

# Physical activity as medicine among family health teams

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To better understand the current use of physical activity as medicine among Family Health Teams (FHTs) in Ontario, researchers at the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Waterloo and the Centre for Family Medicine Family Health Team conducted an environmental scan of 102 FHTs. They published their findings today in the journal *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*.

Family Health Teams (FHTs) are part of a shift towards a multidisciplinary primary care model that addresses the healthcare needs of a community by allowing different healthcare professionals to work collaboratively under one roof. Currently, FHTs serve a relatively small percentage of Ontarians; however, their multi-disciplinary structure may create an ideal environment to enable physical activity promotion as most Canadians receive healthcare through the primary care system. Physical activity has well-established health benefits; however, the best way to engage Canadians in an active lifestyle remains largely unknown.

Before this environmental scan, the number and types of physical activity promotion services, and the types of professionals providing physical activity counselling in Ontario FHTs was not known .

The researchers found that almost 60% of responding FHTs in Ontario offered a physical activity service. However, the types, durations and targeted populations of the services varied depending on the individual FHT. Physical activity services were often restricted to people with specific conditions or needs rather than available to all individuals.

According to the study, "many different types of allied health professionals were facilitating physical activity services. The diversity in the qualifications is concerning, as it suggests that individuals providing physical activity therapy do not always have qualifications related to physical activity prescription and counselling."

Cameron Moore, from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Waterloo and co-author of the study said, "It is promising that almost 60% of responding FHTs offered a physical activity service. However, continued efforts are needed to increase the accessibility and standardization of physical activity therapy offered though primary care."

"In Ontario, Kinesiology is a newly accredited professional designation with a scope of practice that includes [physical activity promotion](#) and prescription. We feel that physical activity counsellors who are Registered Kinesiologists with expertise in [physical activity](#) prescription and behavior change counselling are ideally suited as [primary care](#) providers in FHTs."

**More information:** *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, [www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/a...1139/apnm-2014-0387](http://www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/a...1139/apnm-2014-0387)

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