
What is Canada on the Move?

A brief synopsis of a unique new research tool

“[COTM] ALLOWS FOR A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN BY COLLECTING DATA ON A NATIONAL LEVEL FROM INDIVIDUALS ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF DEMOGRAPHICS AND WITH VARYING DEGREES OF EXPOSURE TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAMPAIGNS AND PROMOTION EFFORTS”

Q1 What is Canada on the Move?

Canada on the Move is a unique new tool that allows individual Canadians to contribute to national health research. It was launched in January 2004 by the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes (INMD) – one of thirteen institutes within the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

In order to participate, individuals log on to the *Canada on the Move* website (www.canadaonthemove.ca) and provide information about their current physical activity, future intentions to increase their activity through walking and other questions relating to demographics. If they are using a pedometer, the site allows them to track their progress and “donate” their steps. Qualified researchers studying physical activity, healthy eating and chronic disease prevention will have access to the data collected on the website. The results will be used to inform other researchers, public health practitioners and policy makers about how to best promote healthy living practices in Canada.

Q2 How is Canada on the Move data gathered and used?

Participants can visit the site on their own or as part of a larger group. Health promotion organizations across the country are getting in step with this new initiative, urging Canadians to sign up and donate their steps to health research. By doing so, step donors of all types will help us better understand the impact of various environmental and motivational factors on an individual's efforts to get active and stay active. Collectively, participants can further our understanding of the role of environment and behaviour at the level of populations.

Participating organizations can also help by providing information about the programs and initiatives they have designed to encourage people to increase their level of physical activity. Through reports provided by *Canada on the Move*, they can then learn more about the effectiveness of their own programs. Ultimately, this knowledge will help practitioners and policy makers share best practices across the country.

Q3 Why is Canada on the Move so special?

Researchers from Canada, the United States and Australia participated in the creation of *Canada on the Move*. Its design allows for a unique environmental scan by collecting data on a national level from individuals across a broad spectrum of demographics and with varying degrees of exposure to physical activity campaigns and promotion efforts. This platform will provide a novel database for Canadian researchers to study the many “natural experiments” currently underway that encourage increased physical activity. The data will also be useful in generating important new knowledge in the fight against obesity and disease.

Q4 How can I learn more?

Logging on to a website at their own convenience is an easy and rewarding new way for Canadians to become involved in health research. To date, over 500 million steps have already been donated.

As more participants step up to the plate (both individuals and groups), the database will continue to grow both in terms of the quantity of data collected and in its relevance as an excellent resource for Canadian health researchers. For more information about *Canada on the Move*, please visit our website at www.canadaonthemove.ca.

VISION

To improve health through health research that identifies effective approaches to health promotion and disease prevention.

VALUES

Excellence: Maintenance of the highest expectations of quality

Integrity: Commitment to honesty and truth

Collaboration: Engagement across sectors and disciplines

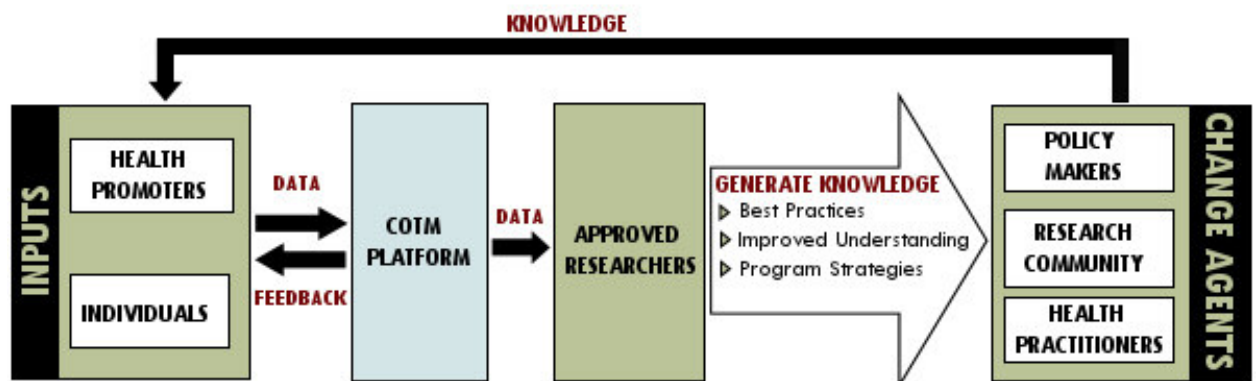
Relevance: Focus on results that are meaningful, can be generalized, and produce action

MISSION

To establish a national platform for data collection, research and evaluation of programs that support increased physical activity and healthy eating:

- by engaging Canadians to provide information that, in aggregate, will allow identification of effective programs in health promotion and disease prevention;
- through partnerships and collaboration with public and private sector organizations interested in addressing the epidemic of obesity.

PLATFORM DESIGN



An Interview with Dr. Diane Finegood

Scientific Director, Institute Of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes (INMD)

Q1 How did Canada on the Move get started?

Many people want to live a healthy lifestyle, myself included, but face challenges in their attempts to increase their physical activity. The pedometer is an easy-to-use, inexpensive tool that can show people how much activity they are really doing by counting the steps they take on any given day. If you try harder to increase your physical activity, it will show up and if your efforts drop off, that will show up too!

The pedometer has been making great headway in North America through programs like *America on the Move* that motivate large groups of people to get active and track their own progress using a pedometer. In Canada, we have noticed a rapid uptake of this approach to health promotion but realize that there have been few studies which help us understand whether this is a useful and cost-effective tool. What's needed is new information on the various ways we promote active healthy living. That way, we can identify the most promising and least harmful approaches. The INMD decided to build a tool that could collect this type of information and enable comparison of different efforts to increase physical activity. These data are of great interest to Canadian researchers – especially those tackling the growing epidemic of obesity. Given the speed with which people are latching onto the whole pedometer movement, it presents an excellent opportunity to gather data from within a large population.

