



The Vancouver Active Communities Initiative

Health experts agree that physical inactivity is emerging as one of the largest threats to public health in the western world. The lack of physical activity has significant personal and financial costs to the individual and society. Obesity levels amongst our youth are becoming alarmingly high and have more than doubled between 1975 and 1990. A majority of adult Canadians are not active enough to benefit their health. Among the four chronic diseases that result in (two-thirds) of deaths in Canada – diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, respiratory disease – all share common preventable risk factors including physical inactivity.

Regular physical activity increases people’s energy levels and improves their ability to fully participate in work, play, social and family life. It reduces stress and promotes psychological well being. Life expectancy is also increased by as much as two years in active individuals. The benefits of increased physical activity lead to a more productive and healthier citizenry.



The City of Vancouver is leading the way in taking action to inspire, support and equip residents to become more physically active. The Vancouver Active Communities initiative is one of the key components of the “ActNow BC” provincial program aimed at

promoting healthy lifestyle choices and environments for all British Columbians. The Active Communities initiative will help raise the health and fitness of our citizens and make Vancouver one of the healthiest municipalities in the world.

The fitness goal of the Vancouver Active Communities initiative is to increase by 20% the proportion of the Vancouver population who are physically active or moderately active during their leisure time. This goal will be achieved by focusing on sedentary individuals and developing specific strategies to increase physical activity opportunities, communicating and marketing these opportunities and reducing barriers to participation.

Five priority areas and the key components, activities, timelines and responsibilities for implementing the Active Communities initiative are outlined.

- Measure and support success
- Develop new Active Communities programs
- Enhance and optimize current programs
- Network and collaborate with others
- Build an Active Communities brand



An Ipsos-Reid survey will be conducted each year to determine the current activity levels of Vancouver residents. Surveys in 2006 through 2010 confirmed that 68 to 70% of Vancouver residents are physically active for more than half an hour three or more times each week. It also identified that 30% of residents are sedentary. A wide range of programs and social marketing activities will be aimed at motivating and supporting this sedentary population to become more active.

Programs will include a “Step-Out” walking program that highlights the wide range of walking and jogging paths in the City. Special theme walks will be developed to highlight Vancouver’s art, heritage, natural beauty and history. Active Special Events such as “Move for Health Day” on May 10th, will be planned to celebrate and encourage healthy living. Fitness and Adventure Passports will be distributed to school children and seniors encouraging them to participate and record fitness activities such as swimming, skating, wall climbing and exploring the many Step Out walks.

The Active Outreach component of Active Communities will reach out to identified sedentary populations. Vancouver Native Health in partnership with the Park Board will implement the Red Fox Active Living program.. This program is aimed at increasing access to fitness opportunities for Aboriginal Families.

Elite athletes will be linked with local Active Communities' events through the "Athletes in Vancouver" program. This initiative provides community associations with grants to contract with our elite athletes to provide support and instruction for local events. These fitness activities would include jogging clinics, team sports and fitness workshops.

Current fitness programs will be highlighted and promoted to reach the sedentary populations that most need to start participating in fitness activities on a regular basis. The Park Board "Go Play" program emphasizes the benefits of the City's nine swimming pools, eight ice rinks and 24 public fitness centres.

To enable effective networking with other agencies, City Council created the Vancouver Active Communities Network (VACnet). This network will act as an advisory committee to help Council achieve the goal to "Step It Up 20%". Vancouver Whitecaps G.M., Bob Lenarduzzi, is the Honorary Chair and he works closely with the VACnet Chair, Jeff Malmgren, and a wide range of government, non-profit and private sector organizations to support and enhance the City's Active Communities programs.

The special events and programs of the VACnet are publicized on the Vancouver Park Board web site and through brochures at local community centres. Reaching the sedentary population is best achieved through social marketing this initiative. Considerable emphasis is being placed on peer incentive programs that encourage people to bring a friend with them when they participate in fitness activities.

The City of Vancouver would like to hear from other civic organizations that would like to join the VACnet and help make Vancouver one of the fittest cities in the world.



Jim McKenzie
Active Communities Coordinator
jim.mckenzie@vancouver.ca