

A Look at Leisure

Participation Among Older Adults

Introduction

The aging of the population in Alberta has implications for recreational preferences and delivery of recreation services. As Albertans get older their recreational needs and interests will change and demand will increase for activities and services specific to older adults. Driven by the arrival of the first Baby-Boomers at their senior years, it can be expected that demand pressures from older adults will continue for the next two decades. This bulletin examines the current participation patterns of Albertans aged 55 and over. The bulletin focuses only on household participation rates as recorded in the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*.

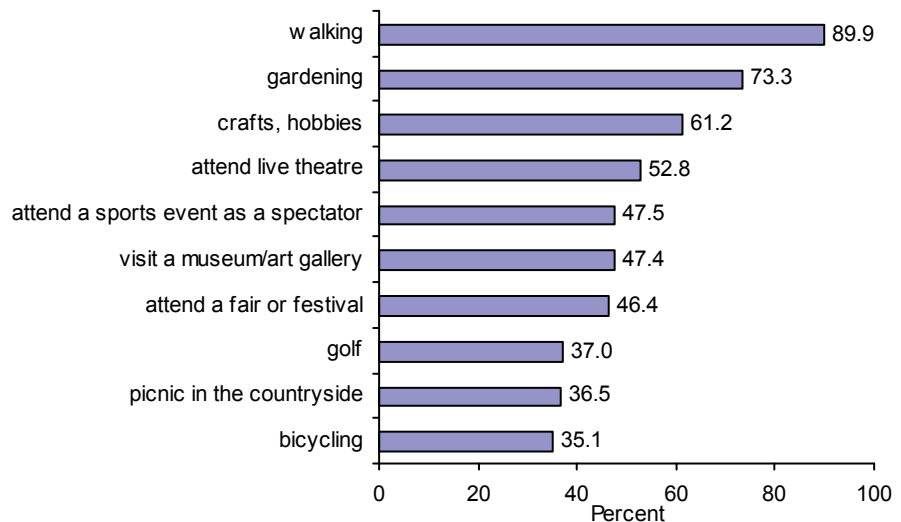
Overview of Participation

Nine out of 10 respondents over the age of 55 take part in walking (Chart 1). This is followed by gardening at 73.3%, crafts/hobbies, and attending live theatre, both of which are taken part in by over half of adults over the age of 55. Of the remaining 10 leading activities for older adults most are fairly passive activities - attending a sports event as a spectator, attending a fair or festival, visiting a museum/art gallery, and picnicking in the countryside - with only golf and bicycling being activities that might be classed as 'active'.

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Chart 1
Most Popular Recreational Activities Among Albertans 55 and Older



Participation by Age Group

The highest percentage of walkers is found in the 55 to 64 age group (94.3%), with 89.9% of the 65 to 74 group also taking part (Chart 2). The participation rates for walking declines as age increases, with 80.2% of those 75 and over reporting to have taken part, leaving approximately 20% who have not.

For each of the top 10 activities, participation rates decline with age. The participation rate for gardening remains constant for the 55 to 64 group and the 65 to 74 group before declining among those who are 75 or older, and for walking the rate is fairly consistent for the 55 to 64 and 65 to 74 groups before dropping off for the 75 and over group.

For those 75 and over, participation rates for each of the remaining eight activities are below 50%. This is quite different to those in the 55 to 64 group where participation rates do not fall below the 50% level until the eighth ranked activity (bicycling) is reached. Such differences raise a question about the access to suitable opportunities for those 75 and over and their own motivations to want to continue to take part in recreation as they get older.

