

# A Look at Leisure

## Keeping the Momentum: How Life Cycle Influences Motivations and Constraints to Participation

### Inside this issue:

Introduction	1
Motivations Among Albertans	1
Constraints	7
Environmental Scan	12
Implications for Practitioners	14
References	14

### Introduction

The *Alberta Recreation Survey* has been conducted every four years since 1981. The seven surveys in the series provide a wealth of data about how Albertans participate in recreation. This bulletin examines the relationship between the motivations and constraints that influence Albertans' participation in recreational activities with specific reference to Albertans' stage of life.

As we age we take part in recreation for different reasons and the constraints that affect how and where we participate can change. The discussion in this bulletin uses the data collected about motivations and constraints and compares it to the age of respondents and their household composition, as measures of life cycle stage. By understanding these relationships, practitioners will be better able to design and deliver programs and services that capitalize on the reasons for participation while mitigating the constraints.

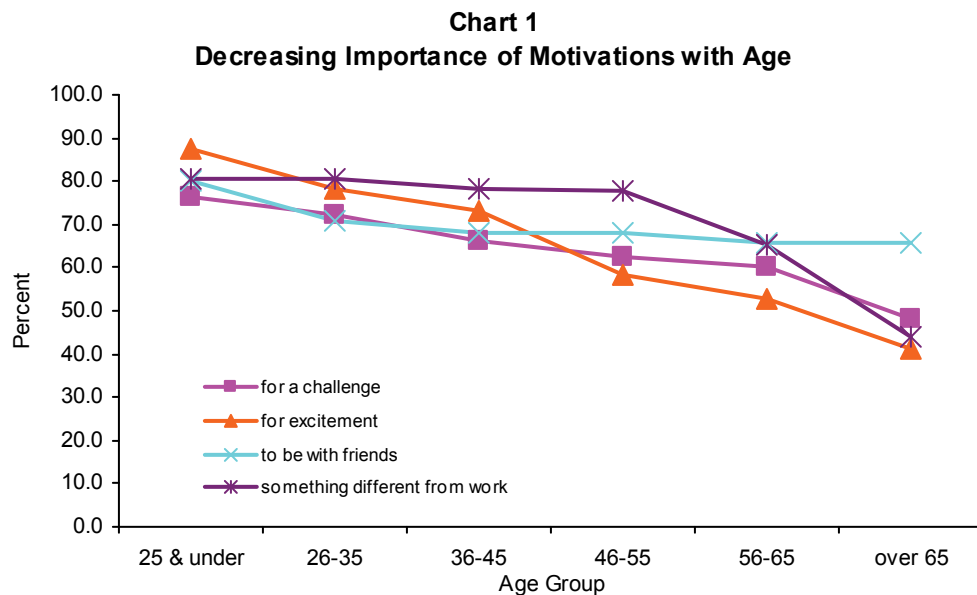
### Motivations Among Albertans

The most significant relationships between the motivations addressed on the *Alberta Recreation Survey* are with the age of respondents. As none of the constraints included in the survey were found to be statistically significant with household composition, the discussion of this factor focuses on general trends in the data to provide a guide for practitioners.

#### By Age

Many of the motivational factors addressed in the survey decrease in importance as age increases. Chart 1 shows how four of these factors follow this trend. Respondents aged 25 and under assign the greatest importance of all age groups to doing something different from work, taking part for excitement, for a challenge, and to be with friends.

The social aspect of being with friends has a fairly flat profile indicating that social