Canada on the Move launched in January 2004 and, to date, individual Canadians have donated over 500,000,000 steps to health research by going up on our site and logging their pedometer results.

Q2 Does anything like this currently exist in Canada or elsewhere?

Not that I'm aware of. There are other web-based programs delivering information about health promotion, but that's not what we're doing. I've also seen web-based tools designed to provide people with feedback regarding their own physical activity efforts, but it's not for research purposes. Our vision is to compare different health promotion programs using the same measures. Some groups may gather information as they are doing health promotion, but we want to do it across the board and gather information that can help determine best practices.

For the research community at large, the data we collect will be made available to qualified researchers. What we are doing is creating a research resource from which further analysis can be done.

We also see this as an opportunity to help groups with what they are doing. *Canada on the Move* brings together the efforts of many organizations working on healthy living strategies and tackling the problems associated with obesity, unhealthy eating and physical inactivity. We see it as a platform to bring those strengths of expertise together.

“CANADIANS HAVE
DONATED OVER
500,000,000 STEPS
TO HEALTH
RESEARCH BY
GOING UP ON OUR
SITE AND LOGGING
THEIR PEDOMETER
RESULTS”

“CANADA ON THE MOVE FILLS A GAP THAT CURRENTLY EXISTS IN OUR ABILITY TO GATHER USEFUL INFORMATION ABOUT REAL WORLD EXPERIMENTS”

Q3 How do you see this initiative benefiting Canadian researchers?

Canada on the Move fills a gap that currently exists in our ability to gather useful information about real world natural experiments. No one is capturing all the efforts being made by governments, private companies and community groups that are trying to get people walking. We see *Canada on the Move* as both an integrative research tool and a means of helping these groups with their initial push to get people engaged. Our long-term vision is to gather data from Canadians representing a wide range of demographics and with a variety of exposure to physical activity programs.

Q4 What stage is the initiative at right now? Where is it heading?

We have over 3,000 participants so far who have been to the site to talk about things like their intention to change their physical activity, provide demographic information and donate their steps. If participants use a pedometer, that's great, but it's not mandatory.

What lies ahead is the incorporation of a new component where groups who promote physical activity report what they are doing and provide us with information about the types of support they offer individuals who are engaged through their group. At the same time, we will ask individuals to report the programs or campaigns they have been exposed to, so researchers can then investigate how different programs impact people's attitudes and behaviours. Identification and understanding of the most important elements of a successful program can lead to a sharing of best practices.

As more walkers come to the site and a wider range of information is collected, the quality and quantity of the database will continually be enriched. Ultimately, we want to make *Canada on the Move* as useful a resource as possible for researchers to help them understand health promotion activities. And we want it to be an invaluable tool for organizations to learn about the effectiveness of their own programs and activities. If it also encourages some Canadians to increase their physical activity while participating in health research, I see it as a win-win situation for all involved.

Partnerships for Health Research

There are many ways for organizations to become involved with Canada on the Move

Q1 What is Canada on the Move?

Across the country obesity has hit epidemic proportions, bringing with it countless associated problems for affected individuals and the healthcare system that serves them. In response, researchers are looking at the various factors that contribute to obesity, including urban planning, advertising, technology, working conditions and other factors that impact physical activity and eating habits. As well, organizations nationwide have initiated many health promotion activities in an attempt to encourage individuals to take up the fight against obesity by adopting a healthier lifestyle.

In order to assist these researchers and organizations, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes (INMD) has launched *Canada on the Move*, a unique research platform that works in tandem with the efforts of health promotion initiatives to provide valuable data on physical activity and healthy eating to Canadian researchers, public health practitioners and policy makers.

Now that *Canada on the Move* is up and running – with more than 3,000 participants and over 500,000,000 steps donated to date – INMD's next goal is to enrich the current database by increasing the quantity of participants and the quality of the information being gathered.

Q2 What are the benefits of partnering?

Partnering with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is a great way for organizations and groups that engage in health promotion activities to join this unique initiative in the early stages of its development. While the database is currently set up to collect information about people's intentions to change their physical activity, pertinent demographic information and the number of steps they are taking, future data collection will expand into various areas that will prove valuable to health promotion organizations and researchers alike.

Ultimately, the INMD envisions that *Canada on the Move* will help both individual participants and some partner organizations to track the success of their efforts. On a wider scale, it will enable researchers to investigate how different programs operate. Identification and understanding of the most important elements of a successful program can lead to a sharing of best practices among health promotion groups across the country.

Being a part of *Canada on the Move* will also provide organizations with an opportunity to form relationships with other groups that are conducting health research or are engaged in health promotion. It is a chance to bring together an excellent combination of like-minded people and their ideas on a national level.

Q3 How can I help?

There are many ways for organizations to become involved with *Canada on the Move* – from simply encouraging individual Canadians to “donate their steps to health research” to in-kind and funding support for research, communications efforts and website involvement.

In addition, partners can share their expertise in population-level approaches to physical activity, healthy eating and chronic disease prevention with other partner organizations and contribute to the overall direction of this exciting new initiative. In return, partners will be kept abreast of the latest developments in *Canada on the Move* research and will receive public recognition for their involvement.

To explore partnership opportunities, please contact Dr. Adria Rose at cotm_partnerships@sfu.ca.

“PARTNERING WITH THE CANADIAN INSTITUTES OF HEALTH RESEARCH IS A GREAT WAY FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS THAT ENGAGE IN HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIVITIES TO JOIN THIS UNIQUE INITIATIVE IN THE EARLY STAGES OF ITS DEVELOPMENT”