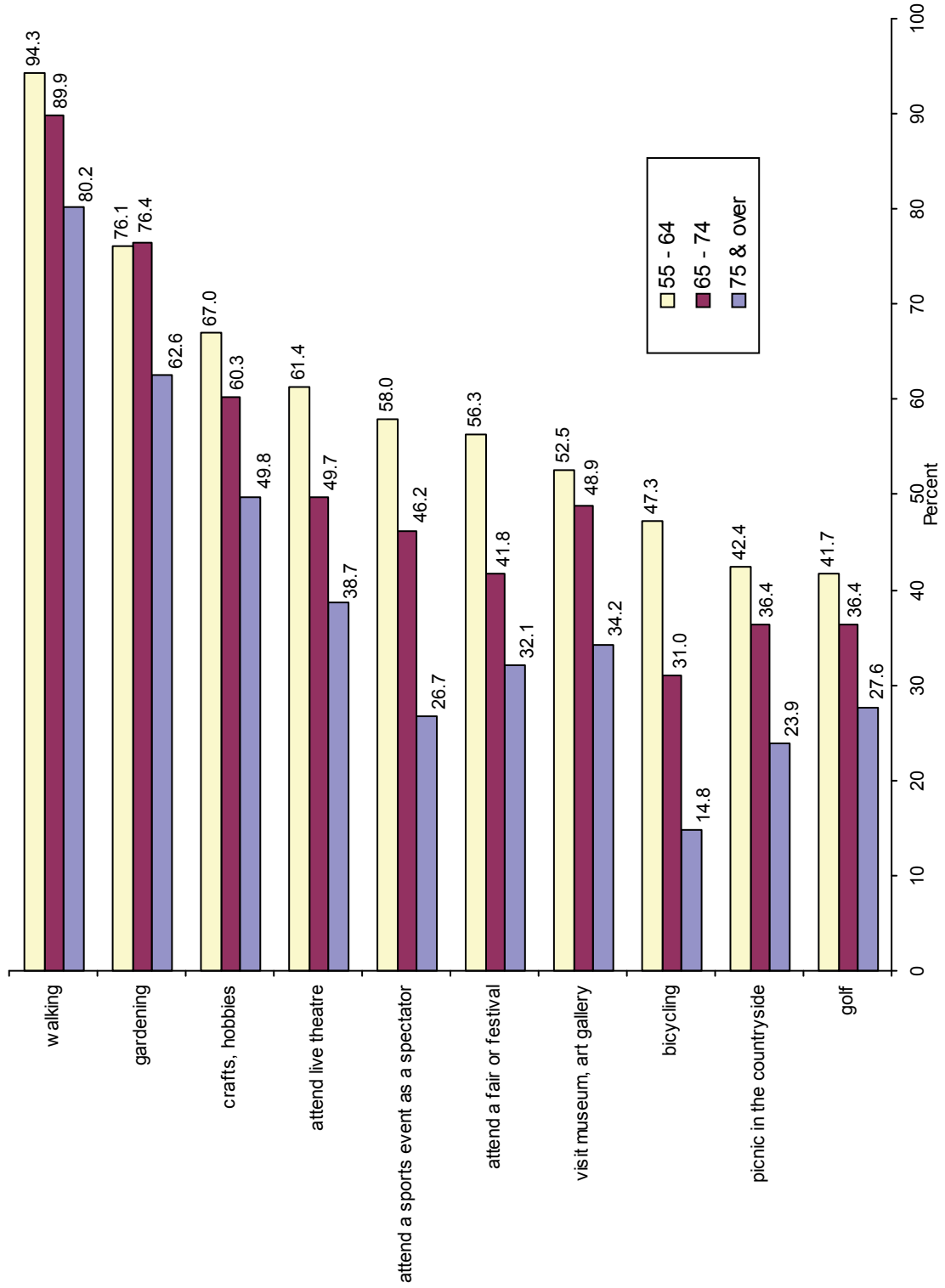
Trends Between Older Age Groups

Of further interest is the relative shift in participation levels and rank order among the top five activities associated with each group of older adults. Gardening, taking part in crafts and hobbies, and attending live theatre are activities that are the second, third and fourth most popular activities among respondents over the age of 55. However, among those in the 55 to 64 age group, attending a sports event as a spectator ranks fifth, then sixth for those 65 to 74 and eighth for those 75 and over. By contrast, visiting a museum/art gallery is ranked seventh for those in the 55 to 64 group but becomes the fifth ranking activity for those in the 65 to 74 and 75 and over groups. These changes suggest that the oldest Albertans look for different types of fulfillment from their recreational time than others.