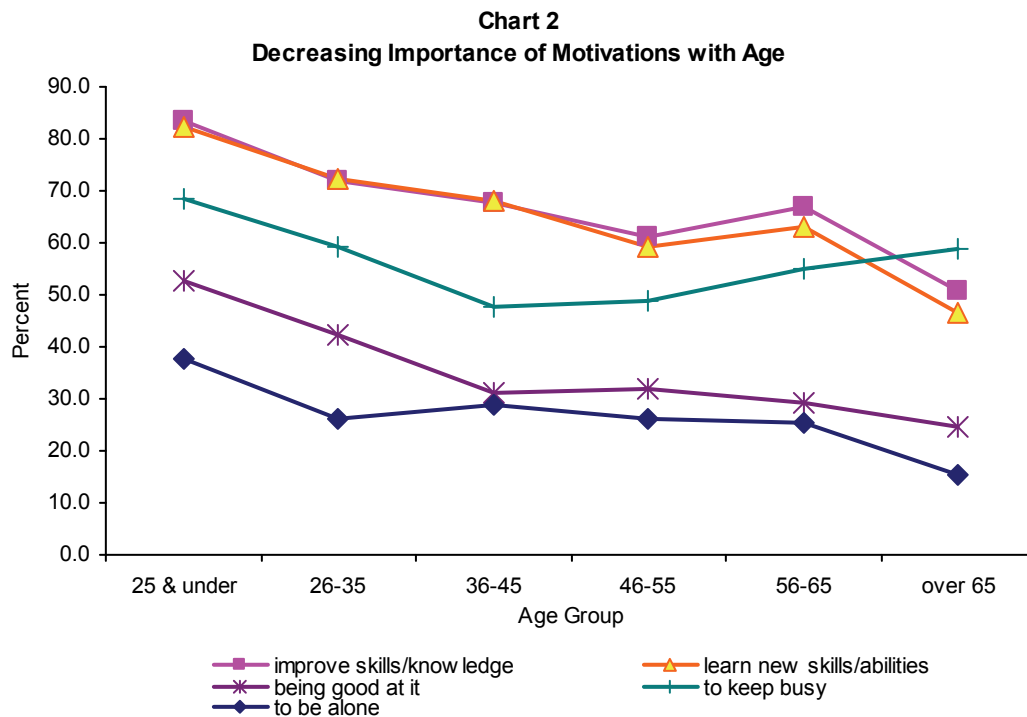


interaction is a key benefit for Albertans of all ages. However, the decline in importance of the reasons participating ‘to do something different from work’, ‘for a challenge’ and ‘for excitement’ suggests changing priorities and interests as age increases.

That doing something different from work is less important to older Albertans, for example, reflects the increasing rate of retirement among those over the age of 55. Taking part in recreation for a challenge or excitement becomes less important with age and points to a desire for different stimuli.

Chart 2 shows that four factors show a downward trend and decrease in importance for Albertans who are 45 years of age or younger. Improving skills and knowledge, and learning new skills and abilities are most important to those 25 and under. As age increases, however, the relative importance of these reasons declines to age 55. Interestingly, after age 55 the desire to learn returns somewhat, perhaps after children have left home and more free time is available. After age 65 this desire again begins to fall away raising a question about how to keep older adults involved in recreation as they reach their retirement years.

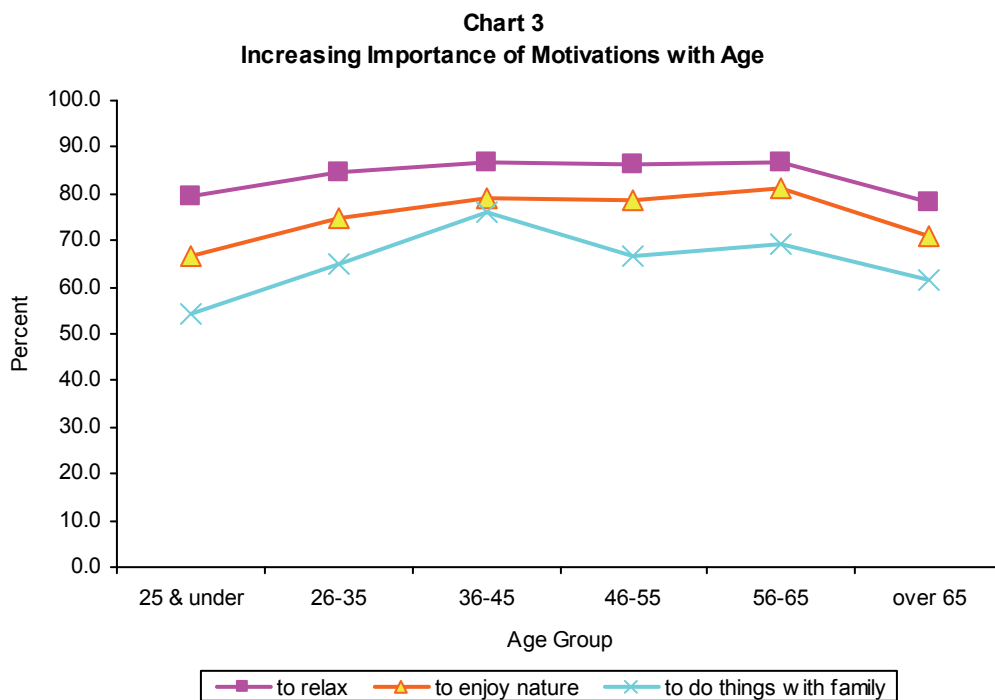
The reason ‘to keep busy’ experiences a similar trend but rather than falling off after the age of 65, this reason continues to be rated as being of increasing importance, a finding that demonstrates that older Albertans have a desire to fill their spare/leisure time with recreational pursuits.



Being good at an activity is most important to those 25 and under but the importance of this reason declines steadily to the age of 45 at which point the trend line becomes flat until the age of 55. After the age of 55, importance declines among those over the age of 65, who clearly seek other benefits from their recreational benefits. This includes being part of a social group since the reason 'to be alone' is important to less than 20% of those under 65, indicating that a social need exists among this older group.

