

2025 Yukon Healthy Living Study





Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Funding	4
Introduction	4
Why is this survey needed?	5
Methods	6
Co- development	6
Data analysis	7
Results	8
Demographics	8
Physical activity volume	10
Physical activity types	11
Active transportation	13
Trail use	14
Local recreation facility use and swimming	15
Getting information	17
Physical activity motivators	17
Physical activity barriers	18
Community strength supporting engagement	19
Limitations	20
Discussion	20
Future Considerations	22
Links to appendices	24

List of tables and figures:

Table 1: Table showing communities grouped into small, medium, large	7
Figure 1: Map of respondents by community of residence	8
Figure 2: Graphic of gender distribution of respondents	9
Figure 3: Pie chart of respondents' age brackets	9
Figure 4: Percentage of respondents achieving 180 min. per week in summer and winter	10
Figure 5: Popular summer activities by community size	11
Figure 6: Popular winter activities by community size	11
Figure 7: Word cloud of popular activities	12
Figure 8: Respondents using active transportation daily or a few times each week	13
Figure 9: Respondents using trails daily or a few times each week in summer and winter	14
Figure 10: Popular services accessed in recreation facilities	15
Figure 11: Percentage of respondents accessing recreation facilities by community size	15
Figure 12: Swimming location by community size	16
Figure 12: Physical activity motivators.	17
Figure 13: Physical activity barriers.	18

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Introduction

The YHLS is designed to understand how Yukoners engage in recreation to lead healthy, active lives. The study has been critical in helping RPAY identify patterns in behaviours and attitudes about physical activity since 2009. The 2025 YHLS built on previous versions of the survey and asked questions to understand active living patterns of Yukoners with a focus on outdoor, unstructured recreational activities. This report includes a brief summary of the 2025 YHLS results, and any additional data can be found in [Appendix D](#).

RPAY is a territorial, non-profit organization dedicated to helping Yukon communities, specifically rural and First Nations communities, engage their citizens in active, healthy lifestyles through recreation and parks. RPAY previously conducted the Yukon Healthy Living Study (YHLS) in 2009, 2016, and 2021. YSPOR supports health research through training, capacity development, knowledge sharing and translation, so that patients, families and communities are empowered to shape health care and research.

Context: The Yukon, located in northwestern Canada, has a population of approximately 47,000. The territory is ethnically diverse and growing quickly (1-3). In 2021, 22.3% of the population self-identified as Indigenous, and an additional 12.8% self-identified as a visible minority (3,4). There is also an active Francophone community (5). About 37,000 residents live in Whitehorse, the capital city (1). The remaining residents live across the territory, with many residing in 14 smaller communities of 500-2,500 inhabitants each (1). The proportion of Indigenous people is greater in rural Yukon than in Whitehorse (6,7).

Why is this survey needed?

- Physical activity and recreation provide valuable social, mental, and physical wellness benefits, yet most adults living in Canada do not reach recommended levels of physical activity (8-10).
 - The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults (11), provide evidence-based recommendations for a healthy day. With respect to physical activity, the guidelines recommend:
 - Moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activities such that there is an accumulation of at least 150 minutes per week. Moderate physical activity is defined as activity that “makes you breathe harder and your heart beat faster. You should be able to talk, but not sing.”
 - Muscle strengthening activities using major muscle groups at least twice a week.
- Monitoring physical activity provides important information to community partners on active living patterns and can be used to inform recreation and health promotion initiatives (12-14).
- Many national surveys exploring physical activity patterns of adults living in Canada underrepresent the territories. Further, many national surveys may not be relevant or culturally informed for Northern communities.
- Data that focuses on the physical activity of adults living in the Yukon is needed to inform local recreation partners and policymakers in making evidence-informed decisions.

Understanding healthy living from a cultural and rural perspective provides opportunities for programs and services to support community priorities and preferences in meaningful, relevant ways.



Methods

Co-development

An essential component of this project was the convening of an Advisory Group to guide and inform how the research was designed and conducted. YSPOR prioritizes the inclusion of lived experience, service-provider, and decision-maker perspectives at the table, recognizing that diverse ways of knowing strengthen the relevance and integrity of research. The Advisory Group included representation from YSPOR, RPAY, Yukon Government Sport and Recreation Branch, Yukon University, Elders, and individuals with lived experience of recreation in the territory. The group reflected diverse experiences of recreation across the Yukon and shared this knowledge to ensure the study was conducted in a meaningful and contextually appropriate way.

The survey was informed by previous versions of the YHLS and adapted in partnership with the Advisory Group to better capture the diverse ways that Yukoners are active. The Advisory Group was engaged through every step of the research process, including survey design, planning recruitment strategies, data analysis, and knowledge sharing.

Process

This study received ethics approval from the Yukon University Research Ethics Board in February 2025. The research process prioritized voluntariness and informed consent.

Eligibility: Anyone living in the Yukon over the age of 19 years was eligible to participate. No limits were placed on the length of time that respondents had been living in the Yukon.

Recruitment: Following discussions with the Advisory Group, YSPOR prioritized in-person recruitment efforts to encourage survey participation. Recruitment efforts were focused on rural Yukon, as RPAY provides most of its programming in communities outside of Whitehorse, and there is very little data representing these communities.

Below is a list of all community engagements attended by members of the research team:

- Dawson City: Canada Day, Dawson City Music Festival, and Discovery Days
- Association of Yukon Communities Annual General Meeting
- Haines Junction: Haines Junction Community Farmers Market
- Mayo: First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun Gathering of the People Health Conference
- Old Crow: RPAY Fitness Programming
- Ross River: Ross River Annual Career Fair
- Watson Lake: Arts in the Park Market
- Whitehorse: Recreation Expo, Fireweed Market, and the Dustball Tournament

In addition to in-person recruitment, postcards directing people to the survey were mailed to all rural addresses and PO boxes. Postcards included survey details, QR codes, and links to the survey. Posters promoting the survey were also posted in various hubs across several communities including grocery stores, Yukon University campuses, and other community bulletin boards. Alongside these efforts, the survey was promoted online through YSPOR and Yukon University’s Facebook page, RPAY’s email list, the ElderActive Recreation Association’s newsletter, and the Yukon Government Sport and Rec. branch newsletter.