Among the many activities that the *Alberta Recreation Survey* asks about, some activities experience notable changes in participation as age increases:

- picnicking in the countryside increases from ninth rank for the 55 to 64 group to eighth for those 65 to 74 before declining to 10th for those over 75,
- golf increases from 11th for those in the 55 to 64 group to ninth for those 65 to 74 and to seventh for those 75 and over,
- swimming in pools increases from 14th for the 55 to 64 group to 10th for those aged between 65 and 74, and is ninth for those 75 and over,
- bingo ranks 24th for those 55 to 64 but increases significantly to 13th for those in the 65 to 74 group and moves to 11th for the 75 and over group,
- fishing also increases significantly from 22nd for the 55 to 64 group to 14th for the 65 to 74 before falling back to 18th for the 75 and over group,
- camping also increases from 15th rank for those 55 to 64 to 11th for the 65 to 74 group before decreasing to 21st rank among those 75 and over.

Chart 2
Relative Popularity of the Top 10 Recreational Activities Among Albertans 55 and Older
By Age Group



Other activities become less popular as age increases and include:

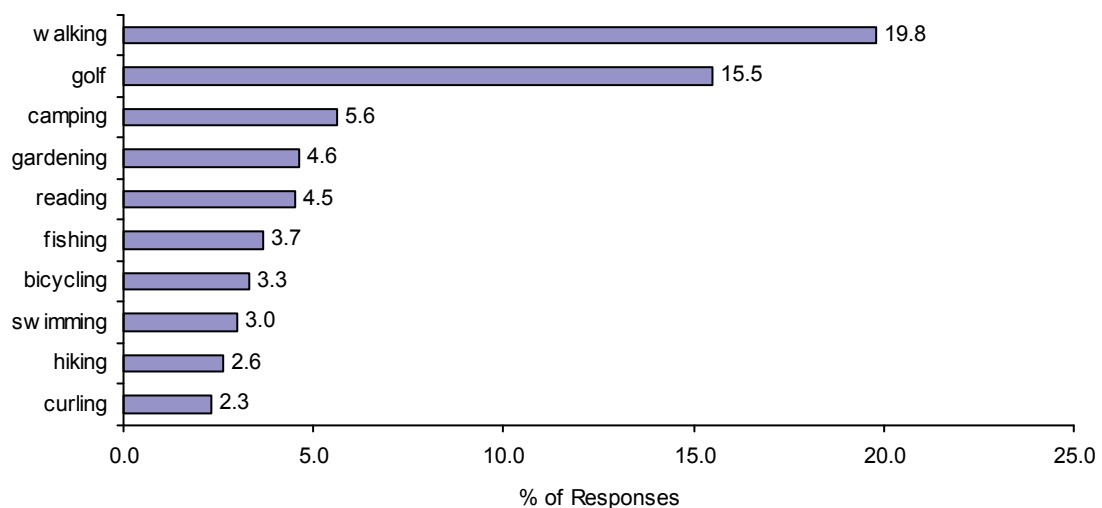
- bicycling, ranked eighth for those 55 to 64 but drops to 17th for those 75 and over,
- playing video, computer or electronic games drops from 10th among those 55 to 64, to 17th for those 65 to 74 but increases to 14th for those 75 and over,
- aerobics/fitness/aquasize/yoga moves from 12th rank for those 55 to 64 to 15th for those in the 65 to 74 and 75 and over groups,
- attending educational courses ranks 13th for the 55 to 64 group but is 20th for those in the 65 to 74 and 75 and over groups,
- day hiking falls from 17th among those 55 to 64 to 21st for those 65 to 74 and 22nd for those 75 or older.

These changes reflect the changing needs and interests of different groups of older adults and may also be reflecting the range and type of opportunities available to these different age groups.

