



Promoting Newcomers' Wellbeing and Inclusion through Bicycle-based Social Activities

Clear increases in physical activity and belonging, but mixed findings for health

Evaluation Summary | February 2024



Program Overview

The Bike Mentorship Program aims to:

- Address the isolation of new immigrants to Canada through facilitating social connection.
- Promote physical and mental health of participants through physical activity, specifically bicycling, by providing bicycles and developing skills and confidence.

The program matches newcomers to Canada with local experienced cyclists to meet weekly and participate in activities around the city over a 12-week period.

In 2021-2023, with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the program operated in three different cities: Halifax, Toronto Region, and Metro Vancouver. The program in each city was based on local partnerships between immigrant-serving and bicycle advocacy organizations: Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and The Ecology Action Centre; CultureLink Settlement and Community Services and Cycle Toronto; and Immigrant Services Society of BC and HUB Cycling. These three years of government funding enabled program expansion as well as a structured evaluation component.

Key Findings

Bicycling

- Participants unequivocally increased bicycle use over the program.
- One year after the program, many were still using bicycles.

Belonging

- After completing the program, participants reported a higher sense of belonging.

Health

- There were mixed results as to whether the program increased health, depending on the measure used.
- In an exit survey question, most participants agreed that they felt healthier after participating in the program. Furthermore, in interviews, participants suggested that the program fostered health through increased physical activity and improved mood and wellbeing. However, we did not find increases in self-reported general health or mental health between the program start and finish.

Evaluation Questions

This process and outcomes evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent and how does the program increase bicycling participation for different trip purposes, and prepare participants to maintain bicycling after the program ends?
2. To what extent and how does the program enhance belonging for participants?
3. To what extent and how does the program enhance health for participants?
4. What are transferable best practices for sustainability and scalability of the program?

Detailed Findings

These findings build on the *Bike Mentorship final evaluation* written in 2024.

Bicycling

433 people participated in the program between 2021-2023. At the start of the program, 6% had never cycled and 34% hadn't cycled for at least one year.

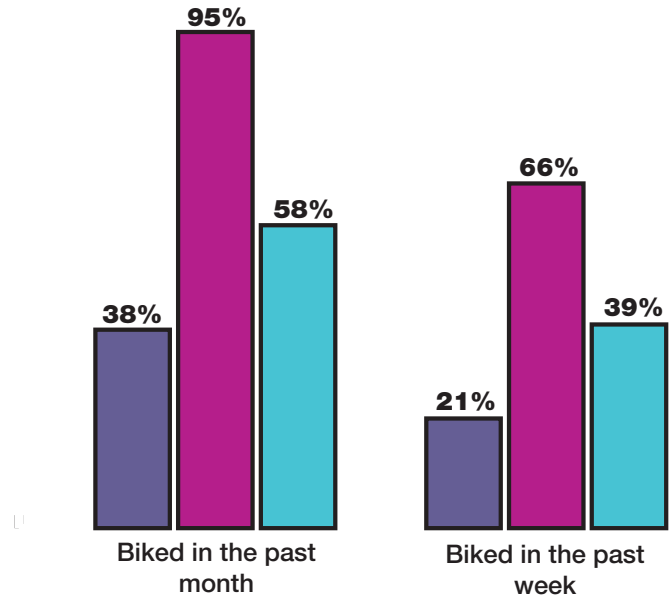
The program increased bicycling participation for all trip purposes: the largest increases in participation were for recreation, followed by errands.

Bicycle use was assessed across a variety of measures (i.e., bicycling in the past month, bicycling in the past week, number of past-week trips, number of minutes bicycled, minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) by bicycling), and all showed statistically significant increases between program start and finish. Furthermore, all data pertaining to bicycling-related knowledge, confidence, self-efficacy, having people to cycle with, and perceived accessibility to amenities showed statistically significant increases. The largest increases were in knowing rules of the road for riding a bike in Canada, knowing bike routes in the community, knowing where to get one's bike repaired, and for confidence in bicycling on a busy road with a bike lane.