Survey Content

- Demographic questions: Community of residence, age, self-reported gender.
- Types of activities: For example, walking, snow clearing, berry picking, skiing.
- Volume of physical activity: Developed to capture adherence to 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week recommendation from the 24 Hour Movement Guidelines and adapted from questions in the Canadian Community Health Survey (15).
- Motivators and barriers to being active: Designed to identify what motivates Yukoners to be active, the systems that influence participation, and the community-based supports that foster engagement in physical activity.

Data analysis

Responses were analyzed by calculating averages for relevant questions and identifying common patterns and themes in written comments. The Advisory Group helped guide the exploration and interpretation of the information, ensuring the findings were meaningful and useful for communities and recreation partners.

Guided by these discussions, the data were organized by community size (see Table 1). This reflects the reality that opportunities and supports for recreation vary across Yukon communities. Presenting the information this way helps recreation partners find data that is most relevant to their local context.

Table 1: Communities grouped by size into small, medium and large.¹

	Carcross, Carmacks, Faro, Keno, Kluane Region (Burwash Landing, Haines Junction, Kluane Lake, Silver City), Mayo, Old Crow, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, Tagish, Teslin
	Dawson City, Watson Lake, communities around Whitehorse (Golden Horn, Grizzly Valley, Ibex Valley, Marsh Lake, Mt. Lorne, Mary Lake, Takhini River Subdivision, Wolf Creek)
	Whitehorse

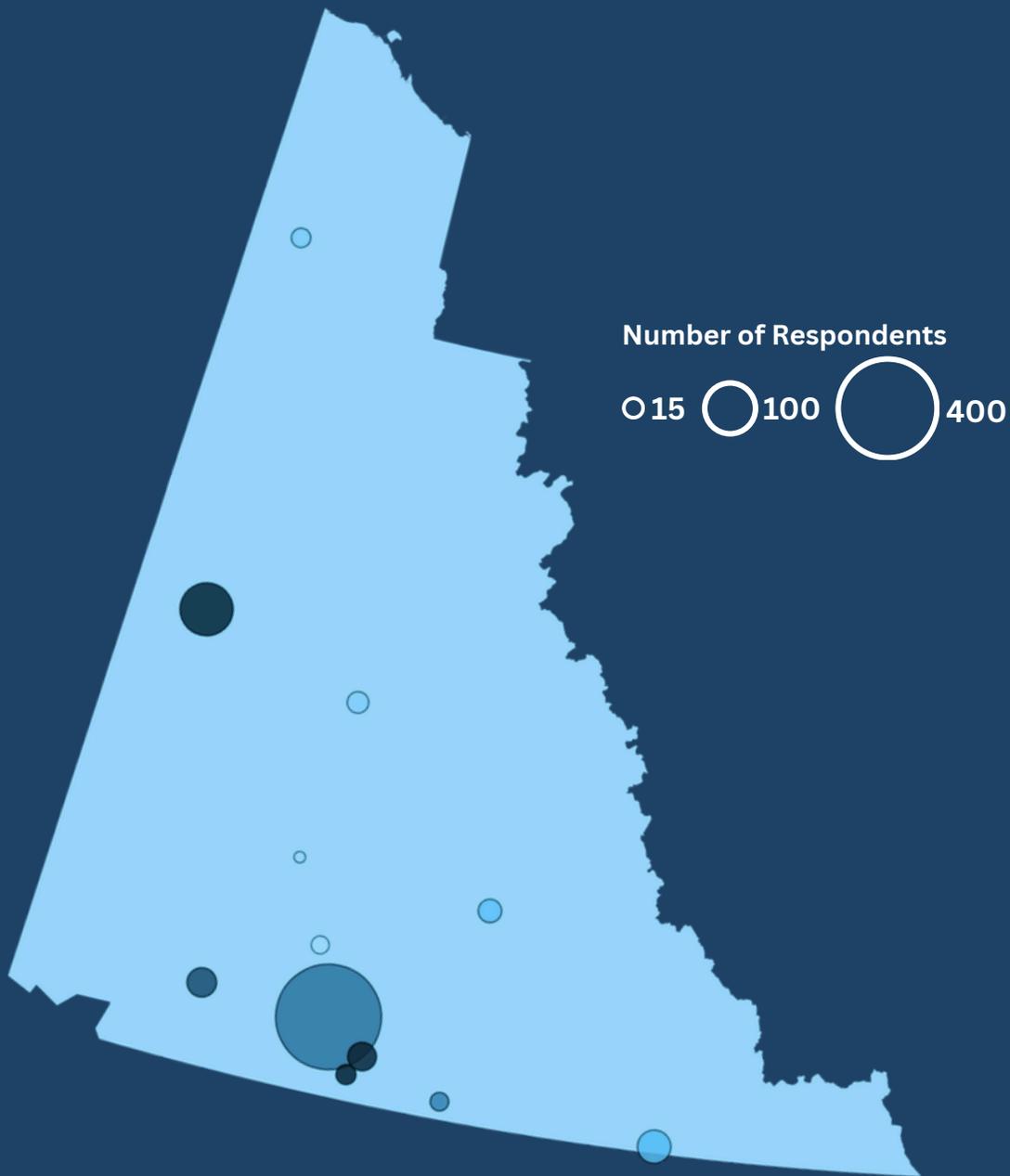
1. Small: population <1500, and more than 50km from Whitehorse. Medium: population 1500-3000 or within 50km of Whitehorse. Large: population >3000.

Results

Demographics

705 Yukoners participated, including 432 residents from Whitehorse and 273 residents from rural communities. On the map below, the size of the circle represents the number of respondents in each community; the circle colour is not relevant.

Figure 1: Map of the Yukon showing number of respondents by community of residence



Most respondents identified as women (70.4%), followed by men (27.6%) and gender-diverse individuals (2.0%). Participants ranged in age from 19 to over 65, with the largest proportion completing the survey aged between 25 and 45 years. Fewer responses came from people in the under-25 group, in part because this age category covers a smaller (6 years) age range than the others.

