

# Engaging Newcomers to Canada in Physical Activity Programming: Research Report

BY PARTICIPATION



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

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publique du Canada

Ontario  
Trillium Foundation



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# Research Report Findings

## Context

The 'ParticipACTION Newcomer Engagement Project' aims to increase engagement of newcomer Canadians<sup>1</sup> in ParticipACTION's [Community Better Challenge](#). To accomplish this goal ParticipACTION engaged in multiple layers of research activities to better understand the needs, perceptions and interests of newcomer Canadians and organizations that serve them.

ParticipACTION has utilized the learnings from these research activities to inform our marketing, communications, stakeholder engagement, evaluation, and program plans to support increased engagement of newcomers in the Community Better Challenge.

Furthermore, ParticipACTION has developed additional resources to support physical activity sector organizations in delivering inclusive programming for newcomers.

## Research Activities

### National Activities

- 1) **Environmental Scan** of available Canadian resources pertaining to engaging newcomers in physical activity
- 2) **Stakeholder Consultations** with representatives from Canadian organizations that serve newcomers
- 3) **Population Survey** of newcomer Canadians

### Region of Peel Activities

- 4) **Focus groups** with Region of Peel residents that are new to Canada (have lived in Canada for less than 10 years)
- 5) **Survey of Newcomers from the Region of Peel**



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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this project, and based on the definition provided in the grant applications, “newcomers” are defined as people who have lived in Canada fewer than 10 years

## Overarching findings

- 1) Local champions are key to building trust and connections; newcomers should be consulted to understand and tailor programs to their needs and preferences.
- 2) Content (e.g., imagery, promotional materials) should be reflective and relevant to newcomer experiences.
- 3) While newcomers face many barriers, they are interested in participating in physical activity to maintain physical and social health. Awareness and effective outreach are needed to make sure the population knows how and where to participate.
- 4) Barriers are significant (e.g., cost, language, transportation, childcare). Organizations working with newcomer populations need adequate funding to support program adaptations that help support newcomer participation (e.g., offering free transportation or childcare, low cost or free program registration, translators, etc.)

## Methods

### 1) Environment Scan of existing newcomer engagement resources

#### Goal

To determine any gaps that exist and fill one of those gaps with ParticipACTION-developed resources informed by consultations and reviewed by an advisory committee.

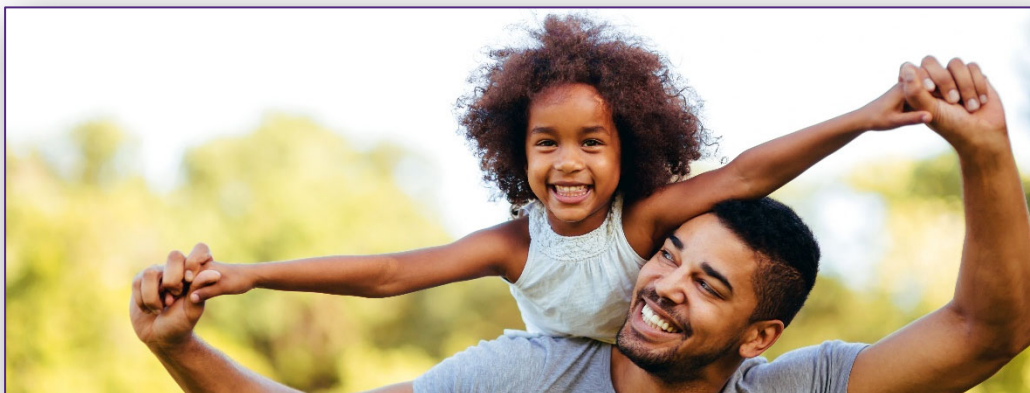
#### Methods

ParticipACTION, in collaboration with an advisory committee of key representatives from physical activity and newcomer serving organizations, developed a list of relevant Canadian government departments and non-profit organizations. The websites of all key organizations were reviewed and scanned for relevant resources and tools pertaining to engaging newcomers in physical activity, by entering various configurations of the search terms such as physical activity; sport; newcomer; new Canadian; immigrant; sport and recreation etc. Peer reviewed publications or specific community level initiatives were not included in the scan.

34 organizational websites reviewed



19 relevant resource captured in the scan



## 2) Stakeholder Consultations

### Goal

To consult with representatives from newcomer serving organizations to understand their perspectives about engaging newcomers in health and wellness or physical activity programs, and any barriers or facilitators to participating in ParticipACTION's Community Better Challenge.

### Methods

From October 28<sup>th</sup> - November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, ParticipACTION's evaluation team conducted 10, 60-minute structured interviews via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or phone with representatives from Canadian organizations that work with individuals new to Canada.

