

## About the Author

**Don Buchanan** has been the Communications and Marketing Coordinator at the Alberta Centre for Active Living since late 2009. He carries out a range of communications, media relations and writing/editing duties, including compilation of the monthly Active Living E-News, and co-editing of WellSpring and Research Update.

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## Alberta Centre for Active Living Celebrates 25 Years of Promoting Physical Activity

Don Buchanan, BA, Communications and Marketing Coordinator, Alberta Centre for Active Living

In 2014, the Alberta Centre for Active Living (the Centre) is celebrating 25 years as a leading advocate for the promotion of physical activity, in Alberta, Canada and beyond.

"By plan, there is no other Centre like ours in the province, and the Alberta government continues to be well-invested in supporting the Centre and the achievement of its mission and goals," states Dr. Kerry Mummery, Chair of the Centre's Executive Management Group and Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (U of A).

Mummery has fond memories of his time in research positions at the Centre in the mid-1990s, before moving to Australia for 14 years. He came back to Canada in 2010 to take up his current position as Dean. "The Centre has really come into its own, especially over the last 10 to 15 years, and has earned its standing as a preeminent physical activity research centre," suggests Mummery.

Judith Down, the Centre's Director since 2000, notes that stable funding has helped the Centre to succeed provincially, and to develop a strong presence nationally and internationally. "Achieving this presence is partly due to our ongoing focus on building strong relationships with active living organizations, practitioner groups, researchers, communities, and many other networks," states Down.



At the Centre's 25th Anniversary event in Edmonton, Centre Director, Judith Down, is joined by Dr. Art Quinney (left) and Alfred Nikolai (right). When the Centre was founded in 1989, both Art (from the U of A) and Alfred (from Alberta Recreation and Parks) played pivotal roles.

*The Alberta Centre for Active Living is a highly professional organization providing incredible service to the people and organizations of Alberta, and right across the country. At ParticipACTION, we are very proud of our partnership with the Centre.*

— Kelly D. Murumets,  
President & CEO,  
ParticipACTION

She adds, “The Centre has developed a strong following among practitioners, policy- and decision-makers, researchers and active living groups, whose work is critical to increasing physical activity and decreasing sedentary behaviour. I am proud of our reputation for excellent service and products.”

## Looking Back

Dr. Dru Marshall, Chair of the Centre’s Executive Management Group from 2001 — 2011, and now Provost at the University of Calgary, suggests one main reason for the Centre’s longevity has been mutual support between the Centre and physical activity researchers who have national and international profiles.

As one of the Centre’s first research associates from 1990 to 1993, Marshall was on hand during the “early days” of the Centre. “From the outset, the Centre’s operational model was a brilliant, unique collaboration between the Alberta Government and the U of A, which is a credit to many people involved at the time, especially Art Quinney and Gerry Glassford from the U of A’s Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, and Steve West, who was Minister of Recreation and Parks.”

As a long-serving Director, Down suggests that the collaborative model involving university and government has truly stood the test of time. “The Centre would not exist today without the generous, ongoing funding from Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, nor without being part of the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation.”

## Building Linkages

Starting in 2001, important steps were taken to ensure the Centre’s Advisory Board and Research Advisory Committee included representatives from various regions of Alberta, recalls Marshall.

“There have been numerous outstanding individuals, including practitioners and researchers who have contributed to the Centre’s success by participating on these committees,” notes Marshall.

*The Centre has contributed immensely to the advancement, translation and dissemination of key information related to the promotion of healthy active living, not only in Alberta, but in Canada and around the world. Furthermore, with visionary leadership ... the Centre has evolved significantly over its time in operation, always anticipating the priorities of the active living field.*

— Dr. Mark Tremblay, Director, Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research, Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, Ontario, Canada

"There is no question that opening up these committees helped to build connections with and among universities and organizations across Alberta," states Dr. John Spence, Associate Dean, Research, at the U of A's Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. Spence, too, has been a long-time supporter, having been employed as a research associate at the Centre in the late 1990s, then serving on the Research Advisory Committee as a Faculty member.

Down notes that in 2004, the Centre started inviting 9 to 10 physical activity researchers with international reputations to become Research Affiliates of the Centre, for a renewable three-year term. "Our research affiliates are located in Canada and around the world. Their research programs are in line with the Centre's three research priority areas. We are very honoured to be able to have their advice and support."



