



Steps to Strides

Building sustainable, walkable communities to improve the health of our citizens, our children and our environment

More than half of Ontarians are overweight and one in six is obese – this startling fact was the finding of the Canadian Community Health Survey conducted in 2004.

While there are several factors that have contributed to the rise of overweight and obesity levels, research consistently points to the lack of physical activity as a significant cause.

Recognizing a need

In her 2004 report, "Healthy Weights Healthy Lives," Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Sheela Basrur, notes that the environment in which we live has become obesogenic – our environment encourages choices that result in increased weight and risk for disease.

The average Canadian commuter spends 62 minutes per day commuting. This does not include travel during the workday, running errands, vacation travel or driving children to and from events.
– Statistics Canada 2002

WalkON is a partnership of Central West Ontario regional municipalities that, together, have identified a need to support the development of walkable communities

According to the Ontario College of Family Physicians, research consistently shows that people who live in low-density towns and cities use cars more often (even for short trips) and walk and cycle less than people living in more compact, dense communities. Poorly-designed, sprawling communities force people to drive everywhere, even to buy a litre of milk.

Each kilometre walked reduces the likelihood of a person becoming obese

Sprawl drives more car use. A study conducted by the Heart and Stroke Foundation in 2005 concluded that people living in suburbs and smaller towns rely more on cars to get around and therefore,

Currently, 6.6% of Canadians walk to work, while 1.2% bicycle. A significant number of motor vehicle trips are at a distance that is easy to walk or cycle. When asked, 82% of Canadians indicated they are willing to walk more given appropriate facilities.

– Go For Green: Business Case

get less physical activity and are at greater risk of being overweight or obese.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation research found that each additional kilometre walked per day reduces the likelihood of becoming obese by nearly 5%. Yet, each hour per day spent in a car increases the likelihood of becoming obese by 6%.

The research is clear: it is time for Canadians to embrace walking as a means of transportation



Why Walkable Communities?

There are economic, health, environmental, transportation and social benefits of building and sustaining a community that supports walking as a primary mode of transportation. They include:

- **Our Health:** Reducing health risks such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease currently faced in our communities.
- **Our Environment:** Replacing short distance auto trips that damage the environment by impacting air and water quality.
- **Road Traffic and Congestion:** Reducing road congestion and improving safety by calming auto traffic and reducing maintenance costs.
- **Our Society:** Promoting community cohesion and a heightened sense of place. Discouraging street crime by increasing pedestrian and cycling traffic.
- **Our Economy:** Reducing health care costs.

What is a Walkable Community?

Walkable communities are a critical aspect of a healthy, vibrant, sustainable community.



To encourage citizens to rely on their cars less and choose walking more often, the environment in which they live, work, learn and play must support walking as a form of everyday transportation. Well-designed, compact communities where people can walk to school and work, to stores, parks and restaurants can significantly reduce the need to drive.

The planning features that are important when designing communities that promote walking are:

- **Connectivity:** It is important that sidewalks, trails, pathways are used to connect one area to another in a neighbourhood.
- **Density:** Density refers to the amount of activity found in an area. Medium to high density areas have a high number of people living in an area with a variety of residential structures, businesses, schools, stores and restaurants integrated into the community.



- **Access to Amenities:** To encourage and support walking as a primary mode of transportation, neighbourhoods need to provide access to amenities within a short walking distance.
- **Aesthetics:** Aesthetics refers to the attractiveness of an area and how much it invites further exploration. Aesthetics include landscaping, lighting, variety of building types and availability of amenities along walking routes such as street benches, shade trees and shelter.
- **Safety Along Walkway Routes:** Key aspects of safety along walking routes include separation from the road, traffic calming features, clear and functional sidewalks, adequate lighting, crossing signals and legible street signs.

Enter WalkON

WalkON began in 2004 as a partnership of Heart Health Coordinators from the Central West region of Ontario, including Halton Region, Brant County, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties, Region of Waterloo, Niagara Region and Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. Together, we identified a need to support the development of walkable communities.

We believe that together, we can build sustainable, walkable communities to improve the health of our citizens, our children, and our environment.

Our Mission

The mission of WalkON is to promote the development of communities that support walking for transportation, health and recreation. WalkON seeks to:

- **Mobilize communities** to focus on improving the built environment through education and access to resources.
- **Improve the built environment** in order to support walking as a form of functional, everyday and recreational transportation.
- **Increase the proportion** of residents in Central West Communities who choose walking as a way to be active.

A multi-faceted approach to mobilizing communities to become walkable is necessary to achieve our goals.

WalkON will work at a variety of levels with a number of key groups.

WalkON supports **community members** seeking to make change in their community, the **regional/city staff** who bring recommendations forward to council, and **politicians** who make decisions in regards to planning, permits and infrastructure.

Our Structure

At the heart of WalkON is the **Coordinating Committee**, comprised of Heart Health Coordinators from each Central West Region of Ontario, a representative from the Ministry of Health Promotion, and a project coordinator.