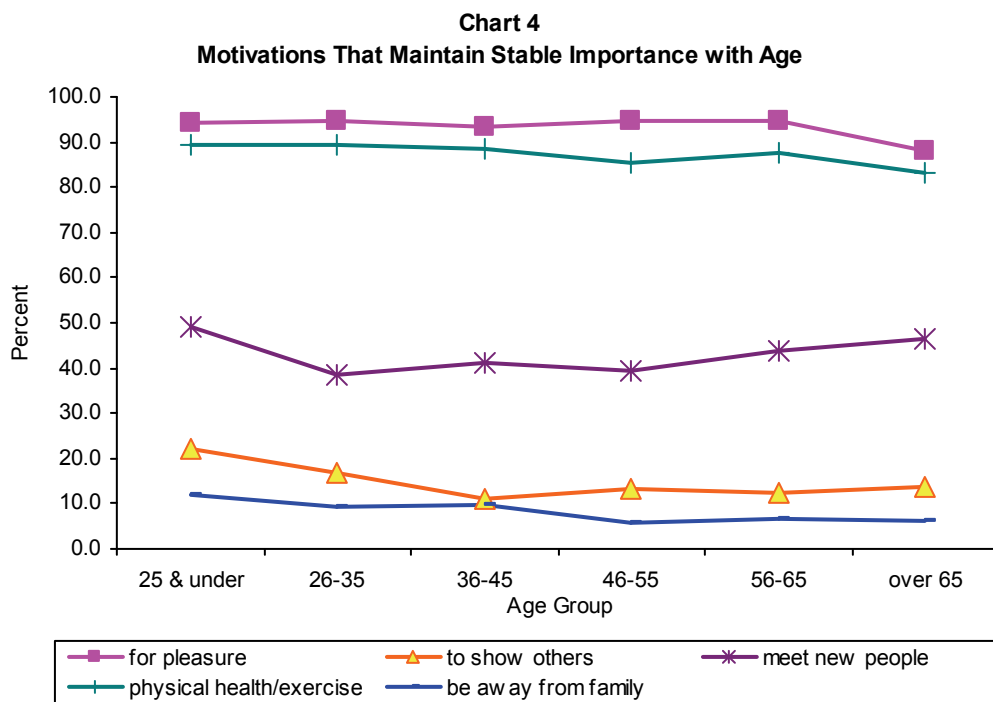
Several reasons increase in importance as age increases (Chart 3). The reason, 'to relax' is rated as important by 79.3% of those 25 and under and becomes increasingly important up to age 45, a possible reflection of the desire to get away from everyday pressures. Between the ages of 46 and 65, this reason remains important to approximately 86% before dropping to 78% for those over the age of 65, a time when more free time becomes available as work is no longer the driving force behind personal schedules.

A similar trend is evident for the reason 'to enjoy nature'. This reason is most important to those in the 56 to 65 age group at 81.4%, having increased from 66.8% for those 25 and under. For those over 65, 'to enjoy nature' begins to decline to 70.8%.



Doing things with family is increasingly important between the ages of 26 and 45, the years when family nurturing is prevalent. However, this reason becomes relatively less important for those over the age of 45 reflecting the aging and departure of children from the family home. Nonetheless, over 60% of Albertans over the age of 65 continue to consider this reason important in their lives suggesting a desire to keep family close.

The motivations described as ‘for pleasure’ and ‘for physical health and exercise’ are important to over 85% of all age groups (Chart 4). It is noticeable, however, that the rate of importance for ‘physical health and exercise’ is somewhat less for those over the age of 45 compared to younger people, perhaps suggesting that the health benefits of recreation are less recognized or desired less among those in older age cohorts.