Judith Down receives a congratulatory message from City Councillor, Bev Esslinger, on behalf of the City of Edmonton, in acknowledgement of the Centre's 25th Anniversary in 2014.

## Bridging From Research to Practice

Spence offers that in today's "information age" it's a big challenge for Alberta practitioners to keep up-to-date with best practices and all the "rapidly accumulating data and findings tied to physical activity or health promotion."

He states, "That's part of why the Centre needs to continue as a credible knowledge broker, not just passing information along but also interpreting and translating it into useful forms for practitioners and other audiences."

"Researchers in physical activity, or any other field, can no longer remain in their ivory towers," offers Mummery. "They need to show somehow that their research has meaning or implications in the real world."

Marshall suggests that researchers today not only have a responsibility to publish in academic journals but also to ensure that the research is available to the public. "This is particularly true if the research is supported by public funds."

## Looking Ahead

Down notes that the Centre made a strategic decision in 2012 to dedicate a full-time position to knowledge mobilization, as part of the Centre's positioning for the future. She adds, "Our new website launched in early March showcases the knowledge mobilization products we have developed and our services that support researchers, including knowledge translation consulting and brokering to assist in the mobilization of their work."

*The Centre fills an important gap between researchers and the public. The distillation of complex scientific evidence into manageable public health messages is a valued asset that the Centre brings to the table.*

— Dr. Peter Katzmarzyk,  
Associate Executive Director, Population Science, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

The Centre will continue its long-time focus on developing and disseminating resources for practitioners, notes Down. “One good example is our collaborative work with a group of exercise physiologists that resulted in the creation of our popular, plain language Physical Activity Counselling Toolkit, which is available in six languages.”

Mummery considers that the future is bright for the Centre, but with plenty of work still to do. He also anticipates that “a 50th anniversary is a likelihood” so long as the Centre continues to change with the times.

“I see the Centre having a strong future in translating and mobilizing knowledge that is being published by researchers here in Alberta, and worldwide,” states Mummery. “By helping to interpret and disseminate the knowledge, this in turn supports the uptake and adoption of best practices and clear, updated policies related to physical activity.” 

**Disclaimer:**

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Alberta Centre for Active Living or the WellSpring Advisory Committee.

## ***Congratulations on 25 Years of Physical Activity Research and Advocacy***

***Honourable Dave Rodney, Associate Minister of Wellness***

Congratulations on achieving an incredible milestone—twenty-five years! I am happy to say that the Alberta Centre for Active Living has been a leading advocate for physical activity, and health and wellness; and is well known for providing easy access to credible information on active living.

The Centre’s plan for a healthy Alberta seamlessly aligns with the Government of Alberta’s Strategic Approach to Wellness: *Health for All... Wellness for Life*, a framework that promotes community action and better environments that support healthy choices in physical activity, diet and wellness for all Albertans.

I congratulate the Centre for being invaluable in bringing together its many partners to work on a number of important projects, such as the online guide *Physical Activity @ Work*; videos promoting stretching and yoga at your desk; a physical activity counselling toolkit available in multiple languages; and an annual physical activity forum – featuring internationally renowned researchers. Congratulations, too, for many years of leading the Alberta Active Living Partners network in collaborative planning and action.

Alberta Health has been a long-standing supporter and contributor to the Centre. We recognize all of the positive changes for a healthy Alberta that the Centre has had influence on over the past 25 years, and we will continue to be a proud supporter of that commitment. Active living is a prevention strategy in provincial policies and in community networks, health associations’ plans, and Albertans’ goals.

Judith Down, Director of the Centre, has been instrumental in the Centre’s accomplishments and successes for the last 14 years. I acknowledge and thank Judith for her passion and leadership that has considerably influenced a number of programs and initiatives many Albertans enjoy today. Enjoy your retirement!



Honourable Dave Rodney (BA, BEd, MRE), MLA Calgary-Lougheed, has been a wellness champion during his three Legislative terms—during which he has served on over 2 dozen committees. He is an entrepreneur, filmmaker, writer, keynote speaker, educator, and is the first Canadian to summit Mt. Everest two times. He founded the “Top of the World Society for Children” with his wife Jennifer; and they have two wonderful sons.