

Physical Literacy Survey Highlights

Results from a survey of older adults and those who work with them, October 2020

Surveys show that only 17% of Canadian seniors participate in enough physical activity to obtain health benefits. (CLSA) That makes it urgent to explore new approaches and new resources to support active aging.

Active Aging Canada is part of a working group that developed a model of physical literacy in older adults. We are working on a plan to broadcast the model along with resources to support it.

We want to develop materials that truly meet the needs of older adults and the people who work with them.

To that end, we conducted a survey.

We wanted to know if physical literacy was a familiar term.

We asked what it meant to adults and those who work with them.

We asked if they would like to learn more about the concept.

We had an incredible response to our survey.

We heard from 725 older adults and 104 people who work with them.

Older adults

- **Most of the older adults (74%)** had never heard of the term physical literacy until they took part in the survey.
- **We identified 10 themes** from what older adults told us they thought physical literacy meant. “Staying physically active” was the most common theme.
- **The word “knowledge”** recurred in many of the themes. For example, some themes were:
 - o general knowledge of physical activity,
 - o knowledge of the physical limitations of the body,
 - o knowledge about accessible physical activities.
- **Most of the older adults (82%)** said they would be interested in learning more about physical literacy.

The responses told us there is an opportunity to promote the concept of physical literacy to older adults. But we need to further explore our strategy and the terms we use.

People who work with older adults

- **Most respondents** knew the term physical literacy. About a third (34%) said they had a ‘somewhat’ clear understanding, 39% had a ‘very’ clear understanding.
- **While most knew** about the term, fewer said that they understood how physical literacy relates to older adults.
- **We identified nine themes** from what people who work with older adults thought physical literacy meant. The most common theme was “knowledge, motivation, and confidence related to physical activity.”
- **Almost all respondents (95%)** said that they wanted to learn more about how physical literacy could support physical activity in older adults.
- **We presented the respondents** with our working group’s ecological model of physical literacy in older adults. 74% said that they were ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ interested in having the model for older adults formed into a resource.

The survey results tell us we need to do more to understand what resources and supports older adults will need if we use physical literacy as the approach. The goal of our project is to optimize the health of older Canadians. To do that, we have to apply the best evidence we can gather about physical activity and aging.

We will continue our dialogue with older adults and those who work with them. This will inform our PLAY65+ initiative. Active Aging Canada will continue to act as a knowledge broker in this area. This will help ensure that what we learn is available to as wide an audience as possible.

We received funding for this project from the Canadian Institutes of Health’s Research Institute of Aging.