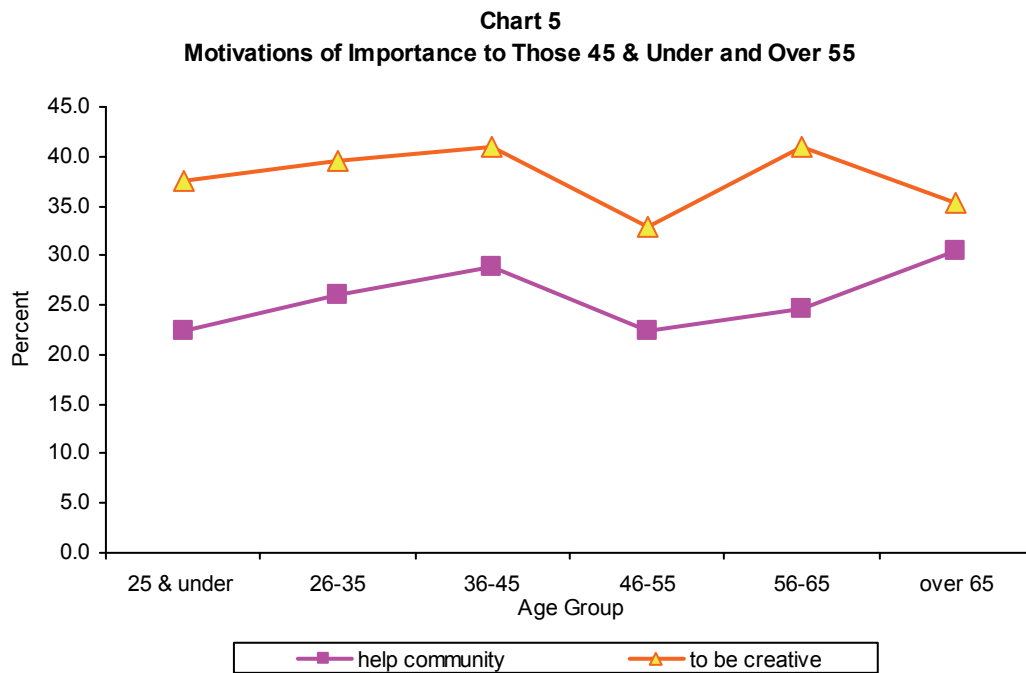


Close to half of those 25 and under consider the socializing factor ‘to meet new people’ to be important. For those between the ages of 26 and 55 about 40% continue to rate this as important but with an increasing percentage after the age of 55. The social dimension, then, is shared by the youngest and oldest respondents, either side of the age cohort that is most likely to be raising children (26 to 55).

The reasons ‘to show others’ and ‘to be away from family’ are least popular and have relatively stable profiles across age groups. ‘To show others’ appears to be slightly more important to those 25 and under (22%) but its importance falls to 11% for those in the 36 to 45 age group, and remains relatively stable at this level across the older age groups.

Similarly, ‘to be away from family’ is given more importance by those aged 25 and under (12%) but for those in the 36 to 45 group importance is at 10% and thereafter, the rate drops to approximately 6% across the three older age groups.

Chart 5 shows that the reasons ‘to help community’ and ‘to be creative’ have similar age profiles. Both reasons are at least somewhat important to those 25 and under but importance increases to age 45. After age 45, the importance of each drops but then recovers and increases to age 55. At this point, the reason ‘to be creative’ begins to decline for a second time for those over 55. By contrast, ‘to help the community’ continues to be important for older adults, indicating a desire among older adults to remain involved with their community.



## By Household

Eight of the 19 motivations that are included in the *Alberta Recreation Survey* are significantly associated with the household composition of respondents (Table 1). Couples with children, for example, are the most likely to take part in recreation 'to do something different from work', 'for excitement' and 'to be with family'. Single parents also want 'excitement', 'to meet new people', 'to do something different from work', and 'to be alone'. They are also the most likely to indicate 'to be away from family', perhaps seeking an opportunity to get away from the stresses of parenting.

Table 1  
Motivations that are Significantly Associated with Household Type

Reason	Household Composition
To show others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single adult</li> <li>• multiple adults*</li> </ul>
For excitement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• couple with children</li> <li>• single parent</li> </ul>
To keep busy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single adult</li> <li>• multiple adults</li> </ul>
To be with family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• couple with children</li> </ul>
To meet new people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single adult</li> <li>• single parent</li> </ul>
To do something different from work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• couple with children</li> <li>• single parent</li> </ul>
To be alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single adult</li> <li>• single parent</li> </ul>
To be away from family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single parent</li> <li>• multiple adults</li> </ul>

\* Multiple adult households include related or unrelated adults some with children and some without.

Single adults also take part 'to be alone', 'to meet new people' and 'to keep busy'. They are also more likely to take part 'to show others', perhaps because they are of an age to volunteer to coach their children in community sports, or perhaps they are older and enjoy passing their experience on to younger people.

Some general trends are apparent among the remaining motivations that were not found to be significantly associated with household composition. Parents (whether couples or single parents) take part in recreation for relaxation, for example, as well as for a challenge. Single adults are more likely to have a desire 'to help the community' and to do social things like 'being with friends'. Couples with no children tend to take part in recreation 'to enjoy nature', and 'for physical health and exercise'.

## Constraints

Analysis of the *Alberta Recreation Survey* results for the constraints identified by respondents reveals that household composition and age are significantly associated with the relative importance of most of the constraints addressed in the survey.

