

# Barriers to Physical Activity Provision in Waterloo Region: Results of a 2009 Survey

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Information on the barriers experienced by active living providers in delivery of programs or services is a first step in achieving one of the Waterloo Region Active Living Network (WRALN)'s goals to increase accessibility to active living opportunities for Waterloo Region residents. An online survey was conducted to determine the barriers to providing physical activity opportunities in Waterloo Region.

**Methods:** Email addresses of physical activity providers were gathered by public means and by identification by the WRALN. The survey was administered using Survey Monkey; an easy to use tool that could be widely disseminated. Data was analyzed using Survey Monkey and presented in table and chart format.

**Results:** 211 individuals were sent the survey; 42 of them having completed the survey (response rate = 20%). Respondents represented all cities (75%) and townships (25%) in Waterloo Region. The only barrier that was classified as significant by the respondents was funding (obtaining and sustaining funding), with over 40% reporting that obtaining funding (44%) and sustaining funding (41%) was a significant barrier.

**Discussion:** With the exception of funding, the other anticipated barriers were not identified by respondents as barriers to the provision of physical activity programs in Waterloo Region. A limited sample size, role of the respondent within their organization, and timing of the survey may have contributed to the unanticipated results. It would be worthwhile for the WRALN to conduct this survey again in the future, as well as explore possible mechanisms for addressing the barrier of funding (obtaining and sustaining), which was clearly identified as a significant barrier by survey respondents.



For more information, send inquiries to: [wraln@together4health.ca](mailto:wraln@together4health.ca)

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Citation**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Waterloo Region Active Living Network (WRALN) is a collaborative group of community partners, local organizations, public health and education representatives, practitioners, and researchers from across Waterloo Region that shares the mission of bringing people together to encourage living actively.

The WRALN has been meeting regularly since January 2008 to work towards the network goals to: strengthen and create relationships amongst members of the community who promote active living; increase accessibility to participation in physical activity; and advocate for creating environments conducive to active living. This research study is a component of goal number two (increasing accessibility to active living). The objectives of this goal are to: identify the barriers to participation in active living; take action to reduce selected barriers and; inform the community of existing opportunities.

Collecting information on the barriers experienced by active living providers in delivery of programs or services is a first step in achieving one of the network's goals to increase accessibility to active living opportunities for Waterloo Region residents. By identifying the barriers

experienced by service providers, it is expected that active living programs and services can be made more available and accessible to Waterloo Region residents. An environmental scan of published literature and reports on active living barriers experienced by program providers was completed in the spring of 2009. The environmental scan provided data on common barriers encountered by physical

### **Table 1: Potential Barriers to Providing Active Living Programs or Services**

#### **Theme 1 – Staff & Volunteer Management**

- Volunteer recruitment
- Retaining volunteers
- Staff recruitment
- Retaining staff
- Obtaining qualified staff and/or volunteers
- Training staff and/or volunteers
- Motivation for staff and/or volunteers

#### **Theme 2 – Funding & Resources**

- Obtaining funding
- Sustaining funding
- Obtaining resources (e.g. equipment)
- Marketing and promotion skills and resources

#### **Theme 3 – Partnership**

- Developing partnerships
- Sustaining partnerships

#### **Theme 4 – Supports**

- Community support
- Organizational support (e.g. Board of Directors)
- Council support (e.g. for your specific physical activity)

#### **Theme 5 – Sustainability**

- Long term sustainability of physical activity program
- Sustaining the importance of physical activity

#### **Theme 6 – Setting**

- Appropriate setting/environment to provide physical activity program(s)

#### **Theme 7 – User fees**

- User fees for participants

activity providers. The results from the environmental scan were used to develop an online survey to collect local data on the specific barriers experienced by Waterloo Region active living providers. This list, in addition to other potential survey questions (e.g. questions focused on respondent organization affiliation) was disseminated to WRALN members for input, including suggestions for additional barriers. As a group, a list of barriers to providing physical activity programs was developed for the purpose of the WRALN Physical Activity Provider Survey (WRALN PA Provider Survey) and categorized into the following themes: staff and resource management, funding and resourcing, partnerships with the community, internal and external supports, sustainability of the program or service, setting of the program or service, and user fees for participants (See Table 1 for a list of potential barriers to providing physical activity programs or services).

The barriers to providing physical activity programs or services in Waterloo Region may be specific for this geographical region, warranting a localized data collection strategy.