Figure 2: Graphic of gender distribution of respondents

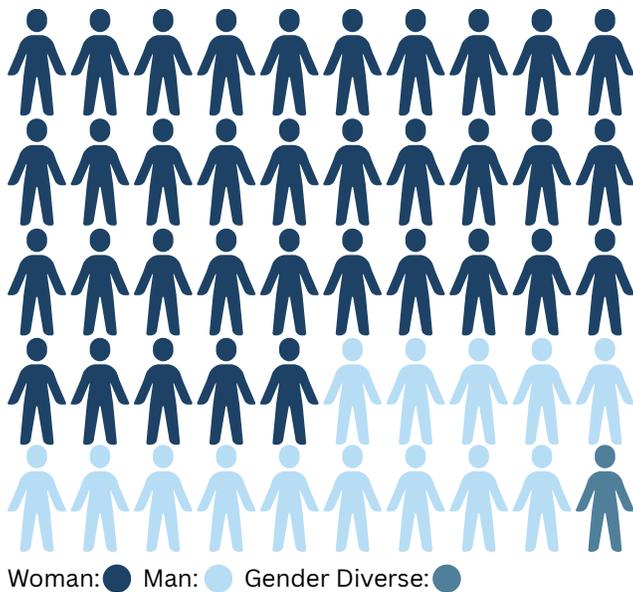


Figure 3: Pie chart of respondents' age brackets

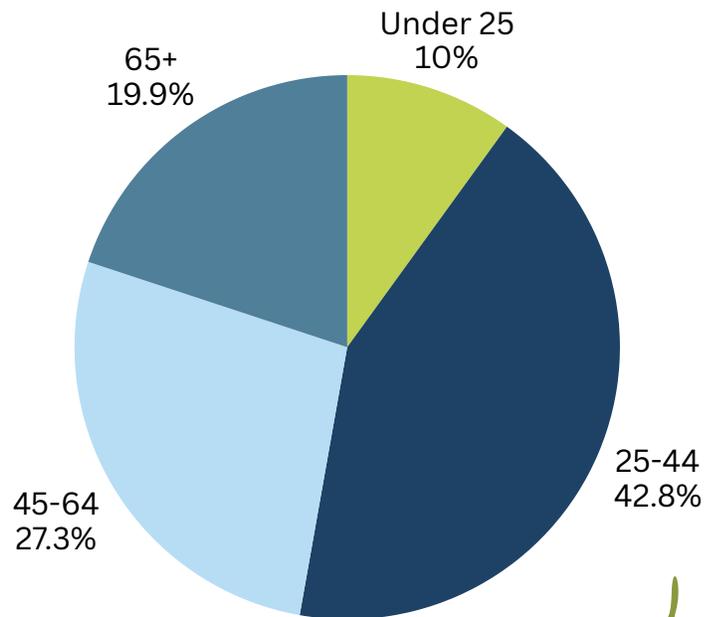
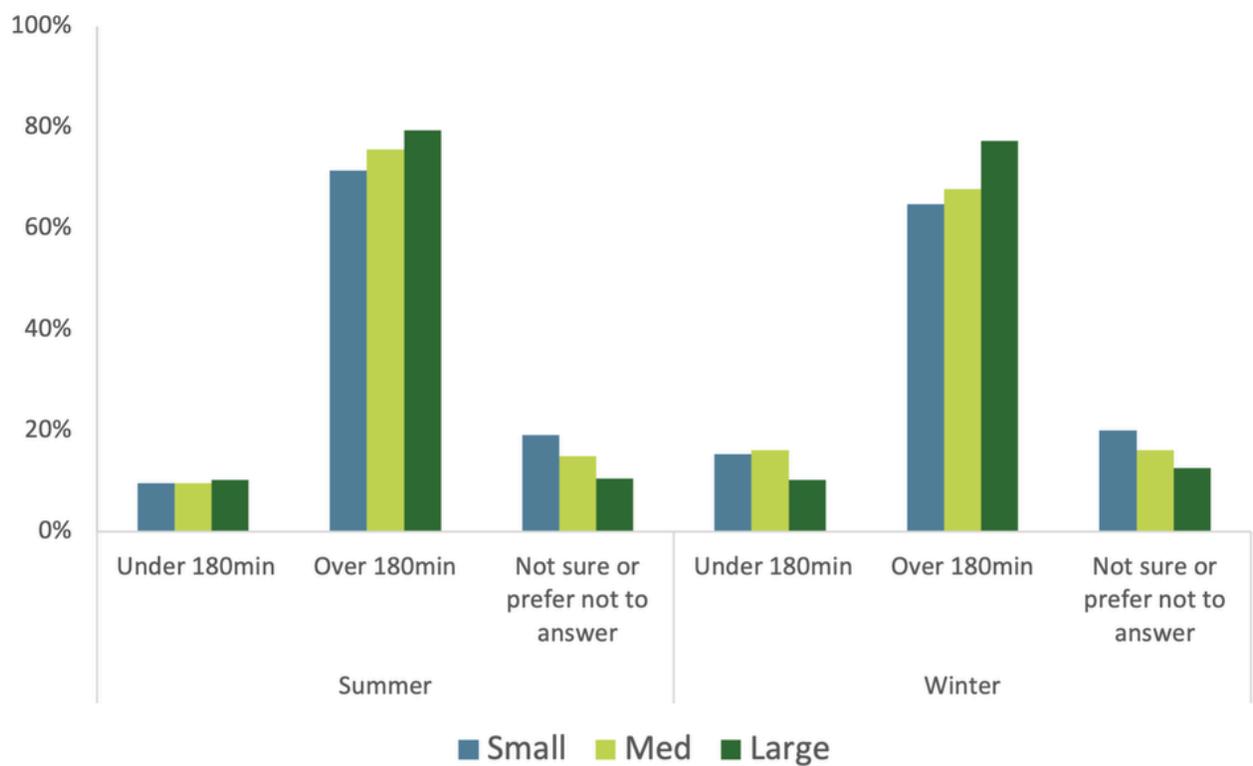


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents achieving 180 min. per week in summer and winter

Physical activity volume

Meeting 24 Hour Movement Guidelines

Overall, 77.3% of respondents met or exceeded the recommended amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in the summer, compared with 73.2% in the winter. The largest seasonal change was seen in small communities, where 71.4% of respondents reported at least 180 minutes of activity per week in the summer, compared with 64.8% in the winter. Across both seasons, respondents in small and medium communities reported lower activity levels than those in larger communities.



Physical activity types

Respondents most commonly reported outdoor, unstructured (self-directed, unscheduled) activities in both summer and winter. In summer, frequently reported activities included walking, hiking, on-the-land activities (such as hunting, fishing, berry-picking, and being on the land), paddling, biking, and swimming. In winter, common activities included walking, skiing and snowboarding (including cross-country skiing), firewood management and snow clearing, gym-based activities, and snowshoeing. Respondents in small communities were more likely than those in medium communities and Whitehorse to report on-the-land and domestic labour activities (such as hunting or firewood management) as a primary form of physical activity. The graphs below show the percentage of respondents who identified each activity as one of their top 3 forms of physical activity (ex. 53% of respondents in small communities said walking was one of their primary forms of physical activity in summer).