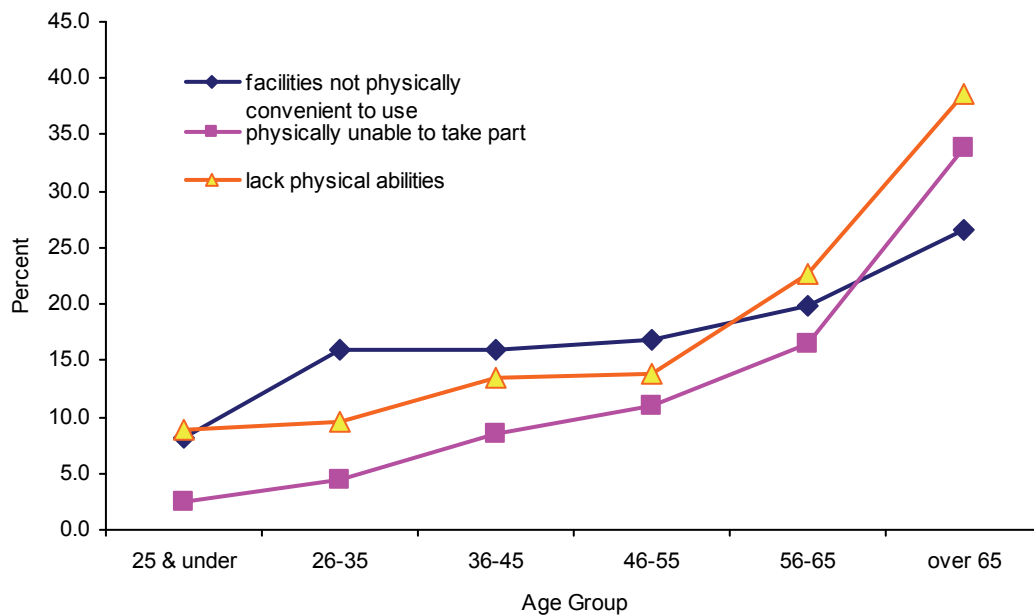
### By Age

Three constraints increase in importance as the age of respondents also increases (Chart 6). The reason 'physically unable to take part' increases from 2.4% among respondents under the age of 25 to 33.9% for those over the age of 65. Similarly, 'facilities are not physically convenient to use' is an important constraint to 8.1% of those 25 and under, but 26.6% of those over the age of 65, pointing to a challenge

in the design of facilities and programs to meet the needs of older users.

The other constraint that becomes more important as we age is the limitations on physical abilities. This constraint is important to 8.9% of those 25 and under but increases to 38.7% of those over the age of 65. Encouraging participation in recreation among older adults needs to accommodate activities that cater to the physical abilities of older people.

**Chart 6**  
Increasing Importance of Constraints By Age

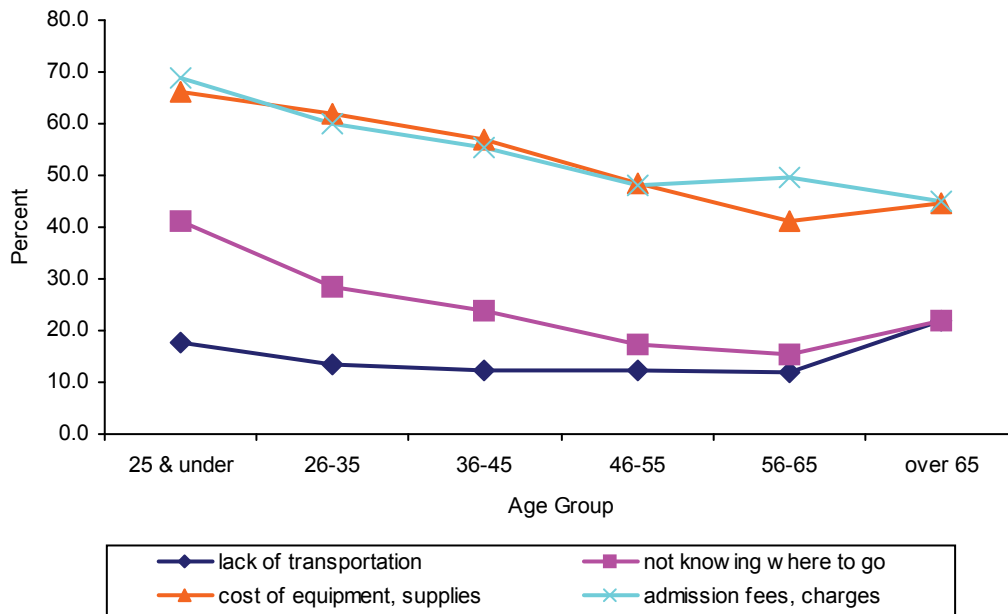


Four possible constraints become less important as age increases (Chart 7). Lack of transportation decreases from 17.7% of those 25 and under, to 11.9% of those in the 56 to 65 age group. However, this constraint is identified the most by those over the age of 65 (22.1%). Consequently, as we move into our senior years we are faced with transportation issues more than in our younger years. A similar argument exists for the constraint described as ‘not knowing where to go’. The importance of this reason drops from 41.1% for those 25 and under to 15.5% for those in the 55 to 65 age group, but increases to 22.1% for those over the age of 65.