Favourites Among Older Adults

In addition to asking respondents about the activities they take part in, the *Alberta Recreation Survey* also asks respondents to name their favourite activities. From the 968 responses provided by respondents over the age of 55, walking ranked first, followed by golf and camping (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Top 10 Favourite Recreation Activities Among Albertans 55 and Older

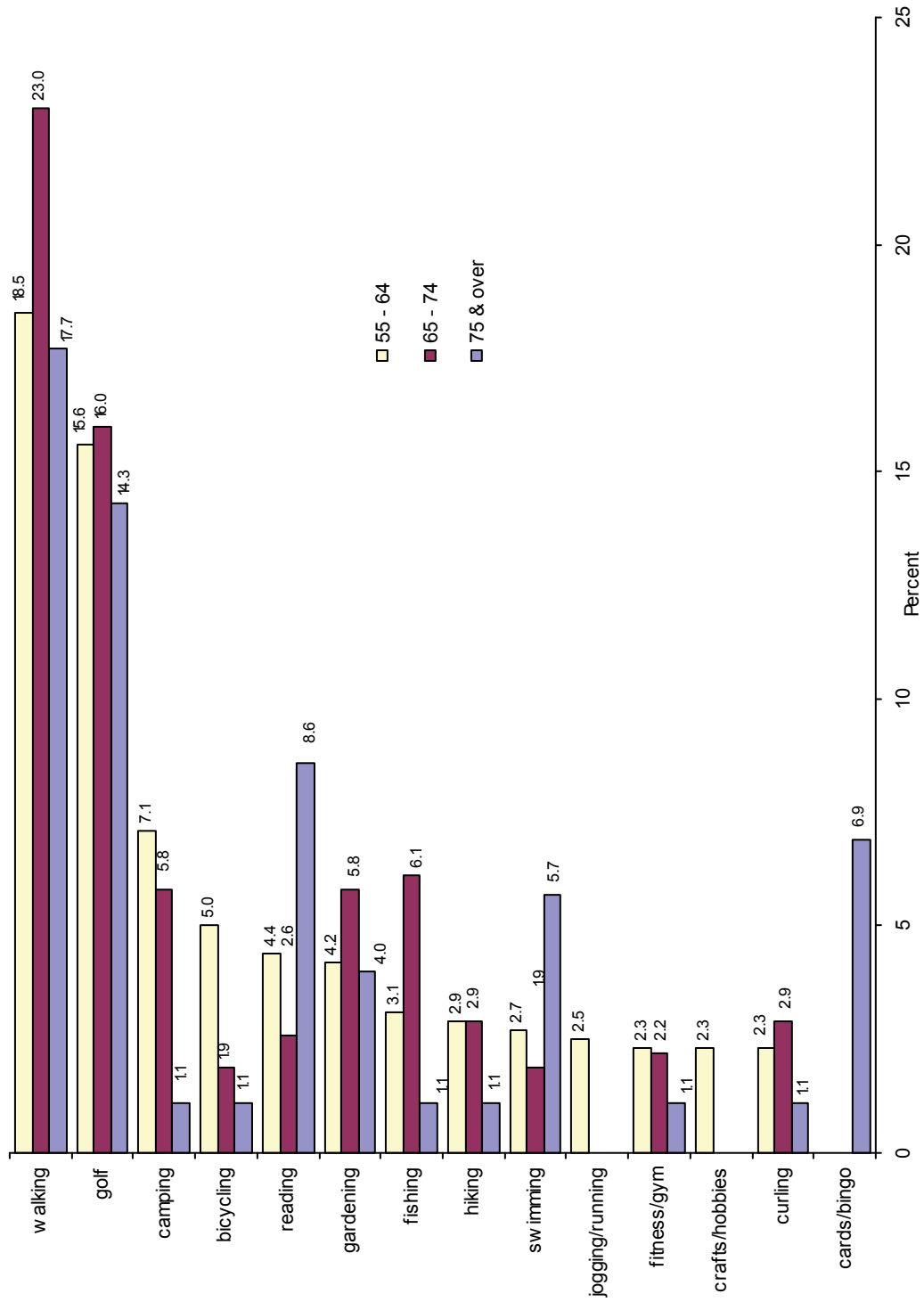


Overall, the top 10 activities associated with the 55 to 64 and 65 to 74 age groups are largely the same, and include a number of activities that are relatively strenuous. This is illustrated in Chart 4. Walking ranks as the first favourite activity for those in each of the 55 to 64, 65 to 74, and 75 and over age groups. Golf also holds its second place ranking across these groups. Camping ranks third for the 55 to 64 group and fourth for the 65 to 74 group but is outside of the top 10 favourite activities for those 75 and over.

