accessibility barriers**. Equitable access to physical activity for adults is critical to building healthy, vibrant and connected communities, and it's possible to achieve through sustained, coordinated actions across governments, sport organizations, municipalities and communities that extend beyond accessibility to address the social determinants of health driving inequities in physical activity participation.

Most importantly, these efforts should be guided by the leadership and lived experience of people with disabilities, whose perspectives should shape the policies, programs and environments intended to support participation.

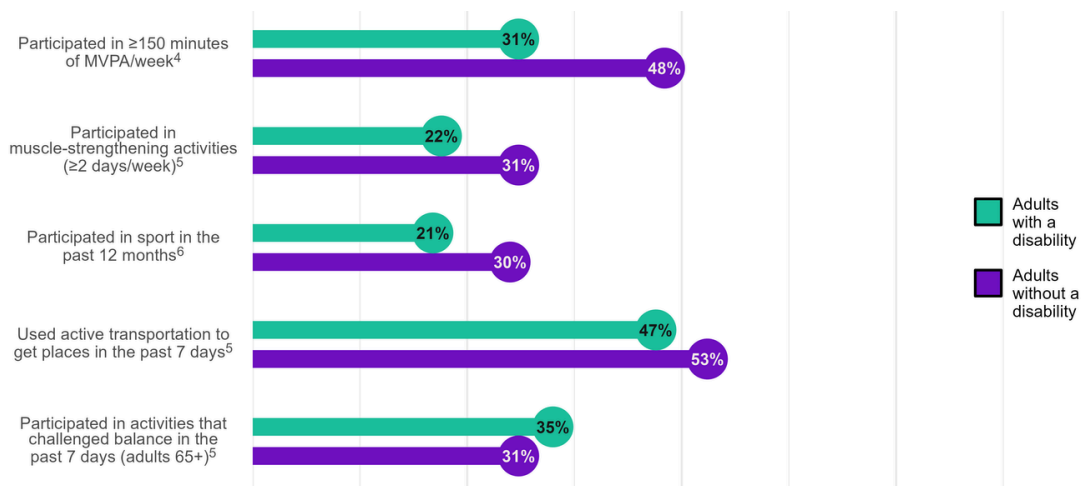
KEY REPORT CARD FINDINGS FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

Disability encompasses a broad range of physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual and mental health conditions and experiences. The national surveillance survey cycles used in the Report Card did not permit disaggregation by disability type or severity, meaning that important differences in movement experiences across disability groups cannot currently be examined. As a result, some disability experiences may not be fully represented in the available evidence.

DAILY BEHAVIOURS

Movement opportunities extend beyond structured exercise. While the [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults](#) were not specifically developed for adults with disabilities, and recent guidance from the American College of Sports Medicine emphasizes that physical activity recommendations should be individualized and disability-informed,³ movement remains important for health and well-being. The activity gap for adults with disabilities spans multiple forms of movement (Figure 1); however, the gap narrows considerably for active transportation and for older adults with disabilities who are doing as much (if not slightly more) balance-challenging activity as their peers. These findings suggest that everyday, accessible forms of movement may be a practical and effective entry point for building broader physical activity habits.

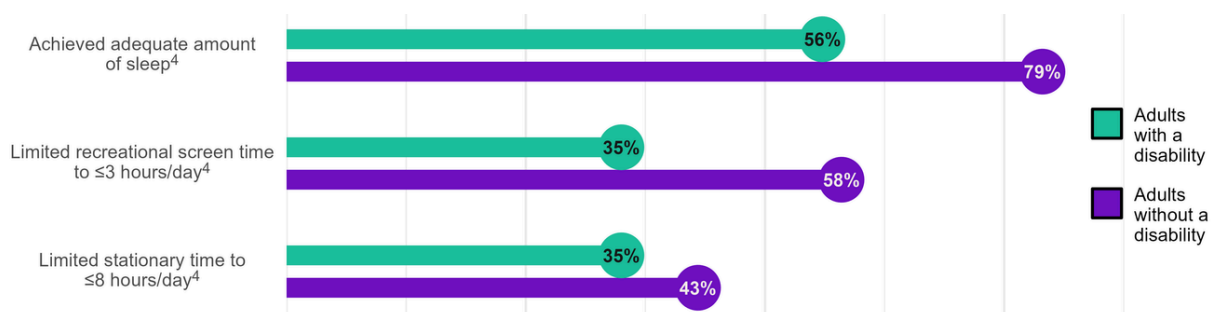
Figure 1. Participation rates in physical activity indicators among people with or without a disability





Sleep and screen time are important too. Differences between adults with and without disabilities extend beyond physical activity to sedentary behaviours, including screen and stationary time, and sleep (Figure 2). These patterns may be shaped by interconnected factors such as chronic pain, fatigue and mental health conditions.

