Who Works in Physical Activity? A National Physical Activity Society Survey

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BACKGROUND

Who are the professionals working in public health approaches to physical activity? The National Physical Activity Society (NPAS) surveyed its members and partners to identify the breadth and depth of this community. Ninety-three percent of seventy-three people completed the survey. The 2014 NPAS member survey is the fourth in a line of surveys conducted every two years and it is the first under the new organizational name. The previous surveys were conducted by the National Society of Physical Activity Practitioners in Public Health (NSPAPP) in 2007, 2009, and 2012. NSPAPP became the National Physical Activity Society in mid-2012.

METHODS

The survey, conducted in SurveyMonkey, contained 31 questions. Skip logic was included on several of the questions and response time averaged less than 30 minutes. After pre-tests, NPAS conducted the survey April 17 to May 7, 2014. Profile questions covered work setting (community, state, national, or international), type of employee, education level, professional background, amount of work (full or part time) devoted to physical activity, number of colleagues, state, and length of service in the field. These questions were designed to give NPAS leadership a clearer picture of who members are. They also help determine target audiences for training.

The training section centered around competencies for the Physical Activity in Public Health (PAPHS) certification. Respondents were asked about integration with national efforts, including the National Physical Activity Plan. The National Physical Activity Plan Alliance was the only partner with whom the survey was discussed ahead of time.

Only one question was devoted to the plan itself; however, many of the activities described in other questions and also in participants’ comments relate National Physical Activity Plan strategies and tactics. The survey was open to paid, student, and associate members, along with partners.

PURPOSE

Intentions for the 2014 survey were to understand the NPAS membership, determine training needs, and provide direction to NPAS leadership. Leaders can then use answers to connect members and partners, provide training, and voice member needs on a national level.

RESULTS

Respondents indicated activities they carry out frequently or sometimes (but not rarely). Results are shown here in two formats. The first figure reflects just the multiple choice activities. The second adds participants’ comments of additional activities. In the second figure the larger words indicate more frequent answers.

One hundred fifty-three (153) respondents answered they had been in the physical activity field ten years or larger. Closer to 70% had been in the field five years or more. About 22% had worked in physical activity one to five years. The most common response for highest level of education reported was Bachelor’s degree (57%), followed by doctoral or terminal professional degree (22%). A selection of competencies for physical activity in public health practitioners describes self-reported levels of experience.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2014 membership survey presents a snapshot of people working in public health approaches to physical activity. The survey demonstrated a range of sector involvement, extensive experience, areas for advanced training, and capacity of NPAS members to promote physical activity through such frameworks as the National Physical Activity Plan.

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For more detail

The full report is available on the NPAS website at http://physicalactivitycity.org.