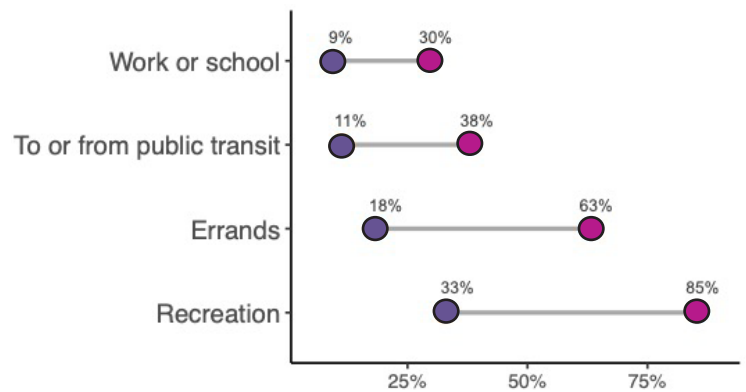
One year after the program, participants were still using bicycles, although less so than at the end of the program. Nevertheless, the odds of riding in the past month or week, as well as the number of past-week trips, minutes bicycled, and minutes of MVPA by bicycling were higher than baseline.

The program increased bicycling participation through providing basic conditions to enable bicycling, tailored coaching, opportunities for repeated practice, opportunities to observe and interact with other newcomer participants, and by asking participants to commit to weekly rides. Longer term riding was sustained, in part, by enhanced access to places and activities.

Large increases in bicycling participation between **baseline** (n=433) and **end of program** (n=357) surveys. Many participants still riding at **year follow up** (n=171).



Riding for recreation, followed by errands, saw the biggest jumps in past-month bicycling between **baseline** (n=433) and **end of program** (n=357) surveys.



Includes all 2021-2023 participants: at baseline, n=433; at exit n=357

Belonging

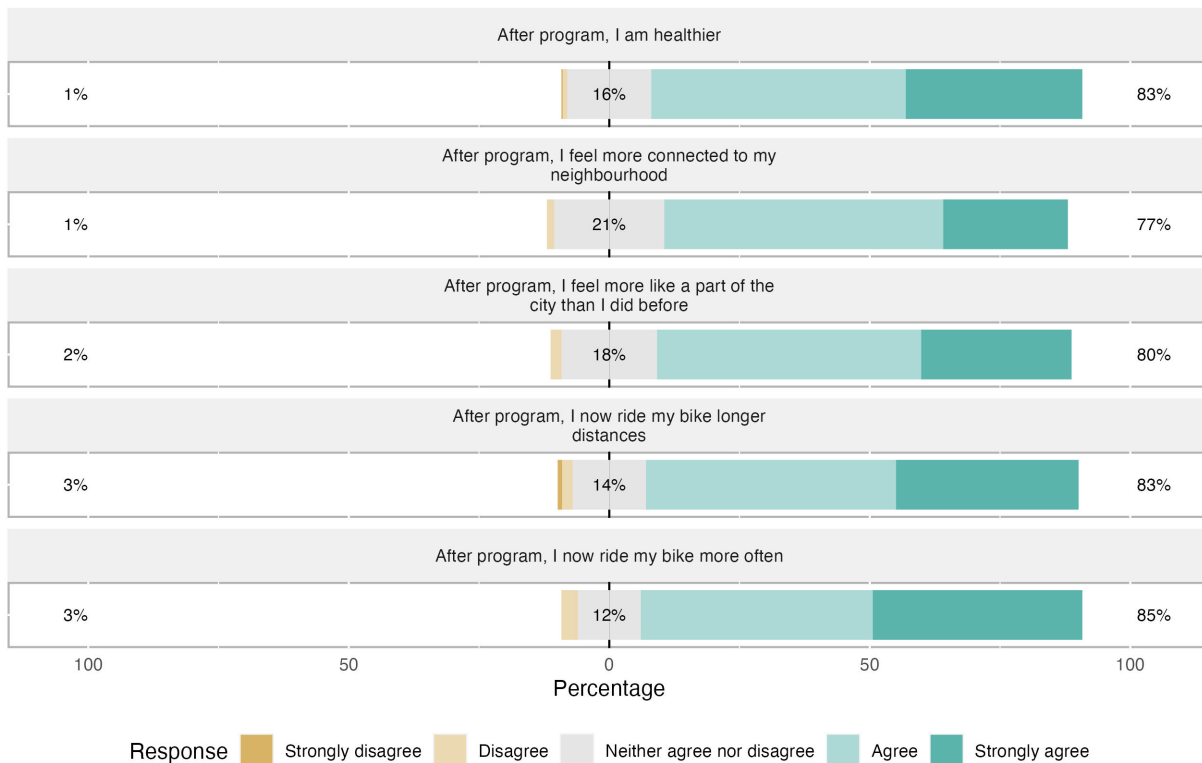
The program enhanced belonging. Belonging was assessed with three survey-based indicators and through interviews. In surveys, participants reported a stronger sense of community belonging between program start and finish (statistically significant), but this increase was no longer apparent at one-year follow up. In retrospective survey questions (i.e., not asked at baseline), most participants agreed they felt more connected to their neighbourhoods and cities after program participation.