Figure 2. Participation rates in sleep, screen and stationary behaviours among people with or without a disability



INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Ability and opportunity stand between motivation and movement. Among adults who reported having a disability, 49% agreed that they have the physical ability to be physically active, compared with 80% of adults who did not report having a disability. Similarly, 60% reported having the physical opportunity to be active, compared with 77% of adults who did not report having a disability.⁵ The difference in motivation was much smaller: 74% of adults who reported having a disability said they want to be physically active, compared with 81% of adults who did not report having a disability (Figure 3).⁵

Figure 3. Self-reported physical ability, physical opportunity and motivation among people with or without a disability



SPACES, PLACES & CULTURAL NORMS

Sport organizations are starting to build in intentional inclusion. With 44% of sport organizations in Canada already offering programming targeted at specific populations, including people with disabilities,⁷ there's a solid foundation to build on. **But inclusive programming is only part of the equation.** Closing participation gaps also requires accessible facilities and spaces, welcoming environments, inclusive communication and staff equipped to support people with disabilities.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Increasing physical activity participation among adults with disabilities requires coordinated, cross-sector action, grounded in the principle of “nothing about us without us”. Adults with disabilities should be actively involved in shaping, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the policies, infrastructure and programs that affect them.

- Communities and municipalities must ensure facilities and active spaces are welcoming, safe and accessible to all. Allocating resources enables and prioritizes inclusive design and operations, such as accessible entrances, spaces, paths, adequate lighting and clear signage. Creating a respectful and comfortable atmosphere encourages more frequent and confident use of active spaces.
- Physical activity and public health sector organizations, when developing and promoting movement campaigns, must reflect the diversity of disability experiences and acknowledge the different needs, abilities and lived experiences of people with disabilities.
- Physical activity sector organizations must develop and implement training standards for physical activity, sport and recreation instructors working with adults with disabilities that address support strategies for varied disability types, required accommodation needs, inclusive programming approaches and fostering a welcoming environment. Programs must also explicitly welcome caregivers and support workers at no additional cost.⁸
- Sport, physical activity and recreation providers must design and plan sport and physical activity programs around community needs, including accessible and reliable transportation (e.g., factoring in bus schedules, ensuring participants with disabilities can bring adapted equipment on transit), resistance-training options tailored to different populations and programming formats that reflect the lived realities of people with disabilities.⁸
- Government research agencies must strengthen national surveillance and research to better understand the prevalence of and contributors to physical activity participation across diverse disability types, intersecting identities (e.g., gender, age, income) and domains of life, leveraging these data to identify where targeted interventions are most needed and to track progress toward more equitable participation over time.



A photograph of three men in wheelchairs on a basketball court. The man on the left is wearing a grey t-shirt and black pants, with his arms raised behind his head. The man in the middle is wearing an orange jersey and black pants, with his arms extended forward. The man on the right is wearing an orange jersey and black pants, with his arms extended forward. They are all looking towards the right. The background shows orange stadium seats and a basketball hoop.

Spotlight on the Municipal Guide for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity:

Active Abilities Canada and the Canadian Disability Participation Project 2.0 have developed research-based areas of practice for disability inclusion in municipal recreation in the areas of workplace culture, staff training, built environment, programming, communication, partnerships, persuading decision-makers and evaluation. Known as the **Municipal Guide for Disability Inclusion in Recreation and Physical Activity**, this resource provides ‘how-to’ strategies for staff at all levels in municipal recreation departments to ensure that people with disabilities have more opportunities to participate in physical activity and recreation. For more information and access to best practices, visit <https://activeabilities.ca/municipal-guide/>.



REFERENCES

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3. Ptomey, L., Morgan, K. A., Blauwet, C. A., Boudreaux, B. D., Fernhall, B., Hauck, J., Legg, D., Tow, S., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2025). ACSM Expert Consensus Statement: Considerations and Recommendations for Prescribing Exercise and Designing Physical Activity Programs for People with Disabilities. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 57(11), 2588–2598.
4. Statistics Canada. (2024). 2022-2024 Canadian Health Measures Survey, Cycle 7. Custom analysis.
5. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2025). Physical Activity Survey. Custom analysis.
6. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2024). Physical Activity and Sport Survey. Custom analysis.
7. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. (2020–21). Sport Organization Survey. Custom analysis.
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Want to learn more?

Together, we can help adults in Canada who experience disabilities make room to move! Visit the links below to access the full evidence behind these key findings and recommendations:

- [**2025 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Adults**](#) – The full Report Card provides a comprehensive assessment of physical activity behaviours among adults in Canada, including detailed data, methods and additional findings for persons with disabilities.
- [**Access, Participation, and Opportunity: A National Status Report on Physical Activity and Sport for Persons with Disabilities**](#) – This national report by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and Active Abilities Canada examines sport, physical activity, and recreation participation among persons with disabilities in Canada, including data on activity minutes, sport participation, perceptions of opportunity, and equity gaps by gender, age, and income.

If you would like to share feedback on our recommendations and/or have additional ideas, please email us at info@participation.com.