The purpose of this report is to present the results of the WRALN PA Provider Survey, and thus assist the WRALN and community stakeholders to develop an action plan to address the barriers to active living in Waterloo Region.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research questions**

1. What barriers do physical activity providers experience in increasing access to physical activity programs in Waterloo Region?
2. When are physical activity providers available for professional development opportunities?
3. How many physical activity providers are interested in joining the WRALN?

Individuals involved in providing physical activity programs or initiatives in Waterloo Region were contacted via email and asked to participate in a short, online survey. Email addresses were collected via public means (e.g. from public websites, brochures, etc.) by members of the WRALN (comprised of active living stakeholders who are well connected to the local community). Emails were sent out to 220 email addresses; sampling was aimed at being representative of physical activity providers in Waterloo Region. Returned emails or email errors were corrected where possible. In total, 211 email addresses were found to be accurate. The survey invitation was also sent to Network members to share with their physical activity contacts; also, providers were encouraged to send the survey to other physical activity

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providers that may be interested in completing the survey – some of which may or may not have been on the original physical activity provider list.

Data was collected via online survey using the Survey Monkey online survey tool. Survey Monkey is a widely-used online questionnaire tool in online research, and is available for low cost. The user-friendly, easy access to the WRALN PA Provider Survey was therefore easily disseminated to potential participants, and was intended to result in a higher response rate than other survey methods (e.g. mail, telephone, et cetera). Survey questions (Appendix A) focused on the organization and target audience of the physical activity provider, barriers to providing physical activity programs in Waterloo Region, professional development opportunities, and interest in becoming a member of the WRALN and contact information.

### Data Analysis

Summary descriptive statistics and frequency data were calculated via Survey Monkey. Data was tabulated and presented via chart form.

## RESULTS

### Respondent Characteristics

A total of 42 individuals completed the WRALN PA Provider survey, resulting in a response rate of approximately 20%. The majority of the respondents represented the three major cities of Waterloo Region (Waterloo, Kitchener, and Cambridge); however, there was also representation (approximately 25%) from the four townships (Wellesley, North Dumfries, Wilmot, and Woolwich) (Figure 1).

The age of the population served by respondents ranged from 0-55+ years; responses were not mutually exclusive. That is, respondents offered programs to individuals of

What cities and/or townships does your organization provide physical programming in?

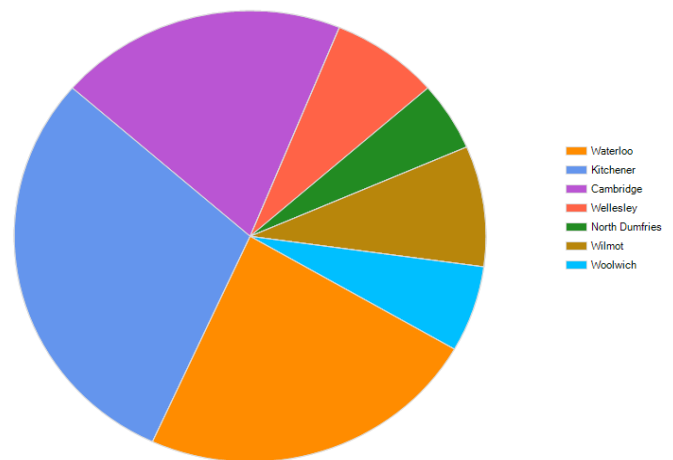


Figure 1 - Geographical Representation of Respondents

What age group(s) does organization target for your physical activity program(s)?

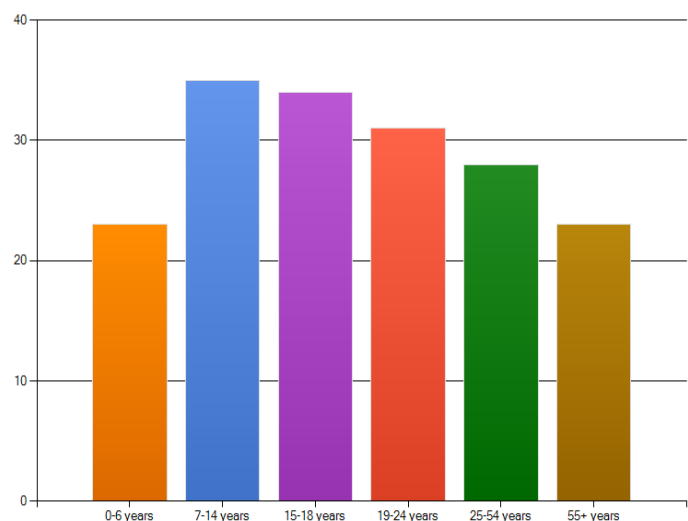


Figure 2 – Target Age Groups of Respondent Programs

many ages, rather than focusing their programs on one age group.