Figure 5: Popular **summer** activities by community size

Figure 6: Popular **winter** activities by community size

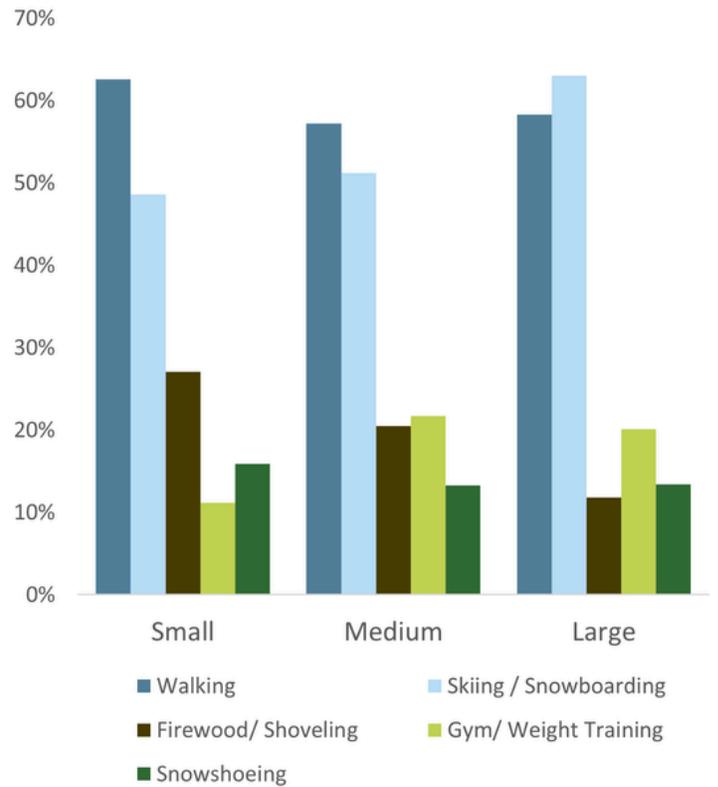
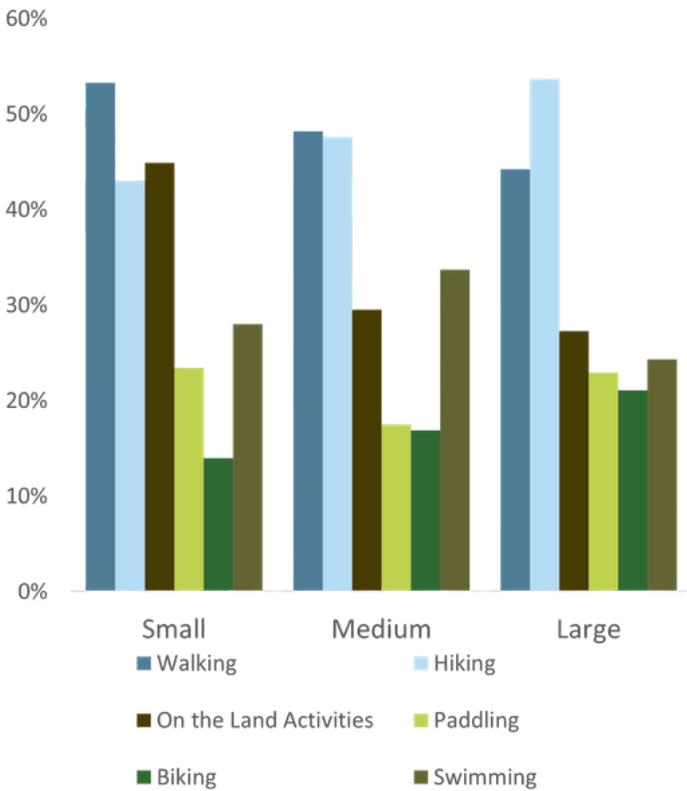
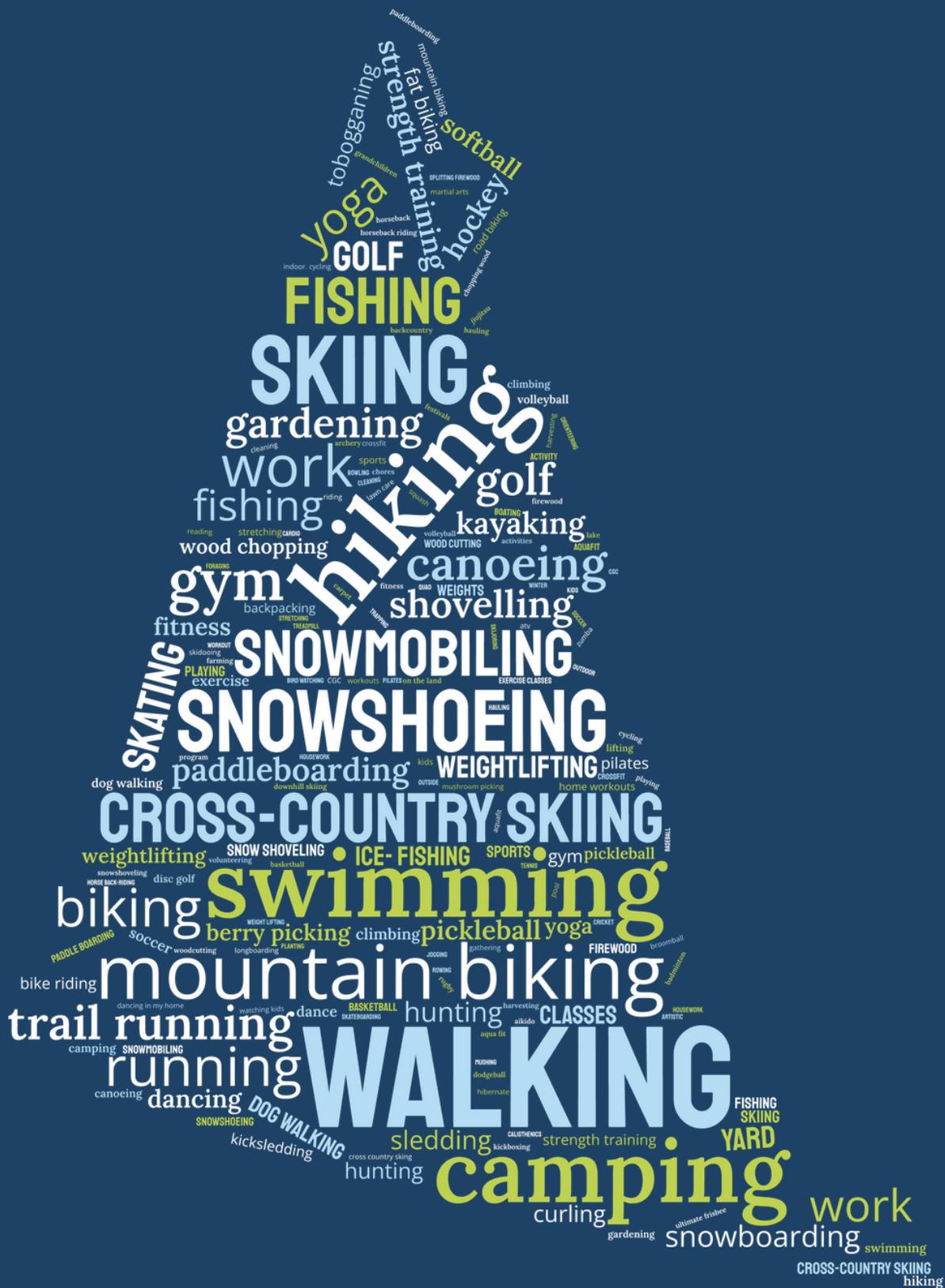