The Coordinating Committee is supported by a dynamic interdisciplinary **Advisory Board** of politicians, planners, representatives from public works and community service, physicians, transportation experts and community members. The Advisory Board provides technical expertise, input and guidance around different aspects of the resources offered by WalkON.

The Coordinating Committee will also work with a diverse **Partnership Group** of regional/provincial groups who share the same passion and commitment for walkable communities.

Each community in Central West will have a **Membership Group**, a group of community members such as politicians, planners, public health professionals, educators, trail enthusiasts and other community interest groups.



Each membership group, with support and resources from the Coordinating Committee, will establish a Walkable Communities Plan for their region/community.

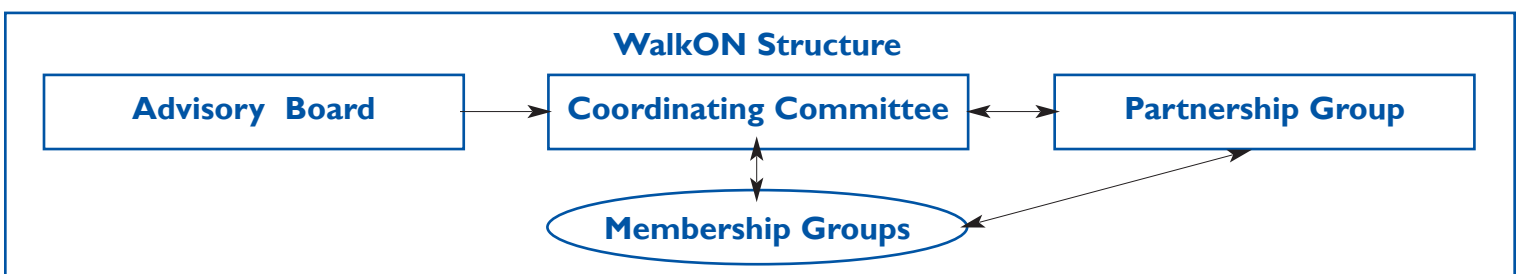
Is there truly a need for walkable communities locally?

In 2005, WalkON conducted a three-prong Environmental Scan which included:

- local interviews in each Central West community.
- a literature review of local, national and global research.
- a global scan of organizations dedicated to walkable communities and pedestrian issues.

Local Interviews

WalkON conducted interviews with key stakeholders in Central West communities. The stakeholders consisted of Medical Officers of Health and senior managers in health units/departments, politicians, and City/Regional Staff.





The interviews were conducted to understand:

- Current needs at a local/regional level
- Key barriers and potential strategies for overcoming these barriers
- The level of support of key stakeholders around creating and/or sustaining walkable communities
- Current policies or guidelines in place to support walkable communities

Those interviewed identified several common barriers in building walkable communities such as:

- Lack of access to amenities in new subdivisions
- Car dependent society
- Lack of funding to support the building of walkable communities
- Lack of community awareness

The interviews indicated a strong need for WalkON to move forward with the following recommended strategies:

- Developing a picture of a walkable community offering real examples with which people can identify
- Educating municipal politicians and the community about the importance of building walkable communities
- Identifying strategies to mobilize the community
- Educating the community and policy makers about best practices linked to walkable communities

Part of a Global Movement

WalkON is a part of a global trend towards creating safe, walkable communities. Organizations in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other parts of Canada are also working on this important issue.

WalkON studied successful initiatives linked to building walkable communities such as Walk Edmonton, Walk Arlington, Walk Boston, America Walks and Wisconsin Walks. WalkON evaluated the strategy, programs, impact, budget, and structure of each group.

Walkable communities are a critical aspect of a healthy, vibrant, sustainable community.

From Baby Steps to Bold Strides

In 2006 and 2007, WalkON will focus on developing the Advisory Board, Partnership Group and establishing Membership Groups in each Central West community.

A web site has been launched and includes information and resources for a variety of audiences.

A Pedestrian Charter Toolkit and Walkability Toolkit are currently under development and will be available online in the members section of the web site in 2006. Local information sessions and Walkable Community Workshops will be developed in the spring and summer and brought to communities in the fall of 2006.

In 2007, there will be a roll out of resources to local politicians and municipal staff including Best Practice Research and Information Session. Stay tuned!

WalkON is committed to offering research, best practices, and resources that will provide value for all of our key stakeholders.

For more details on WalkON, including timelines and work in progress, please visit our web site at www.walkon.ca.

May 2006

Key Future Dates



Summer '06:

- Design of Walkable Communities Workshop and Education Seminar



Winter '07:

- Launch Pedestrian Charter Toolkit and Walkability Toolkit



Fall '07:

- Best Practice Seminar for key stakeholders



Fall '06:

- Launch Pilot Walkable Communities Workshop
- Launch Education Seminars in local communities



Spring '07:

- Launch best practice research around planning tools to support walkable communities