



# Physical Inactivity Cost Calculator *background*

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOOL

Good planning demands a solid understanding of costs. But one cost that is too rarely understood and factored into decisions at the state, city and organizational level is the mounting expense associated with a physically inactive population or workforce. A new tool helps leaders understand, estimate and address this cost.

Physical inactivity, as described by the Surgeon General, is *less than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most, if not all, days of the week*. This definition is used as the representative level to classify the percentage of physically inactive adults.

The *Physical Inactivity Cost Calculator*, developed by Active Living Leadership with funding from Fifty Plus Lifelong Fitness, is an easy-to-use online tool that calculates the financial cost of physical inactivity for adult populations. In a matter of minutes, the free tool gives policymakers, local and state officials, community leaders and organizations an estimate of

medical care, workers' compensation and lost productivity costs associated with the level of inactivity in their population or workforce – helpful information to make informed decisions about resource allocation.

The process for developing the calculator included:

- **Development of Initial Calculations.** Dr. David Chenoweth, a nationally recognized econometrics expert, conducted scientific research, made an initial design of the framework and outlined the framework to look at three cost realms, including medical care costs, workers' compensation and lost productivity. The development of the initial calculations included using actual medical care costs obtained from various health insurers

(private and public) in seven states and the available information regarding employer costs for workers' compensation and lost productivity.

- **Scientific Panel Review.** A group of 12 experts from the private sector, academia and government, ranging from public health and medical experts to econometrics specialists, served as reviewers of the methods and final calculations.
- **Dissemination Plan.** To obtain valuable input for developing a useful tool and to ensure widespread use, a group of diverse organizations was asked to participate in a product development review, to participate in distributing the cost calculator and resource materials, and to participate in joint media activities announcing the availability of the calculator.
- **Beta Testing and Pilot Testing.** The final two steps in the development process involved tests to look at the reliability and usability of the tool. For the beta testing of the newly developed calculator, demographic information from the original seven states that formed the foundation of this project was used with the online calculator. These cost estimates closely matched the results from each of the original seven studies. In addition, pilot testing for a two-week period of time provided communities and businesses with an opportunity to assess the usability of the calculator and its accompanying materials. A completed survey with comments from the testers served as the standard for what needed to be revised.

*A detailed copy of the project methods can be downloaded from the Physical Inactivity Cost Calculator Web site at <http://www.ecu.edu/picostcalc/>.*