## Barriers to providing physical activity programs in Waterloo Region

The levels of significance (“not a barrier”, “slight”, “moderate”, “significant”) of barriers that were most reported by respondents are shown in Table 2 (as percentages). Staff and volunteer management were identified by most participants as being a non-barrier or a slight barrier. Partnerships, supports, sustainability and setting were identified by the majority as not a barrier. User-fees were reported as a slight or moderate barrier. Obtaining and sustaining resources, and marketing skills were reported as a slight to significant barrier by survey participants. The only barrier that was classified as significant was funding (obtaining and sustaining funding), as over 40% of survey responders reported obtaining funding (44%) and sustaining funding (41%) as a significant barrier.

**Table 2: Levels of significance of barriers as most frequently reported by survey respondents (%)**

|  | Not a Barrier | Slight Barrier | Moderate Barrier | Significant Barrier |
|--|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Staff &amp; Volunteer Management</b>        |               |                |                  |                     |
| Volunteer recruitment                          | (31%)         | (26%)          | (31%)            |                     |
| Retaining volunteers                           | (36%)         |                | (33%)            |                     |
| Staff recruitment                              | (41%)         |                |                  |                     |
| Retaining staff                                | (39%)         | (39%)          |                  |                     |
| Obtaining qualified staff and/or volunteers    | (31%)         | (31%)          | (31%)            |                     |
| Training staff and/or volunteers               | (39%)         | (44%)          |                  |                     |
| Motivation for staff and/or volunteers         | (39%)         | (41%)          |                  |                     |
| <b>Funding &amp; Resources</b>                 |               |                |                  |                     |
| Obtaining funding                              |               |                |                  | (44%)               |
| Sustaining funding                             |               |                |                  | (41%)               |
| Obtaining resources                            | (21%)         | (28%)          | (23%)            | (26%)               |
| Marketing & promotion skills and resources     |               | (26%)          | (28%)            | (26%)               |
| <b>Partnership</b>                             |               |                |                  |                     |
| Developing partnerships                        | (36%)         |                |                  |                     |
| Sustaining partnerships                        | (46%)         |                |                  |                     |
| <b>Supports</b>                                |               |                |                  |                     |
| Community support                              | (39%)         |                |                  |                     |
| Organizational support                         | (62%)         |                |                  |                     |
| Council support                                | (39%)         | (26%)          |                  |                     |
| <b>Sustainability</b>                          |               |                |                  |                     |
| Long-term sustainability of program            | (41%)         |                |                  |                     |
| Sustaining the importance of physical activity | (44%)         |                |                  |                     |
| <b>Setting</b>                                 |               |                |                  |                     |

|   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| Appropriate setting/environment for program | (39%) |       |
| <b>User-Fees</b>                            |       |       |
| User-fees for participants                  | (31%) | (31%) |

Survey respondents were also asked to identify other barriers to providing physical activity not referred to in the survey questions. Results (Table 3) showed that the most common reported other barrier was the availability of the physical activity setting (n=4), for example the availability of a field or pool, including available times for use. Other reported barriers include competition between similar organizations for funding sources and settings, availability of low-cost activities, community perception, corporate activities, and methods to target special populations.

|  |
|--|
| Setting/facility availability (e.g. pool, gym, field) (N=4)        |
| Competition between organizations for same funding source          |
| Competition for usable space amongst user groups                   |
| Availability of low-cost recreation opportunities to refer clients |
| Perception by community and overall community recognition          |
| Corporations not recognizing the benefits of fitness subsidizing   |
| Methods for targeting special populations (e.g. females)           |

### Availability of physical activity providers for professional development opportunities

Of those who completed the WRALN PA Survey, most (82%) would like to be informed of professional development opportunities for physical activity providers. The data clearly indicated that respondents preferred to participate in professional development activities during the week, and specifically in the morning hours. Weekends were not preferred by most respondents (60-72% were not available on Saturdays or Sundays). The summer season was least preferable (50% listed summer as least favourable); however, no season was identified as favorable above the others.

### Physical activity providers interested in joining the WRALN

Sixty-eight percent of respondents were interested in becoming a member of the WRALN, and provided their contact information for future contact.

## DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

Funding and resources were the only significant barriers identified by the majority of survey respondents. This result was surprising as many chose the survey items (determined from the literature

scan) as non-barriers. It was anticipated that many of the barriers would be significant or at least moderate barriers, but were not identified as such by the survey respondents. The reason for this could be the limited sample size, as agencies that responded to the survey may not have similar barriers to those that did not respond. Furthermore, the people who responded to the survey may not have had a role in their organization that would allow them to accurately assess the significance of each proposed barrier.

It would be worthwhile to explore why funding is a significant barrier in Waterloo Region at this time. This result can also be confounding reflective of current financial environment (economic recession). Perhaps many granting organizations have held back funds for this year, in addition to organizations themselves cutting back funding on programming as a whole, resulting in decreased funding and resources to deliver previously existing programs.

It would also be worthwhile to explore what the survey responders meant by identifying “resources” as a barrier. To address such barrier, it would be helpful to determine what types of resources in particular could be increased (for example, supplies, promotional items, etc.).

Physical activity providers also need to be asked how best the barriers of obtaining and sustaining funding can be realistically addressed by the WRALN. Funds cannot be given by the WRALN to these agencies; however, there may be strategies that can be applied to enhance the organizations’ capacities to access funding and resources. Determination of strategies to address barriers would be best accomplished in a formalized discussion between physical activity stakeholders and members of the WRALN.

## Limitations

By choosing email communication as the method for disseminating the survey to potential respondents, certain limitations arise. First, only email addresses that were publicly accessible were sent an email invitation to participate. Active living providers or providers who only have private email addresses would not have been notified of the survey. Second, the email invitations could have been missed by those individuals who do not use email communication regularly or at all. Third, when sending bulk emails, messages can be lost in “junk” email filters, and missed completely.

The timeframe for the data collection was limited to two weeks. A longer timeframe would have allowed for individuals’ busy schedules, as well as word-of-mouth dissemination. Also, because the

survey was only available during two weeks in the Fall season, those who provide programs or initiatives in other seasons may have been unavailable via email to respond to such a survey.

The sample selected to receive email invitations for participation in the WRALN PA Provider Survey was limited to only those who had publicly available email addresses, resulting in a total of 220 email addresses. This total may be limited in scope and may not be comprehensive, likely under-representing physical activity providers in Waterloo Region. This factor influences the generalizability of the results; results can only be generalized to those who participated in the survey, and should be used as a guide to stimulate further discussion with WRALN stakeholders and community members.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Determine the best strategies for increasing availability of funding and/or resources in Waterloo Region**

#### *Recommendations for future research in Waterloo Region*

It would be worthwhile to implement the WRALN PA Provider Survey again after the economic recession has diminished to see if results were reflective of time. It would also be useful to conduct the survey in a different season to ensure that providers who offer programs or services in different seasons have an opportunity to share their opinions on this topic. In future surveys, a multitude of data collection methods (e.g. focus groups, email survey, telephone survey) for a longer period of time would allow for a more comprehensive collection of information.

#### *Recommendations for next steps for WRALN*

As a network that brings people together to encourage living actively, it is recommended that the WRALN communicate with the community to discuss best strategies for increasing availability of funding and/or resources in Waterloo Region. Focus groups, community forums, conference presentations, or less formal, “lunch & learn” presentations are examples of community engagement practices that may be useful to the WRALN when determining next steps for aiding physical activity providers in Waterloo Region.

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For more information on the WRALN or this report, contact [wraln@together4health.ca](mailto:wraln@together4health.ca)

**Appendix A: WRALN Physical Activity Provider Survey Questions**

# Waterloo Region Active Living Network - Physical Activity Provider

## 1. Introduction

You are invited to complete a survey to help identify barriers faced by physical activity providers in Waterloo Region in providing physical activity programming.

This information will help inform the forum that the Waterloo Region Active Living Network (WRALN) will be hosting on the evening of November 24, 2009. The purpose of the forum is to develop an action plan to address barriers to improve access to physical activity opportunities in Waterloo Region.

Completion of this survey is voluntary, and will signify your voluntary participation. You may withdraw from the survey at any time. Withdrawal from the survey will not affect your participation with the WRALN.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name and that of your organization will not appear in any report or publication summarizing the results of the study. Results shared will be in aggregate form, therefore not identify responses of individual respondents.

Survey results will be analyzed, collated, and presented at the November 24 forum, where we will develop an action plan to address the physical activity barriers identified.

This survey is supported by Together4Health.



