

## **National Best Practice Study to Improve Reach and Quality of Physical Activity Programming for Older Adults**

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**Purpose:** In 2003, the National Council on the Aging (NCOA) conducted a national competition to identify best practices in physical activity programming for older adults to focus public policy and national strategies on expanding the reach and quality of such programming. The competition announcement specified detailed criteria for applicants, based upon physical activity and behavior change research, and studies on sustainability. After a rigorous review process, 10 programs were selected and site visited by an expert team.

**Settings:** Selected programs were based in a wide variety of local organizations.

**Interventions:** The average number of annual participants was 1350. All settings offered physical activity programming that included cardio-vascular, strength and flexibility to accommodate various levels of capability. Generally, this was done through multi-component classes. In a few cases, participants had individualized plans that drew upon a variety of classes/equipment. Behavior change strategies were more variable across programs. Each program had very strong, well-defined organizational support and partnership relationships that contributed to sustainability.

**Outcomes:** All programs included evaluation, ranging from participant satisfaction surveys with self-reports of changes in health status to individualized, physical measures. Each reported positive results based upon the measures used. Average total annual expenditures per participant were \$160.

**Conclusions:** This study documents feasibility of high quality community-based physical activity programming that attracts large numbers of seniors. Results are being used to develop a “template for high quality programming” to distribute through the Blueprint on Physical Activity and NCOA, and to support policy initiatives to increase funding for high quality programs.