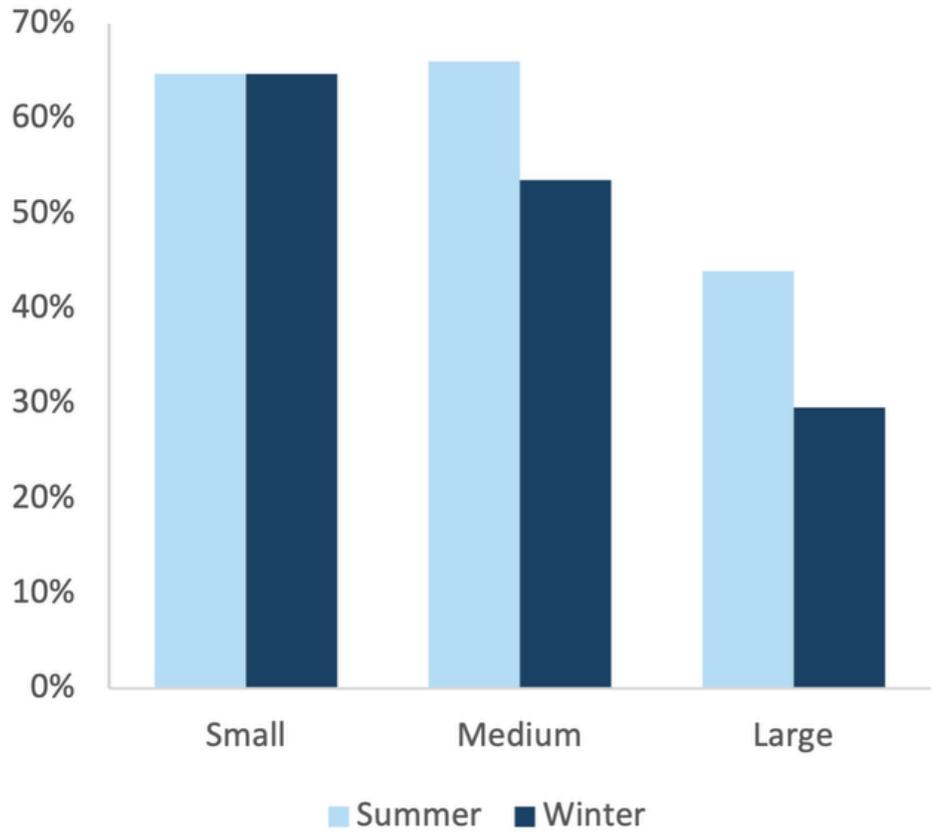
Figure 7: Word cloud of popular activities
 Generated from word frequency count of respondent's top 3 forms of activity in summer and winter.



Active transportation

Just over half of respondents (52.3%) reported using active transportation (walking, biking, or other forms of human-powered travel) a few times per week or daily in summer, compared to 40.6% in winter. Active transportation was more common in small and medium communities than in Whitehorse. In small communities, participation rates were similar in summer and winter, while in medium and large communities, active transportation was more common during the summer months.

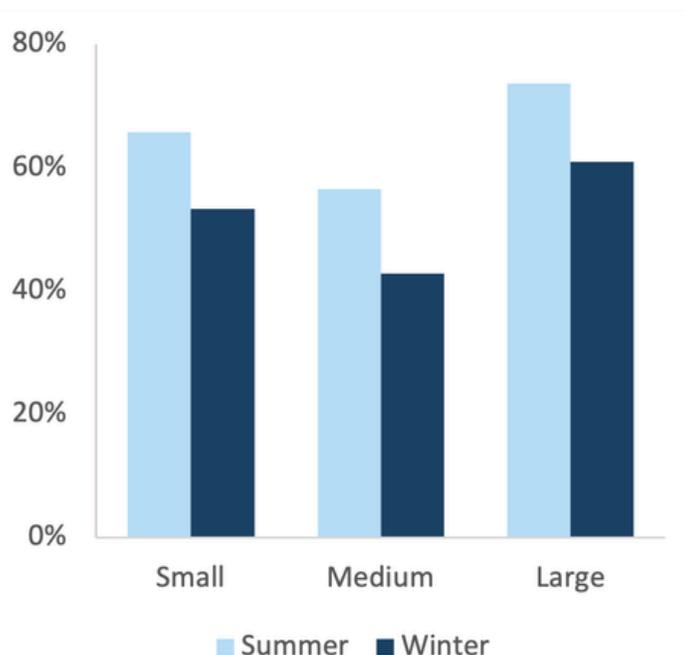
Figure 8: Percentage of respondents using active transportation daily or a few times each week



Trail use

Many respondents reported regular use of community trails. In summer, 68.4% used trails daily or a few times per week, compared with 55.5% in winter. Trail use was similar across community sizes and higher in summer than in winter.