The program enhanced belonging through the creation of caring environments and interactions (with program staff, mentors, and other participants), cultivating a sense of place, and developing a sense of participation in the city.

Health

There were mixed results as to whether the program increased health, depending on the measure used. Health was assessed with three survey-based indicators and through interviews. Our analysis of survey results found no increase in either self-reported general health or mental health between program start and finish, but in a different exit survey question, most participants agreed that they felt healthier after participating in the program. Furthermore, in interviews, participants suggested that the program fostered health through increased physical activity and improved mood and wellbeing. However, in one-year follow up surveys, participants reported worsened self-reported general health and mental health. The broader literature shows that immigrants generally arrive with better self-reported health than Canadians, but that health declines with time in Canada. In the absence of a comparison group, it is unclear if Bike Mentorship program participants have smaller declines in self-reported health than their peers not in the program.

Participants reported better health, higher belonging, and more biking after the program.



Best Practices

A stand-alone *Newcomer Bike Mentorship Program Service Delivery “How-to” Manual* was created in 2023 to document best practices for organizations who wish to launch a Bike Mentorship program in their community.

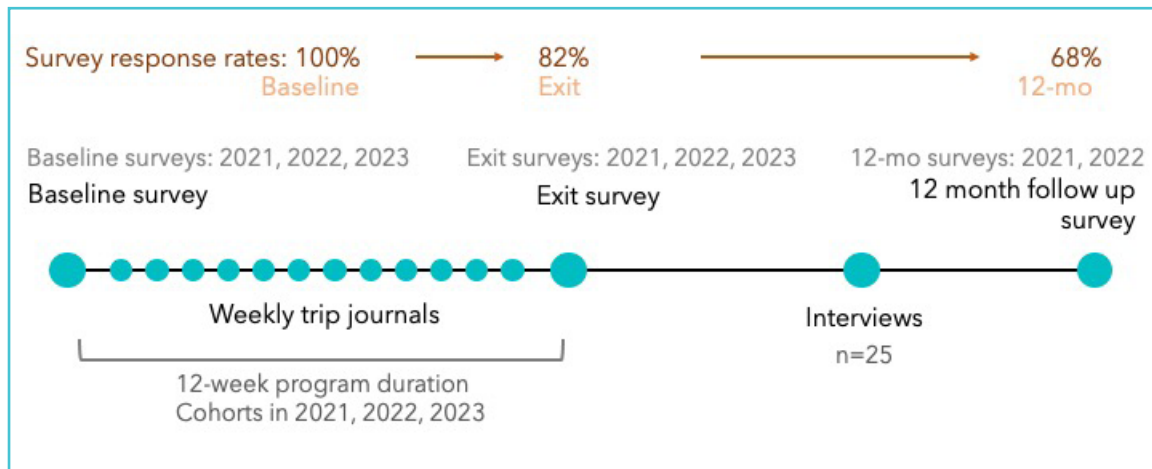
Evaluation Methods

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative methods included interviews with participants and workshops with program staff. This information enabled the team to:

- Examine circumstances facilitating bicycling participation, belonging, health, and other outcomes.
- Review and extend the program’s Theory of Change.
- Understand how the program was implemented and the challenges it faced.

The quantitative methods included longitudinal participant surveys at three points (baseline, program end, and one-year follow up), and weekly trip journals submitted by participants during the program (12 per participant). This information enabled the team to:

- Determine whether program activities were implemented as intended.
- Describe participant characteristics and assess medium and long-term outcomes.



ISSofBC commissioned Stephanie Sersli to conduct an independent evaluation of the Bike Mentorship Program. Full report results are available [here](#).