It is also noticeable that three of the four constraints shown in Chart 7 receive relatively high ratings from those in the 25 and under group, with over 40% considering these constraints to be important or very important. The economic factors of admission fees (68.8%) and the cost of equipment and supplies (66.1%) present significant constraints that become less important as age increases presumably as young adults enter the work force and have more stable incomes. However, 41.1% of the 25 and under group also identified the constraint ‘do not know where I can take part’ as important, suggesting a risk to



**Chart 7**  
**Decreasing Importance of Constraints By Age**



program providers that there is a missed opportunity of getting young adults involved in recreation early to create a basis for participation in later years.

Table 2 shows trends that are evident for the remaining constraints from the *Alberta Recreation Survey*.

**Table 2**  
**Constraints Associated with Age Groups**

Trend Among Age Groups	Constraint
Increasing importance as age increases up to age 45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too busy with family</li> <li>• Too busy with work</li> <li>• Recreational facilities or areas are overcrowded</li> <li>• Recreational facilities or areas are poorly maintained</li> </ul>
Increasing importance for those over age 45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of transportation</li> </ul>
Decreasing importance for those under age 55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No opportunity near home</li> <li>• Not at ease in social situations</li> </ul>

## Constraints by Household

Analysis of the composition of households with the 14 constraints that the survey includes, finds that a significant association exists for 11 of the 14 constraints.

Households consisting of couples with children are most likely to be associated with constraints that reflect a busy lifestyle (Chart 8). Among these households, 68.5% identified being busy with family and 61.5% identified being busy with work as being important. Single parents also attached a relatively high degree of importance to these reasons with 49.4% and 57%, respectively, rating them as important.

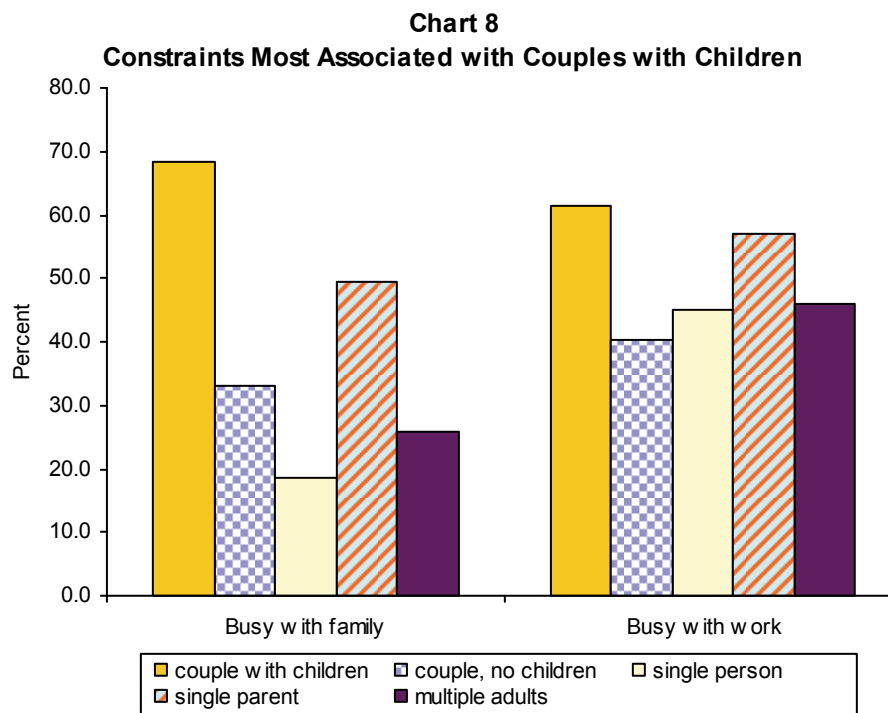
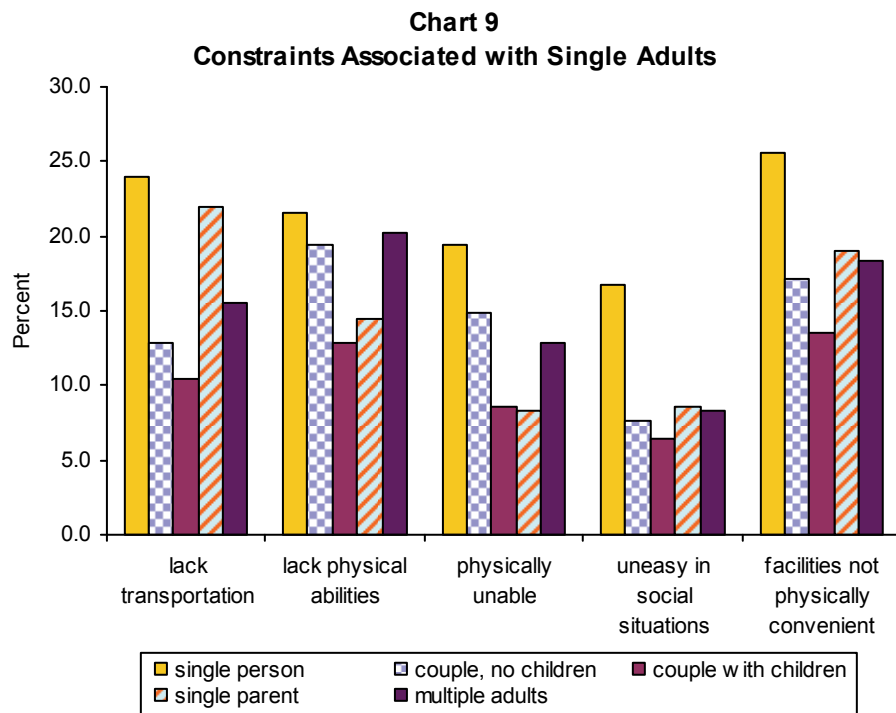
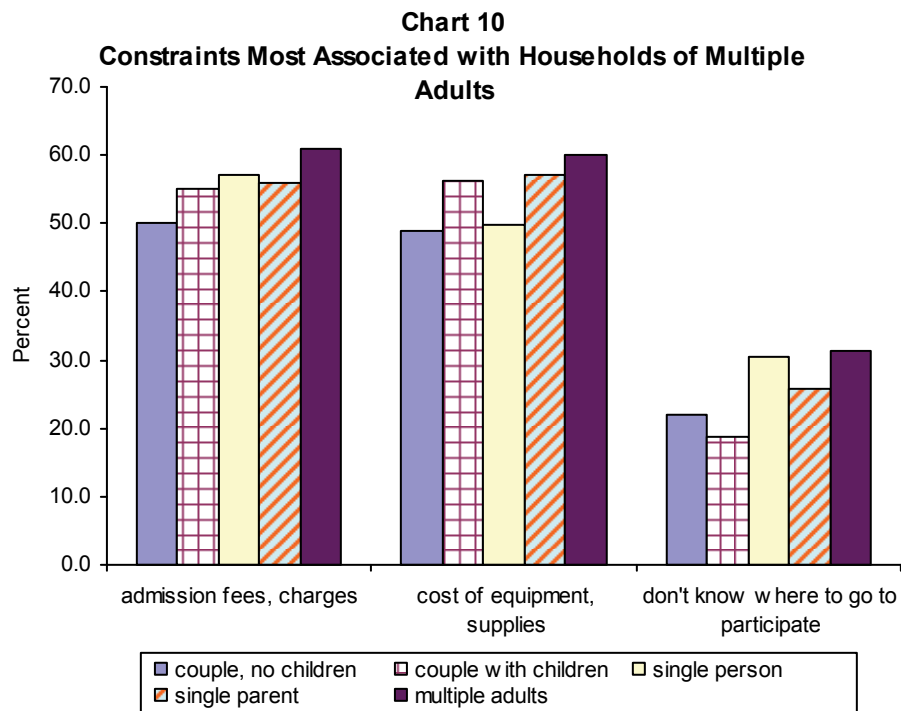