Interview participants were recruited by email from a list of relevant organizations and key contacts and were given a \$50 Amazon gift card as compensation.

### Organizations Interviewed

Commonwealth Sport  
Canadian Women and Sport  
Pour Trois Point  
Peel Newcomer Strategy Group  
Winnipeg Newcomer Sport Academy  
Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre  
Big Bike Giveaway  
The Together Project  
Sport for Life  
Fillactive

## 3) Population Survey

### Goal

To consult newcomer Canadians nationally to understand their perspectives about physical activity and sport participation in the context of the current pandemic.

### Methods

The participants in the quantitative survey included a diverse sample of individuals new to Canada. The survey was conducted online through the Maru Voice Canada Panel, and was in field from November 16<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

### Survey Sample

	Total (1460)
National Sample - Gen Pop	1460
Individuals who have lived in Canada less than 10 years	284



## 4) Focus Groups

### Goal

To consult newcomer Canadians from the Region of Peel to understand their perspectives about physical activity and sport participation.

### Methods

From November 4 - 12, 2020, market research vendor Maru/Matchbox conducted **4 online focus group discussions** among several groups of newcomers from the Region of Peel.

To qualify, respondents had to reside in the Region of Peel, and have lived in Canada fewer than 10 years. Residents were from a range of physical activity levels and different levels of engagement within the community. Each group sought a mix of genders and ages from 18-59. Two groups were held among South Asians (the largest group of newcomers in the Region of Peel) based on age (18-44 and 45-59).

### Focus Groups

1. South Asian (ages 18-44): 8 participants
2. South Asian (ages 45 – 59): 8 participants
3. Chinese: 8 participants
4. Black: 6 participants

## 5) Survey of Newcomers from the Region of Peel

### Goal

To consult newcomers from the Region of Peel to understand their perspectives about physical activity and sport participation in the context of the current pandemic.

### Methods

The survey was conducted online through the Maru HUB survey platform. A survey link was emailed to relevant ParticipACTION partners for distribution to their networks within the Region of Peel, and the survey was in field from December 14<sup>th</sup> – January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### Survey Sample

	Total (85)
Peel residents	85
Individuals who have lived in Canada less than 10 years	44



## Key learnings

### Resources Gaps

Several **gaps in available resources** that support organizations in engaging newcomers in sport and physical activity programs were identified from the scan.

#### Gaps:

- Resources developed within the past two years (up-to-date resources are needed, especially given rapidly changing contexts)
- Resources that explore differences between newcomer groups, and how this impacts program development
- Resources at the individual level
- Actionable resources and materials (e.g., checklists, worksheets etc.).
- Additional language translations of participant facing resources (e.g., policies, templates etc.)

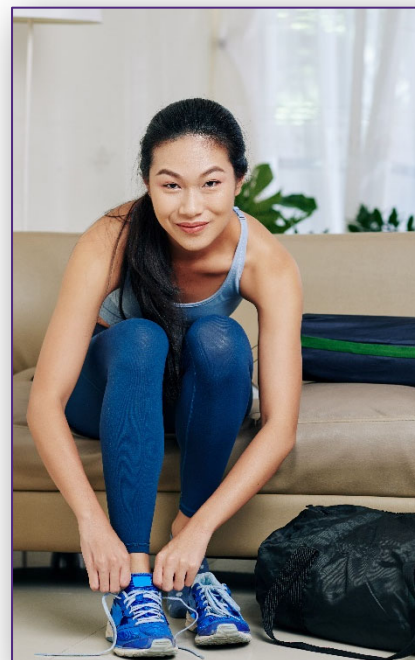
#### Opportunities:

- Several resources have examined barriers and potential solutions specifically for newcomer sport programming. There is an opportunity to develop and make available a collated list of existing helpful resources/guides.

### Newcomer Experience

#### Physical activity is important to newcomers;

The value of physical activity is not in question among newcomers. They recognize the importance and many of them engage in regular activity (currently at home or outdoors). Newcomers' motivations to be active, such as to stave off health concerns, age well, and weight loss/maintenance, are very much in line with the general population. For many, being physically active daily is both a priority and a challenge, and many are often missing out on the need to achieve the elevated heart rate of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). There is an opportunity for ParticipACTION to increase knowledge around physical activity guidelines and highlight ways to transform the daily walk and stretch into activities that will allow them to achieve recommended MVPA levels.