Similarly, bicycling which ranks fourth for the 55 to 64 age group, drops to 11th rank for those in the 65 to 74 and 75 and over groups. For those 75 and over, more passive activities become popular, including playing cards, watching television, playing bingo, writing, sewing, and doing puzzles, all of which are also among the leading favourite activities for this oldest age group.

These findings show that there is a change in activity preferences as we get older. However, the change need not always be from relative active pastimes to those that are more passive. Swimming, for example is the favourite of more adults aged 75 and over (5.7%) than adults in either of the two other age groups. There appears, then, to be a continued interest in physically demanding activities among the oldest members of the population just as there is interest in more passive activities such as playing cards or bingo, or reading.

Chart 4
Relative Popularity of the Favourite Recreational Activities
Among Albertans 55 and Older By Age Group



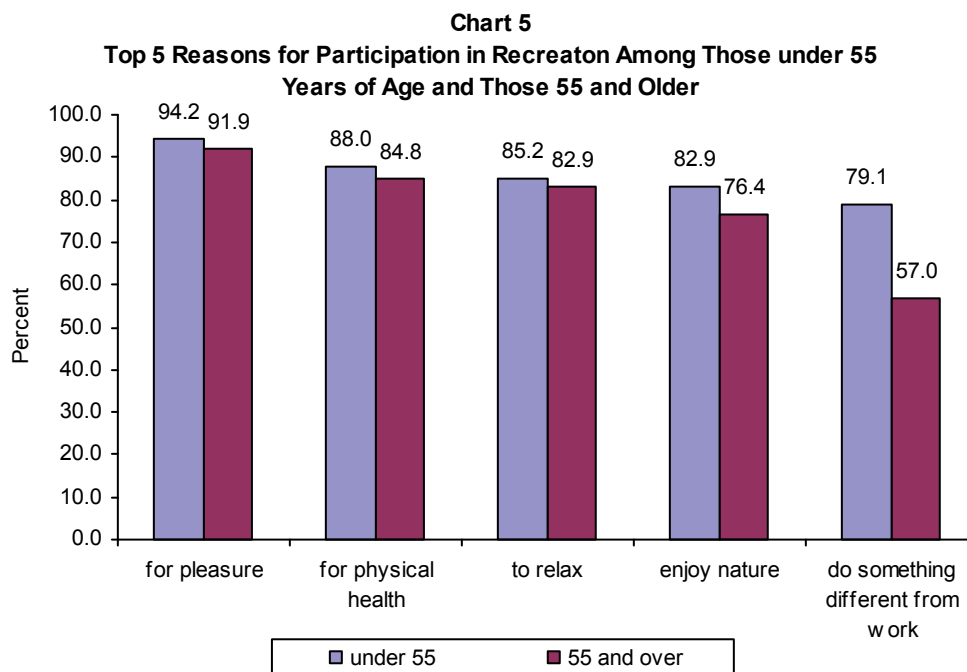
Motivations

The *Alberta Recreation Survey* includes a question about the affect that a set of 20 possible reasons have on participation in recreation by respondents. The results from this question can be examined by age group to identify similarities and differences.

Among all respondents to the survey, regardless of age, five reasons were selected by more than three-quarters of respondents. These were:

1. for pleasure (87.2%),
2. for physical health or exercise (82.3%),
3. to relax (77.8%),
4. to enjoy nature (70.4%),
5. to do something different from work (63.3%).