Chart 9 shows that five of the constraints single adults are the most likely group to report as being important to them. Of these, four relate to social or physical difficulties including being uneasy in social situations, lacking the physical abilities, being physically unable to participate, and facilities not being physically convenient to use. These results are consistent with the age profile noted previously as three of the identified constraints are associated with people over the age of 65.



A further trend of significance is the changing composition of households. Many households now consist of multiple adults or include multiple generations of the same family. These households are associated with three specific constraints to participation, two of which reflect economic considerations - admission fees and the cost of equipment and supplies. The third reflects a lack of knowledge about where to participate. These trends point to specific needs within this segment of the population.



## Environmental Scan

Physical activity is known to prevent age-related loss of function, reduce the risk of chronic disease, improve mental and physical health and support quality of life. (Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 2).

The results of the *Alberta Recreation Survey* show that Albertans generally take part in recreation for pleasure, personal health and exercise, to relax and to be with friends. For those over the age of 55, reasons for taking part in recreation can vary. Similarly, while there are a variety of possible constraints that prevent or limit participation in recreation, some are more prevalent than others for people over the age of 55.

The motivation to participate decreases as age increases and perceptions of constraints decrease as education level increases. (Carroll & Alexandris, 1997, p. 290). Overcoming constraints to participation often requires some form or degree of change in the behaviour patterns of individuals. This is most commonly associated with the trade-offs people are willing to make to accommodate recreational activities among the many other commitments they have (Scott, 2005, p. 284). Effectively, this requires some degree of encouragement, incentive or expression of benefits, to begin participation (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997, p. 118).

Stage of the life cycle is also influential. Personal constraints increase with age and being married with a family means higher time and family constraints (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997, p. 121). After children have grown up family constraints decline in importance but adults between 45 and 65 years tend to report being

constrained by a lack of knowledge and time, whereas time is less of a constraint for 18-25 year olds (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997, p. 120).

