The Active Workplace Audit Toolkit:
A new resource to help workplaces move more and sit less

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Introduction

Physical activity and sedentary behaviour are recognized as two separate and distinct health behaviours. Physical activity is any movement with a substantial increase in resting energy expenditure that lasts 10 minutes or longer. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults engage in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week, however only 16.4% or approximately 3 out of 20 Canadians adults get enough physical activity to meet this recommendation. At the same time, Canadians spend an average of 9.6 hours of their waking day in sedentary behaviours.

Physical inactivity and excessive sedentary behaviour increase the risk of developing chronic disease conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, some forms of cancer, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression and anxiety, osteoporosis, and premature death. Since many Canadians spend half of their day in the workplace, often office-based, it provides an ideal setting to implement interventions that support increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour time. Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Centre for Active Living (CAL) worked in partnership with support from health, wellness, and workplace professionals to develop an evidence-informed toolkit. This toolkit is aimed to support workplace champions, human resource professionals, and health and wellness promoters in the identification of how to support office-based employees to move more and sit less throughout the work day.

Developing the Active Workplace Audit Toolkit

The Active Workplace Audit (AWA) Toolkit builds on the Increasing Physical Activity and Decreasing Sedentary Behaviour in the Workplace Systematic Review, developed by CAL in 2015 and the Workplace Physical Activity Framework, developed by CAL in 2003. To our knowledge, this is the first time both physical activity and sedentary behaviour are assessed separately within one workplace toolkit in Canada.
Workplaces are ideal settings to support moving more and sitting less throughout the day.

Phase 1: Environmental scan and audit tool development

A scoping review was conducted to learn if a current audit tool exists to assess factors in the office-based workplace setting that influence physical activity and sedentary behaviour, as two independent behaviours, from a social ecological lens. Additionally, the scoping review followed a systematic protocol to identify audit tools, checklists or questionnaires for office workplace settings, published between January 2007 and April 2017, and related to either physical activity and/or sedentary behaviour that could be used to inform the development of a comprehensive audit toolkit. The search and screen process identified 860 independent resources, which resulted in 23 resources (i.e., questionnaires, audit tools, checklists) meeting the inclusion criteria. Many of the resources reviewed did not include physical activity and sedentary behaviour as two distinct behaviours and did not include multiple levels of influence from the social ecological model. The Active Workplace Audit Tool was developed to fill this gap.

Core themes and sample items used in others’ resources were identified and categorized according to the health behaviour and social ecological model.

Phase 2: Audit tool development

The content from the scoping review was explored with a practitioner working group, made up of health, wellness, and workplace professionals via online meetings and surveys. Once the content of the audit tool was finalized, the working group members advised on the content layout and delivery of the toolkit, and they provided recommendations on external resources that could support the implementation of audit tool findings.

Phase 3: Audit tool pilot

The audit tool was piloted in office-based workplaces of varying sizes across Alberta to further test its application and support further refinement. For this, two champions per workplace volunteered to: i) complete the audit tool, and ii) complete a survey about the audit tool. To assess reliability of the audit tool, each pair of champions independently completed the audit tool on the same workplace setting. Survey findings provided feedback on how appropriate, practical, useful, and applicable the audit tool was for an office-based workplace. Follow-up interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis with at least one of two champions per workplace to gain better insight on the audit tool. Some revisions to the audit tool were undertaken based on the findings from this pilot.
Phase 4: Assessment of the AWA toolkit

Once the AWA toolkit was updated, an assessment was completed using an adapted version of the AGREE II tool used for health promotion practice rather than clinical guidelines. It assessed the quality of the toolkit, the methodological strategies used in the development, and reporting of the information.

The Active Workplace Audit Toolkit

The toolkit provides workplaces with guidance on who can benefit from an active workplace and who can be a champion to lead the effort, what can be done or is already being done to support an active workplace, where to start and look for support, why it’s important to support an active workplace, and understand how your workplace scores and how to make the workplace an employee’s choice. These questions can be answered by following the four sections of the toolkit, which are outlined below:

Part 1: Get started — Build the case for an active workplace

The Get Started section can help you build the case for an active workplace. This section includes information about why employees should move more and sit less, the areas of influence workplaces have on physical activity and sedentary behaviour, and the first steps to engaging a workplace in an active living initiative.

Part 2: Assess — Audit your workplace

The audit tool helps to identify physical activity and sedentary behaviour influences in your workplace. It provides workplace champions with a resource that can identify the current physical activity and sedentary behaviour supports available and areas for improvement in the workplace. It can be used in large or small office-based workplaces. Within larger organizations, the tool may be used to assess the entire organization or specific departments across the organization. It is meant to provide information about the specific workplace and is not meant to be used to compare against other workplaces or between departments. The tool can be used as:

- a baseline measure to identify ways to improve workplace active living before starting a new initiative;
- a follow-up on the progress of an initiative (i.e., pre- to post-assessment); or
- a status report on the state of physical activity and sedentary behaviour support in the workplace.
The audit tool supports assessment of five areas of influence, which include:

1. Employee awareness and education;
2. Social support;
3. Organizational support;
4. Community assets and partnerships; and
5. Policies and programs.

Part 3: Explore - Find resources for action

In this section, users can explore ways to support employees to move more and sit less based on their results. Ideas for action are provided with links to resources and tools to help your workplace act to promote physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour at work, to/from work, and outside of work.

Part 4: Go - Plan for change, maintenance, and continuous improvement

The objective of this section is to learn about how to plan and implement initiatives that are tailored to the needs and interests of your workplace. More specifically, this information will help you to plan your initiative, get others excited about the initiative, engage employees in the initiative, and learn about the successes and ways the initiative could be improved.

Practical Implications

We recognize that each workplace setting is unique and that opportunities to support increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behaviour will vary across Canada. This toolkit provides workplaces with an evidence-based resource to facilitate the conversation and process to begin supporting an active workplace. If your workplace is ready to explore a comprehensive health approach, please see the Healthier Together Workplaces website to learn about how to support other health behaviour in the workplace.

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Erin and Christina’s work at Alberta Health Services focuses on chronic disease prevention through the promotion of active living. They develop and support initiatives to help Albertans move more and sit less.

For more information about their work, contact activeliving@ahs.ca.

References