Figure 9: Respondents using trails daily or a few times each week in summer and winter



Supports to increase trail use

Respondents were asked to select from a list of factors that might increase their trail use; the three most popular responses were:

- Better routes that connect me to where I want to go
 - This includes improved trails for commuting, trails that are safer and away from cars, and trails connecting neighbourhoods in Whitehorse.
- Better maintained routes (e.g. cleaner and or cleared more often)
 - Better management of snow and ice on trails and sidewalks, as well as managing litter and dog poop by adding garbage cans.
- Having someone to go with

Other important considerations

Respondents also voiced a desire for improved infrastructure. Suggestions included having washroom or outhouse facilities on trails, improved lighting and gravel/pavement trails to promote accessibility and safety, tools for personal safety (bear spray, reflective vests, and headlamps), and equipment to prevent slips, trips, and falls (ice cleats/crampons and walking poles).

Local recreation facilities

Seventy percent of respondents reported using local recreation facilities. Whitehorse offers multiple recreation facilities, including the Canada Games Centre and Takhini Arena, while Dawson City and Watson Lake each have recreation centres. Many small communities also have recreation facilities, though available services vary from single-use spaces such as gymnasiums or seasonal ice rinks to larger recreation complexes.

The most commonly used facility features included gyms and fitness classes, ice rinks, pools, courts, and, in Whitehorse, the indoor walking track. Facility use was more common among respondents in large and medium communities than in small communities. In small and medium communities, recreation facilities also frequently served as community gathering spaces for social events, bowling, and special sporting events.

Figure 10: Percentage of respondents accessing recreation facilities by community size

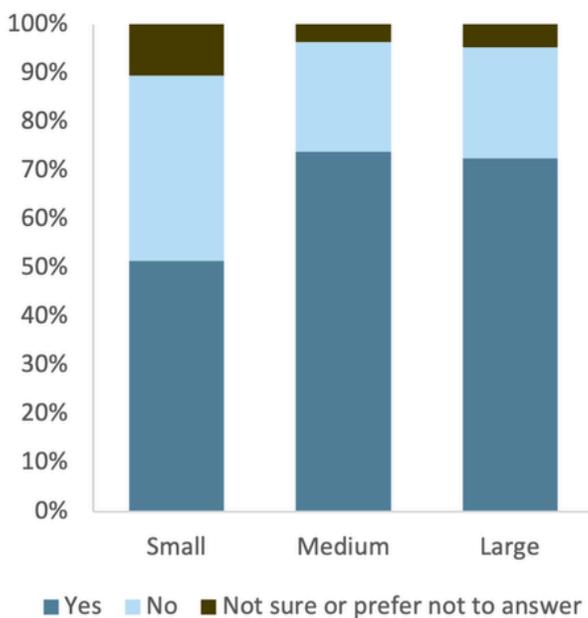
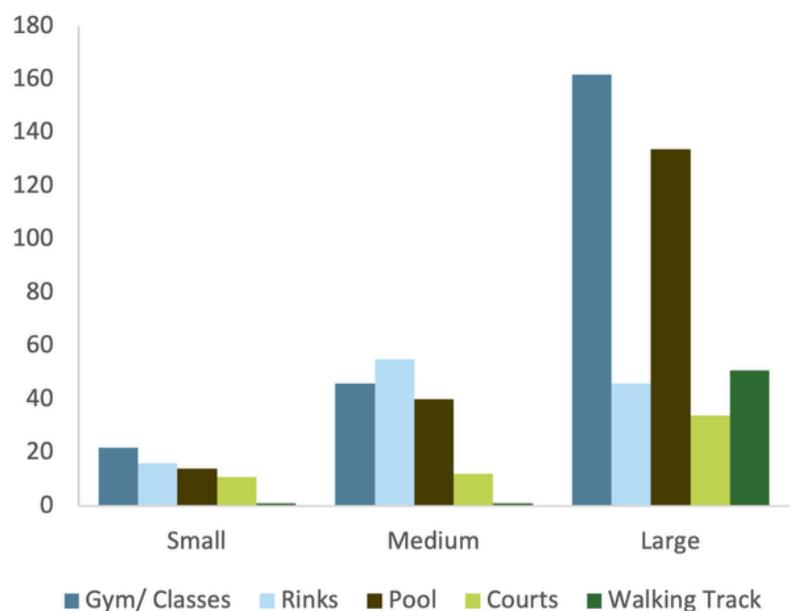


Figure 11: Popular services accessed in recreation facilities



Common reasons for not accessing facilities varied

A common reason among all respondents for not accessing recreation facilities was a preference for spending time outdoors. Respondents from medium-sized communities also highlighted the crowding of facilities and distance to facilities as barriers to access. In small communities, respondents most frequently reported not using recreation facilities due to the absence of facilities or a lack of relevant and interesting programming. Lastly, cost and living too far away (including lacking transportation options) were common barriers to access among respondents in Whitehorse.

More information on recreation center use can be found in [Appendix A](#).

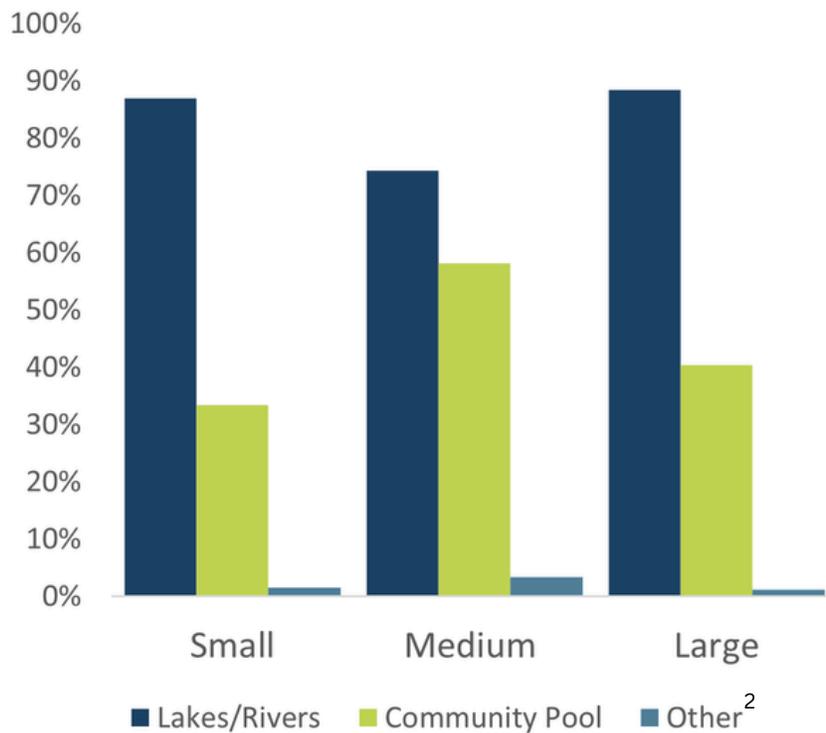
Swimming

Survey questions on swimming and pool use were important for understanding how much and where Yukoners swim in the summer. Overall, 63% of respondents said they swim in the summer, with medium-sized communities reporting the highest percentage at 70.5%. Most respondents (85%) indicated swimming in lakes and rivers, while 44% said they swim in community pools.