Many adults over the age of 55 view exercise as a task and effort they do not want to undertake unless a dramatic event, such as diagnosis of disease, affects them. (Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 3). This attitude, however, appears to be changing.

There is recognition among older adults that the aging process and how it is portrayed more generally in society is different from what it was for the previous generations (Ryan, 2005, p. 61). In this respect, older adults taking part in marathon runs or regular fitness classes are considered to be more a norm than an exception. Baby-boomers live in a culture where physical activity and exercise are accepted and they have more knowledge of how exercise prevents chronic health conditions (Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 3). This is expected to create increased levels of participation in recreation of all types.

As the number of older adults increases over the next 15 years, there will be a greater demand for health services of various kinds. Public policy will need to reflect the relationship between the health benefits of participation in recreation and the cost of providing health care services (Ryan, 2005, p. 60; Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 4).

That said, there will also be a need for and recognition that individuals will have to take responsibility for their own health and welfare and involvement in suitable recreational pursuits is one strategy by which individuals can be responsible (Ryan, 2005, p. 61). For those who take on this responsibility, Carroll and Alexandris (1997) have suggested that even these people exhibit high levels of constraint despite taking part in recreation on a regular and frequent basis. However, their commitment or sense of responsibility about continuing to take part prevents them from ending their participation.

Opportunities to take part in recreation that provide a pleasant experience and the social benefits of recreation appeal to older adults. The availability of different settings or opportunities for social interactions are similarly influential to how constraints are overcome and how participation can be encouraged (Walker & Virden, 2005, p. 205). The ease with which participants can find and take part in activities is also important but this need not be as significant a constraint when participants understand the value of unstructured activities such as walking (Ryan, 2005, p. 57).

Facilitating access through neighbourhood design that encourages walking and other forms of recreation also has benefits. The availability of maintained trails and safe parks that contribute to a positive image serve to encourage people to use these amenities (Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 4).

Access also includes support through the availability and knowledge of professionals. For older adults, physical trainers familiar with the needs of this group can deliver the experiences older adults desire. Of similar value is targeting messages that make physical activity appealing to older adults (Milner & Ryan, 2005, p. 5).

McGuire and Norman (2005) argue that constraints to participation may be a good thing as we age. Their position is that how you feel, based on a personal self-assessment of health, for example, is more influential than a person's actual age. So it is a change in choice to match personal interpretations of life-stage and

capabilities that affects participation.

## Implications for Practitioners

There are a number of key implications that arise from the findings of this report. Firstly, the data collected from the *Alberta Recreation Survey* provides evidence that Albertans are experiencing many of the issues and trends that have been identified elsewhere. It is clear that as we age and as our stage of life cycle changes, our recreational interests and needs change. We move from a desire for excitement and challenge to more passive socially-oriented interests. We do, however, still seek recreation that provides a pleasurable experience and which provides health and exercise.

In our early years we are faced with economic issues, such as admission fees and costs but these become less important as we reach our middle years and we enter the family stage. While in this stage our interest in recreation is focused on family-oriented activities that we can build into our work schedules. At this stage we are faced with trade-offs as we seek a balance but we aim to achieve relaxation while away from everyday pressures. All of these factors should be reflected in programming geared to families.

Once we pass the family stage of the life cycle we become freer in our choices but we become more affected by personal physical restrictions. Programming and facilities need to accommodate this change and the need for this will increase as the Baby-Boom generation enters the post-family life cycle stage. One benefit as the Baby-Boomers age is their greater knowledge of the relationship of health and exercise compared to previous generations. Lastly, to encourage participation and foster the benefits older adults seek, suitable settings for exercise need to be available, whether at a recreation facility, or at the neighbourhood level.

## References

- Alexandris, K., & Carroll, B. (1997). Demographic differences in the perception of constraints on recreational sport participation: results from a study in Greece. *Leisure Studies*, 16, 107-125.
- Carroll, B., & Alexandris, K. (1997). Perception of constraints and strength of motivation: Their relationship to recreational sport participation in Greece. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 29 (3), 279-299.
- Frederick, Judith, & Fast, Dr. Janet. (1998). Days of our lives: Time use and transitions over the life course. Living Longer, Living Better. Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 89-584-MIE - No. 6.
- McGuire, Francis, & Norman, William. (2005). The role of constraints in successful aging: Inhibiting or enabling. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 89-99). State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc.
- Milner, Colin, & Ryan, Patricia. (2005, June). Physical activities for the elderly. International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) Vision Paper for WHCOA from the World Wide Web: <http://www.icaa.cc>
- Ryan, Patricia. (2005). Viewpoints: Looking at the future for older adults. *Journal on Active Aging*, International Council on Active Aging, March-April, 56-61.

Scott, David. (2005). The relevance of constraints research to leisure service delivery. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 279-293). State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc.

Walker, Gordon J., & Virden, Randy J. (2005). Constraints on outdoor recreation. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 201-219). State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc.

**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](http://www.tprc.alberta.ca)