

# Neighbourhood Environment Facilitators and Barriers to Outdoor Activity during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada implemented emergency public health measures including physical distancing and lockdowns. These measures impacted physical activity negatively and increased sedentary behaviour for many individuals<sup>1</sup>. The built environment is known to shape physical activity patterns<sup>2</sup> and may have contributed to changes in behaviour during the pandemic.

This recent qualitative study\* explored the role of the built environment in supporting physical activity during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

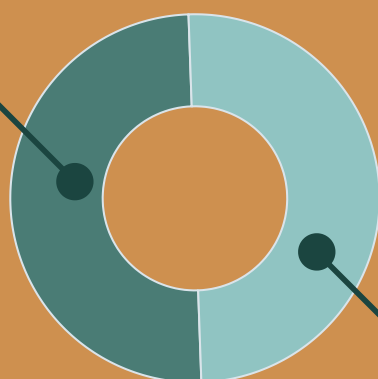
Between April and June 2020, 12 residents of north central Calgary (Alberta, Canada) participated in semi-structured interviews to capture their experiences and perspectives.

20 years

AGES

70 years

50% Male



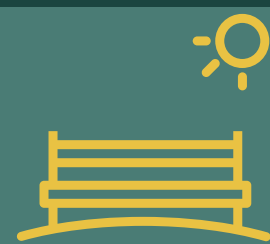
50% Female

Three key themes emerged reflecting how the built environment influenced participant's physical activity routines during the pandemic.

## Adaptations in use of outdoor space for physical activity:

"I think it's a good reset making you realize that you don't need to go to the gym to exercise, which is a nice thing. Because in Calgary, we can go to the mountains, I can go to Nose Hill Park, or I can go bike around and do lots of those things."

"If we didn't have this COVID situation we [wouldn't] go [to parks]. We can't go [to the] zoo or science centres, but it's okay. Now we find out Calgary offers so many different places."



## Importance of connectivity and destinations:

"We even had a couple painted games on some of the paths for the kids to play like hopscotch and there was another stone throwing thing and we played that one day which was kind of fun."



"... a lot of the pathways interconnect with other communities for bike paths and stuff... you can get good workouts in around our neighborhood... you can go a fair distance without having to be on roadways or major roadways."

## Navigating interactions with people outdoors:

"I would try to avoid crowds and stuff, and that's not something that I would have thought twice about [before]. It hasn't really affected much with [the] parks... I feel like it's enough outdoor space and room for me to walk around where I want to."



"I've noticed that sometimes people get really nervous to walk past you these days. They'll stand so far, go on the other side of the grass, and go around you, and get really nervous... I think it's funny that sometimes people feel like they have agency to enforce the social distancing rules. I've seen that a lot lately... All this social policing, they like to call it."

The built environment provided opportunities for outdoor physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, pathways and parks that allowed for physical distancing were important spaces that supported outdoor physical activity during the pandemic.



### \*For more information:

- McCormack GR, Petersen J, Naish C, Ghoneim D, Doyle-Baker PK. Neighbourhood environment facilitators and barriers to outdoor activity during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: a qualitative study. *Cities & Health*. 2022 Jan 11;0(0):1–13. 1. DOI:10.1080/23748834.2021.2016218
- Petersen JA, Naish C, Ghoneim D, Cabaj JL, Doyle-Baker PK, McCormack GR. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour: A Qualitative Study in a Canadian City. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021 Jan;18(9):4441. DOI:10.3390/ijerph18094441

### References:

- <sup>1</sup>Government of Canada.2020. Physical distancing: how to slow the spread of COVID-19. <https://www.Canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/social-distancing.html> [Accessed: 14 January 2021].
- <sup>2</sup>Stockwell S, Trott M, Tully M, et al. Changes in physical activity and sedentary behaviours from before to during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: a systematic review *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine* 2021;7:e000960. doi: 10.1136/bmjsem-2020-000960



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