\* 1. [Click here to start the survey.](#)

[jn](#) Here

## 2. Organization & Target Audience

Please provide some brief information on your organizational role and target audience of your physical

# Waterloo Region Active Living Network - Physical Activity Provider

activity programming.

\* 1. Do you and/or your organization provide physical activity programs in Waterloo Region?

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

\* 2. What is your role with your organization? (e.g. coach, president, etc.)

\* 3. What physical activity program(s) does your organization provide?

\* 4. What cities and/or townships does your organization provide physical programming in?

Waterloo

Kitchener

Cambridge

Wellesley

North Dumfries

Wilmot

Woolwich

\* 5. What age group(s) does your organization target for your physical activity program(s)?

0-6 years

7-14 years

15-18 years

19-24 years

25-54 years

55+ years

## 3. Barriers to Providing Physical Activity Programs in Waterloo Region

# Waterloo Region Active Living Network - Physical Activity Provider

The following questions ask about the barriers your organization may experience in increasing access to physical activity programs. Scales range from 1-5, where 1 is not a barrier, 4 is a significant barrier, and 5 is "I don't know."

## \* 1. Staff & Volunteer Management

|   | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Volunteer recruitment                       | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Retaining volunteers                        | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Staff recruitment                           | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Retaining staff                             | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Obtaining qualified staff and/or volunteers | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Training staff and/or volunteers            | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Motivation for staff and/or volunteers      | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |

## \* 2. Funding & Resources

|  | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Obtaining funding                            | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Sustaining funding                           | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Obtaining resources (e.g. equipment)         | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Marketing and promotion skills and resources | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |

## \* 3. Partnership

|                         | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Developing partnerships | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Sustaining partnerships | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |

## \* 4. Supports

|  | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Community Support  | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Organizational Support (e.g. Board of Directors)           | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |
| Council support (e.g. for your specific physical activity) | 1                 | 2                  | 3                    | 4                       | 5                |

# Waterloo Region Active Living Network - Physical Activity Provider

## \* 5. Sustainability

|   | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Long term sustainability of physical activity program | jn                | jn                 | jn                   | jn                      | jn               |
| Sustaining the importance of physical activity        | jn                | jn                 | jn                   | jn                      | jn               |

## \* 6. Setting

|   | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Appropriate setting / environment to provide physical activity program(s) | jn                | jn                 | jn                   | jn                      | jn               |

## \* 7. User Fees

|                            | 1 - Not a barrier | 2 - Slight barrier | 3 - Moderate barrier | 4 - Significant barrier | 5 - I don't know |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| User fees for participants | jn                | jn                 | jn                   | jn                      | jn               |

## 8. Other Barriers to Providing Physical Activity Programs in Waterloo Region

Please list any additional barriers your organization experiences in providing physical activity program(s) in Waterloo Region.

## 4. Professional Development Opportunities

Please provide some information on what types professional development opportunities would be of interest to you.

### \* 1. Professional Development Opportunities

Would you like to be informed of professional development opportunities for physical activity providers?

Yes

No

# Waterloo Region Active Living Network - Physical Activity Provider

## \* 2. Ideal Times for Future WRALN Events - Weekly

Please indicate the most ideal times of the week for WRALN events.

|           | Morning               | Afternoon             | Evening               | Not Available         |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Monday    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tuesday   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Wednesday | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Thursday  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Friday    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Saturday  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sunday    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## \* 3. Ideal Times for Future WRALN Events - Seasonally

Please indicate the most ideal times of year for WRALN events.

|        | Least Favourable      | Favourable            | Most Favourable       |
|--------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Spring | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Summer | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Fall   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Winter | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## 5. Contact Information

Your contact information will be used to send you feedback from this survey, and information on our upcoming event on November 24th, 2009.

If you do not wish to fill in this information, please select "next" to move on to the next page.

### 1. Please fill in your contact information below

First Name

Last Name

Organization

Phone Number

Email Address

## \* 2. Are you interested in learning how to become a member of the WRALN?

Yes. I am aware that my contact information will be used to contact me with information about the network and how to join.

No

## 6. Questions and Thank You!

If you have any questions or comments, contact Brandie Steeves at [wraln@together4health.ca](mailto:wraln@together4health.ca).

Your feedback is appreciated! Please share this survey with other physical activity providers in Waterloo Region who may like to provide their feedback. The survey will be available from September 22, 2009 to October 6, 2009.

Thank you for your input!

The Waterloo Region Active Living Network