Further information on swimming participation and community pool use can be found in [Appendix B](#).



Figure 12: Swimming location by community size



2. Other includes ponds, other swimming places outside of the Yukon, pools in another Yukon community, or private pools

Getting information

Respondents identified several different platforms where they accessed information on recreation and physical activity. These included word of mouth, social media (specifically Facebook), newsletters, bulletin boards, and recreation events.

Physical activity motivators

Respondents identified factors that motivate them to be active. Across all community sizes, primary motivators related to mental or holistic wellness, including:



Other important motivators for physical activity were getting stronger and managing weight.

Figure 13: Physical activity motivators



Physical activity barriers

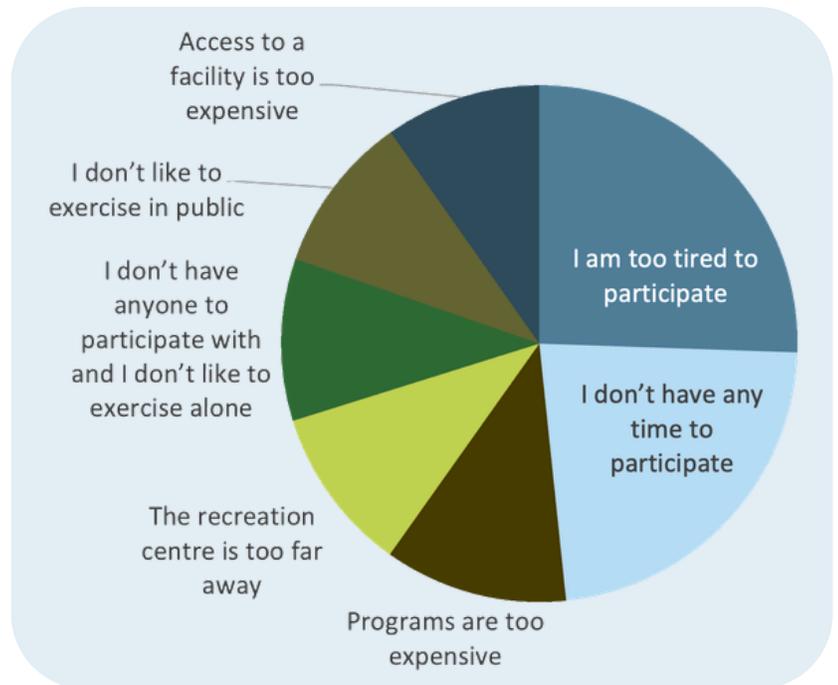
Respondents also identified barriers that made it more difficult to be active. Some of these barriers varied by community size.

Individual barriers: Time and energy

Across all community sizes and groups, the most common barriers were being too tired to participate or not having enough time to participate. Other individual barriers included health issues, nervousness or anxiety surrounding participation and not having anyone to go with.

“Less time spent at work would equal more time and energy for activities”

Figure 14: Physical activity barriers



Service barriers: Cost and access

Cost was a commonly reported barrier to participation, especially in Whitehorse, where facility and program fees may be higher. However, respondents in small and medium communities also identified cost-related challenges, including equipment costs and the overall high cost of living.

Those aged 65+ were the only group where the cost of programs or facility access was not one of the top 3 barriers, instead this group identified that distance to a recreation facility was a primary barrier to participation.

Improved access to relevant programming for specific groups, such as Elders and older adults, families, and beginners, was desired. Additionally, the timing of programming was identified as a barrier, including a lack of programming available outside work hours. Limited transportation to and from recreation sites was also identified as a barrier.

“Reduced costs for exercise classes/programs/membership fees”

“Make outdoor gear and clothing accessible and affordable!!”

“More drop-in programming or programs that require less time commitment”

Needs specific to small and medium communities

In small and medium communities, respondents commonly identified limited access to facilities and/or the need to travel long distances as barriers to participation. Many also expressed interest in expanded programming, including offerings for adults over 65, Elders, intergenerational programming (and/or programs with childcare), outdoor and land-based activities, and training opportunities for community members to get certified. There were also many requests for improved access to equipment, such as low-cost equipment rentals.

“More activities for families, or the ability to find after 5:00pm and weekend child care so I may participate myself”

“More land-based and less sport focused activities would be more appealing to me”

“More training and instructor classes for community members to get certified and provide service to the community”

Community strengths supporting engagement

Many respondents spoke positively about aspects of their communities that support their participation in physical activity. In small and medium communities, several respondents expressed gratitude for local recreation leaders and their efforts to support the community and expressed that they were a crucial part of promoting physical activity engagement.³

“Our rec manager is awesome and is super motivational and is always finding activities for youth in the community!!”

“Recreation leaders are knowledgeable and passionate”

In Whitehorse many felt that the community encourages an active lifestyle.

“Being active is woven in to my life here and it has always been supported by friends, family, and workplaces, which is amazing”

Many respondents also expressed appreciation for the wide variety of available programs and services. Respondents in Dawson City and Watson Lake were very grateful for the available facilities, noting that access was better than is typical for a community of that size.

3. More quotes about appreciation for recreation leaders can be found in [Appendix C](#).

Limitations

This survey may have been more likely to capture Yukoners who already engage in physical activity and recreation than those who do not. The sampling was not random, and this sample may not represent the territory as a whole. While the results do provide a general overview and illustrate trends, they should be used with caution.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the patterns and preferences related to physical activity among Yukoners and explore the motivators, barriers, and community strengths that influence engagement in physical activity. Together with RPAY and an Advisory Group comprised of people with lived experience, community leaders, and community partners, YSPOR co-developed a survey that was completed by more than 700 Yukoners, of whom 273 were from small and medium-sized communities representing 38.7% of responses. This section provides a high-level overview of the survey results in relation to national patterns and trends, highlights novel findings from this year's iteration of the survey, and discusses the implications of what was learned to better meet the physical activity needs of all Yukoners.