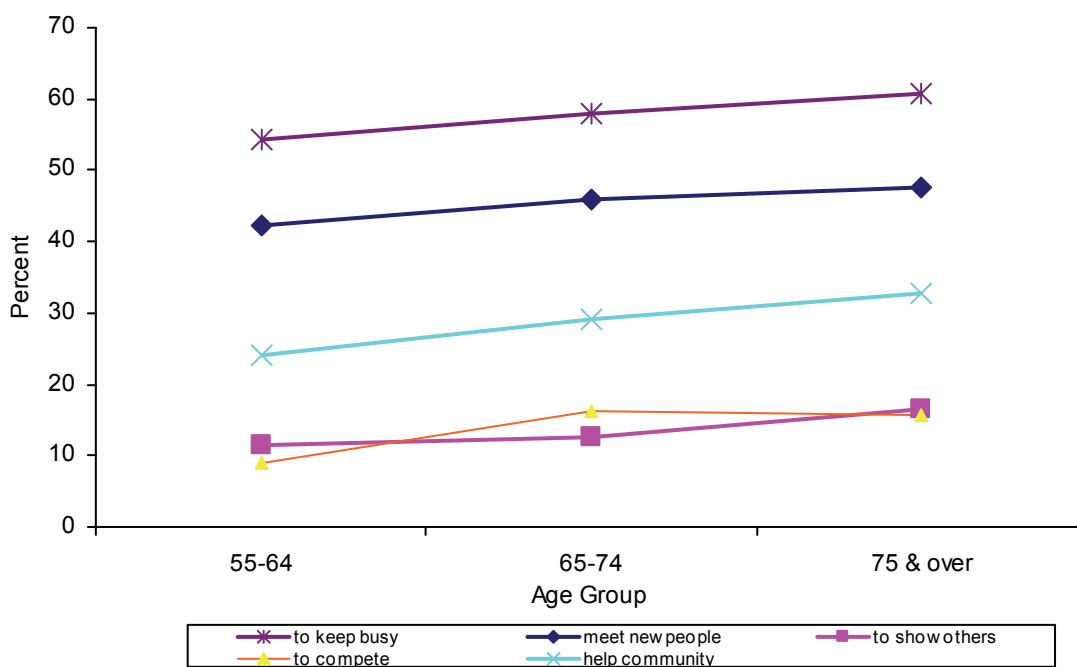
The three highest ranked reasons consistently make-up the three leading reasons among respondents under the age of 55 years as well as those over the age of 55 (Chart 5). There is also little difference between the age groups that comprise the over 55 category.



Of further note is the relative percentage of respondents from each age group who select each reason and the trends that emerge across age groups. Chart 6 shows that five of the reasons investigated in the *Alberta Recreation Survey* increase in importance with age.

Keeping busy is important to a higher percentage of older respondents. This reason is important or very important to 60.9% of those respondents from the 75 and over age group compared to 54.2% of the 55 to 64 group and 52.9% of the under 55 group. A similar trend, although among relatively smaller percentages of respondents in each age group, affects the reasons ‘to meet new people’, ‘to show others can do it’, ‘to help the community’, and interestingly, ‘to compete’. From these results it appears that the oldest members of society take part in recreation in order to satisfy both their own desire to be active and also to give something back to their communities.