#### Newcomers experience significant barriers to

participating in physical activity programming including finances, language, program location, transportation costs, competing priorities (housing, work, food, family), environments that are not culturally appropriate, and cultural differences between different newcomer groups. Winter weather is also a significant barrier for some

newcomers (e.g., high cost of winter sport equipment, unfamiliarity with winter activities). Newcomers often are not aware of the programs or opportunities offered in their area or are not familiar or interested in the activities offered.

**COVID-19 has had a dampening effect** on newcomers, like other Canadians. Many are working from home or have changed how they commute resulting in much more online and sedentary behaviour. Furthermore, community centre and gym closures have had a negative effect on physical activity levels. Walking and hiking has enabled newcomers to stay active through the fair weather, however cold weather conditions led to declines in physical activity levels for newcomers.

**Opportunities:** Newcomers are unaware of, but very supportive of a national physical activity focused organization like ParticipACTION. They see opportunity for a steward who helps newcomers to navigate their new landscape and understand what programs are offered and where. A resource of this kind would be critical for newcomers looking for opportunities to give active within their community. With cost being a major barrier, a steward who can offer support or ways to help find options within limited budget would be increasingly valuable.



## Organizational Experience and Needs

**Organizations can help encourage and support newcomers to participate in programs** by utilizing trusted networks and partnerships already part of that community to deliver programs; offsetting costs (transportation, fee for programs, childcare), offering activities for the whole family; and offering activities that are culturally relevant and meet the needs of that community.

**Organizations need financial support to adequately address barriers and ensure programming aligns with newcomer needs.** Funding allows organizations to address the reported barriers (e.g., microgrants would help support providing transportation, staff time to organize and promote, translators or coaches who speak the language of origin of their members).

**Community Partnerships** are key. It takes time to build trusting relationships with newcomers, and organizations that have extensive experience (i.e., settlement services/workers) can provide a sense of trust, belonging and comfort.

Programs should ideally be **sustained** (rather than one off initiatives) to help build word of mouth promotion and trust. **Newcomers should see themselves at the centre of the program and** be represented in the program communications and promotional material, as well as understand how it will impact or benefit them. It is important for organizations to **consult newcomers** on what they need in a physical activity program and apply their feedback.

### How can you support engagement of newcomers in your physical activity programs?



**Consult newcomers on what they need** in a physical activity program, rather than make assumptions.



Engage and leverage trusted networks and community partnerships to help deliver programs that align with newcomer needs and perspectives. Involvement of experienced organizations or community leaders helps build a sense of trust, belonging and comfort.



Reduce barriers (e.g., provide transportation (or offer programs close to home), reduce fee for programs, provide childcare).



Offer sustained programs (these tend to be more successful compared to one-off initiatives, as they provide a chance to build word of mouth promotion, have a lasting impact, and build trust).



Ensure newcomers see themselves represented in the program communications and promotional material.



Offer activities that are culturally relevant, meet the needs of that community, and engage the whole family.



## Community Better Challenge

There was lots of interest from both organizations interviewed and newcomers themselves in participating in the Community Better Challenge, however both organizations and individuals need more information on specifically how to participate and the benefits before they can get comfortable committing. For newcomers, events that take COVID-19 restrictions into account (e.g., events run in consultation with Public Health, events offering virtual options) had a positive impact on willingness to participate. Organizations highlighted the need for more research and discussions with newcomers about their specific needs and wants in a physical activity program and how they want to be engaged (“Nothing for us without us”), as well as a need for changes to promotional materials or communications (better representation of newcomers, providing communications in different languages of origin of newcomers, making newcomers the centre of the program).



## Recommended Resources

Resource	Organization	Description
<a href="#">Engaging Newcomer Girls and Women: Physical Activity and Sport Handbook</a>	Canadian Women & Sport	A handbook that outlines key considerations and provides best practice recommendations and strategies for engaging newcomer women and girls in sport and physical activity.
<a href="#">Playing together: New citizens, sports and belonging</a>	Institute for Canadian Citizenship	A report that outlines participation barriers for New Canadians, information on how New Canadians engage in sports in Canada, and recommendations for inclusive ways to organize and communicate sport and physical activity programs to ensure more and different people can get involved.
<a href="#">Sport for Life for All Newcomers to Canada</a>	Sport for Life	A guide that identifies 12 barriers with proposed solutions, opportunities, and promising practices.
<a href="#">Vital Signs: Sport and Belonging</a>	Community Foundation of Canada/ True Sport Foundation	A report that provides strategies that sport and community organizations can use to create sport that is more inclusive, accessible, and fun.
<a href="#">True Sport Principles</a>	Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport	Offered in 12 languages, the True Sport Principles are the foundation for positive, rewarding experiences. When intentionally activated, they are expected to create the conditions for the benefits of good sport to become more fully realized.