Survey results demonstrate that Yukoners report higher rates of physical activity than the rest of Canada, and that more than 73% of respondents are meeting the physical activity recommendations outlined in the 24 Hour Movement Guidelines. Importantly, the high physical activity levels of Yukoners appear to be sustained over time, as similar levels were found in the 2021/2022 Canadian Community Health Survey, which reported that 69.5% of Yukoners were meeting the recommended level of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity compared to 56.0% in Canada and 58.8% in the Northwest Territories (16). Most respondents engaged in outdoor, unstructured recreation as their primary form of physical activity. These types of activities are convenient because they can be completed at any time, do not require facilities, and take advantage of abundant opportunities for outdoor recreation in the Yukon. Unstructured, on-the-land activities were also common in previous YHLS surveys, suggesting that many Yukoners consistently engage in this type of activity. Primary motivators to engage in physical activity include mental and holistic benefits, such as managing stress and feeling peaceful while out on the land. Many respondents also described a culture of active living in the Yukon that supports and encourages participation in physical activity. The primary barriers to engaging in physical activity remain the same as those previously identified in the 2009, 2016, and 2021 YHLS: a lack of time and energy to be active and financial barriers to participation. Likewise, national surveys have identified time and cost as being prevalent barriers to participation, both in urban and rural settings (17).

Small and medium communities

This survey provides some of the only available information on physical activity patterns and preferences specific to rural communities in the Yukon. While physical activity levels were high in both summer and winter, small communities were found to have a large change in physical activity levels as seasons transitioned, with more respondents engaging in physical activity in the summer than in winter. A lack of access to facilities or long travel times to facilities were identified as key barriers to participation in physical activity in small and medium-sized communities. A lack of facility access is a widespread barrier to physical activity participation across rural Canada (17). Further, other studies investigating barriers to physical activity have identified that environmental factors, such as weather, in combination with limited access to indoor recreation opportunities, contribute to seasonal patterns in physical activity in northern rural communities (17-19).

In small communities, more respondents participate in traditional or domestic labour activities, such as hunting, fishing, and being on the land (summer), and firewood management/snow clearing (winter), as primary forms of physical activity, compared with medium and large communities. Recreation leaders were also highlighted as a key strength of these communities, which supports physical activity engagement by providing opportunities and motivation for community members to participate in physical activity. Similarly, national surveys have identified that social support is a critical facilitator for physical activity participation in rural settings (20). Additionally, this suggests that considering cultural context and working with local residents when seeking to understand physical activity patterns and preferences is an important approach when designing promotion initiatives (21).

It is important to recognize that local leaders possess valuable knowledge of their own communities. Future YHLS studies should consider using alternative methodologies for information gathering, such as relying on local sources, which may provide additional depth that is difficult to capture in surveys. Perspectives of local leaders are valuable for understanding the implications of this work. While the survey highlighted broad trends and preferences around physical activity in small and medium communities, local leaders provide additional insight into the unique context, assets, and opportunities within each community.



Future Considerations

Patterns of physical activity show a preference towards unstructured and/or outdoor activities which are seen as part of the Yukon culture.

Consider programming that supports unstructured recreation, such as drop-in activities or facilities. Reduce barriers (fees and schedules) by developing outdoor spaces (e.g., trails and playgrounds) and making equipment freely available (e.g., disc golf, toy boxes/sheds).

Physical activity becomes a social norm when more people have access and can participate. Making recreation and physical activity more inclusive requires removing commonly identified barriers such as time, cost and skill.

Prioritize recreation funding and programming that targets Elders, families, and beginners, and that brings people together, providing social and physical benefits. Improve funding for unstructured, outdoor, and/or on-the-land recreation programming.



Walking, hiking, and non-motorized snow sports are the most popular ways to be physically active.

Encourage regular physical activity patterns. Maintain, and when feasible, develop trails, sidewalks and roads in ways that safely improve opportunities for recreation and active transportation. Establish, care for, and promote routes that connect people safely from home to school, work and shops.

Across the Yukon, recreation places (facilities) and outdoor spaces support a physically active lifestyle. Of significance is the number of people who report using lakes and rivers for swimming, paddling, fishing and skating.

Consider that more adults and youth (aged 3 to 14) report swimming in lakes and rivers as compared to swimming in a community pool (see [Appendix B](#)).

Consider initiatives and programs that will make outdoor, water-based activities safer, especially in communities where there is no pool to learn to swim or no organization teaching ice safety.

The top motivator, across all respondents, is that being physically active supports mental wellness, reduces stress, and promotes a feeling of well-being. Being tired, not having time, and cost make it harder to be physically active.

Implement strategies that promote the mental health benefits of recreation and physical activity and reduce the barriers. Follow the ParticipACTION approach and encourage people to move just a little more each day. Support more drop-in and informal programming in local places and spaces.

Trained, local recreation leaders support Yukon residents to be physically active through their passion, encouragement, and delivery of quality programs and services.

Sustainable recreation requires leaders who have the right skills and knowledge, and wraparound support to stay and grow in their roles.

Consider leadership development a top priority, because facilities cannot operate without people. Invest more in recreation leadership through training, better pay and benefits, and recognition that recreation is a vital community service.

The Yukon continues to show a higher level of physical activity across the population than in other Canadian jurisdictions. Yet barriers to physical activity continue to affect a large part of Yukon's population.

Position recreation and physical activity as essential health promotion and disease prevention strategies. Allocate adequate resources to improve access, especially for equity-owned populations who face increased barriers to access.

Insights into recreation and physical activity patterns and preferences from the Yukon Healthy Living Study benefit policymakers and programmers.

Culturally relevant, up-to-date evidence is necessary to inform decision-makers and local recreation providers. Consider conducting the YHLS every five years. In the future, incorporate alternative information-gathering methods, such as engaging local sources, to gain insights that are difficult to capture through surveys alone.



Appendices

- A. Focus on recreation spaces
- B. Focus on swimming
- C. Appreciation for recreation leaders
- D. All data by question number

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