Chart 6
Increasing Importance of Motivations with Age



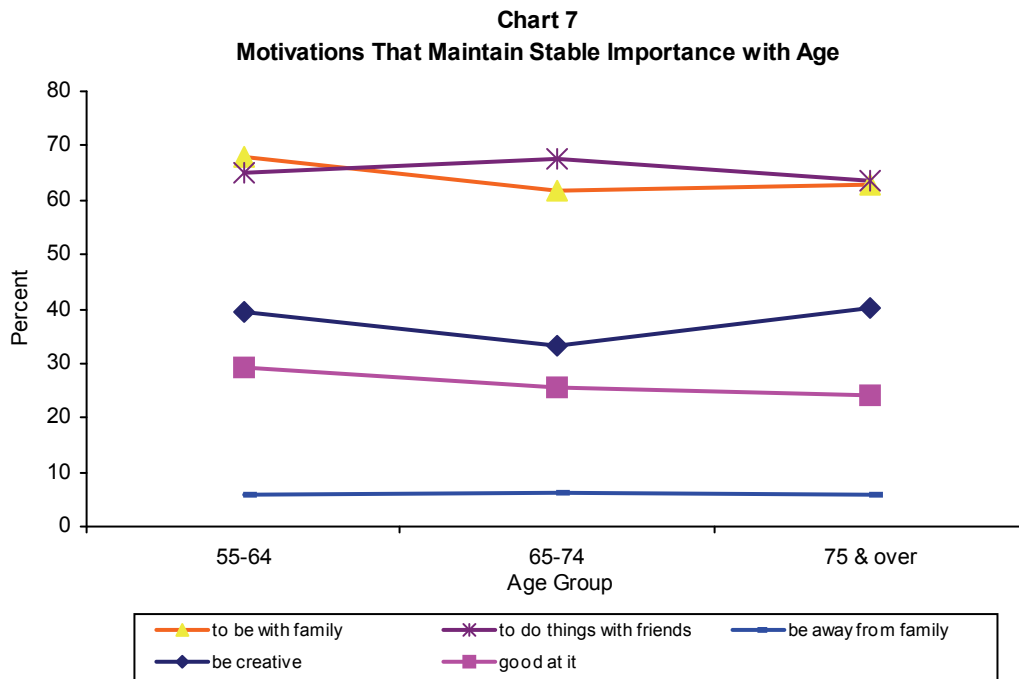
Further consideration of the rank order of this group of motivations shows that there are differences between the age groups (Table 1). Respondents from the 75 and over age group (47.6%) are more likely to consider meeting new people to be important or very important than respondents in the 55 to 64 age group (42.3%). Those over the age of 75 rank this reason eighth whereas those in the 55 to 64 group rank it 13th, and those in the 65 to 74 group rank it as 12th.

Table 1
Rank Order of Motivating Factors By Older Age Group

Motivation	Ranking For Older Age Groups		
	55 to 64	65 to 74	75 and over
For pleasure	1	1	1
To relax	2	3	3
For physical health or exercise	3	2	2
To enjoy nature	4	4	7
To be with family	5	6	5
To do something different from work	6	11	13
To improve skills or knowledge	7	8	9
To do things with friends	8	5	4
To learn new skills and abilities	9	10	11
For a challenge	10	9	10
To keep busy	11	7	6
For excitement	12	13	14
To meet new people	13	12	8
To be creative	14	14	12
Being good at it	15	16	16
To be alone	16	17	19
To help community	17	15	15
To show others can do it	18	19	17
To compete with others	19	18	18
To be away from family	20	20	20

There are some noteworthy differences between age groups for some of the other reasons that the *Alberta Recreation Survey* investigates. Four potential motivating factors have about the same level of importance across all of the older age groups (Chart 7). Of these, 'to do things with friends' and 'to be with family' are important to up to two-thirds of each age group. However, a comparison of the rank order of these two reasons shown in Table 1 reveals, for example, that the reason 'to be with family', ranks fifth among those in the 55 to 64 group and the 75 and over group, while it ranks at sixth among the 65 to 74 group.

By comparison, the reason ‘to do things with friends’ ranks eighth among survey respondents in the 55 to 64 group, but becomes more important as age increases, rising to fifth rank for the 65 to 74 group and fourth for those in the 75 and over group. So, while the value placed on family maintains its high importance as we age, the value on friends and the broader social circle becomes more important as age increases.



Nine of the 20 motivations tested on the *Alberta Recreation Survey* show a downward trend with regard to the percentage of respondents across the older age groups rating them as important or very important (Chart 8). Among those in the 55 to 64 group, 95.2% reported that the reason ‘for pleasure’ was important or very important. This rate decreased to 91.9% among those in the 65 to 74 group and to 82% for those in the 75 and over group. It seems that pleasure becomes somewhat less important as age increases.

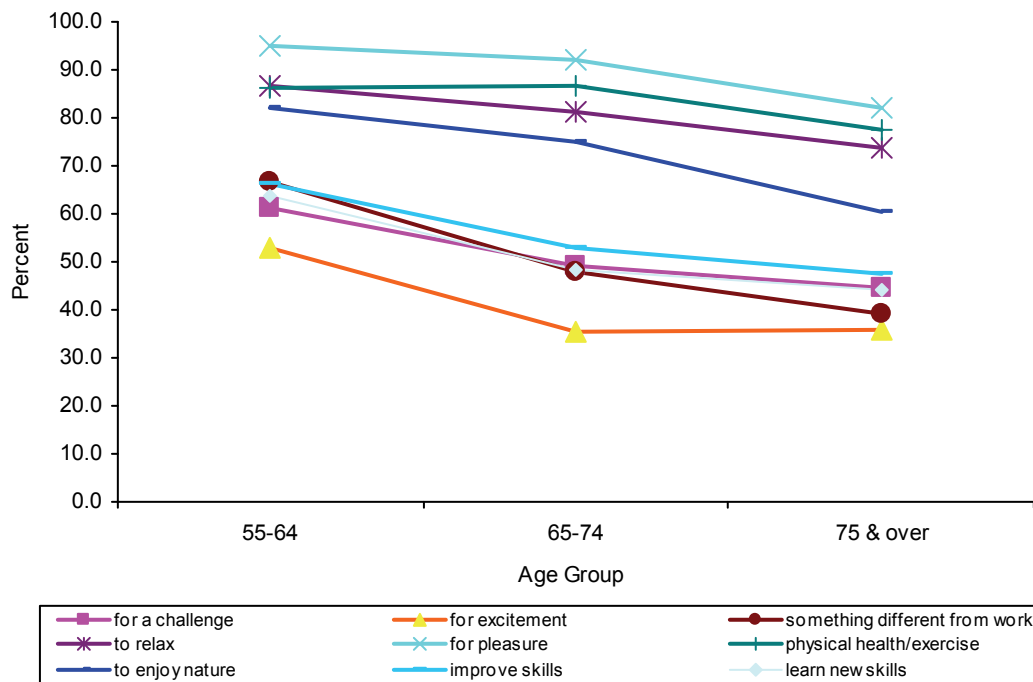
A similar trend is evident for the second ranked reason of ‘for physical health or exercise’. Of those aged between 55 and 64, 86.2% indicated this to be important or very important and an almost identical percentage (86.8%) of the 65 to 74 group gave the same response. Among those 75 and over, 77.5% provided an important or very important rating.

For most of the motivations shown in Chart 8, the rank order shown in Table 1 remains at about the same level for each. There are, however, two reasons that experience notable changes. The reason ‘to enjoy nature’ ranks fourth for those in the 55 to 64 and 65 to 74 age groups but falls to seventh for those 75 and over. This may reflect an increasing difficulty for those from the oldest age group to access nature-related opportunities.

More consistent is that the reason ‘to do something different from work’ ranks 11th for those in the 65

to 74 group and 13th for those 75 and over but is sixth for those in the 55 to 64 group. Clearly this trend reflects the continuing participation in the workforce of those 55 to 64. For future survey analysis, it will be interesting to see if the current rank of 11th for the 65 to 74 group, changes as members of this group continue to work past standard retirement age.

Chart 8
Decreasing Importance of Motivations with Age



Further Information:

Sport and Recreation Branch
 Alberta Tourism, Parks,
 Recreation and Culture
 9th Floor,
 Standard Life Centre
 10405 Jasper Avenue
 Edmonton, Alberta
 T5J 4R7
 Phone: (780) 427-6549
 Fax: (780) 427-5140
 Website: www.tprc.alberta.ca

Implications

Activity preferences and reasons for taking part do change as we get older. From the *Alberta Recreation Survey* data there is evidence of a shift from more energetic pursuits to more passive ones as age increases. However, there is also evidence that activities such as swimming, golf and curling remain popular among those who have reached the age of 65.

The reasons for taking part in recreation also exhibit a relationship with age of respondents. Those under 65 tend to take part because they still value the physical health benefits and because they want a diversion from their everyday work and family commitments. Those over 65 who don't have the distraction of work are looking to keep busy and to spend time with family and friends. The shift in motivational factors can determine the type of recreational opportunities made available to older adults. While in general, activities should focus on meeting the social needs of older people, there is still an interest in more energetic activities such as swimming and curling, and these might be the focus for social recreation programming.