

Promoting Physical Activity Among Middle-aged and Older Adults

Regular physical activity is essential for healthy aging. It reduces the risk for heart disease, diabetes, depression, falling, and frailty among older adults.

Yet, few older adults achieve even the minimum recommended 30 minutes of moderately intense activity on most days of the week.

By 2030, 20% of the U.S. population will be 65 or older. Preventing chronic disease and disability among this growing population of older adults can reduce the burden on society for medical care, pain, and suffering.


What needs to be done


Encouraging older adults to get sufficient physical activity is an important public health goal.

Programs exist that have been proven to enhance physical activity among older adults. **But more knowledge is needed about how to increase the use of these programs, especially among people with lower incomes and among ethnic and cultural groups most at risk of chronic conditions.**



Did you know?

 Only 24% of adults aged 55 and older engage in regular leisure-time physical activity.

 Fewer than 10% of adults aged 85 and older engage in regular leisure-time physical activity.

 Fewer than 20% of older adults engage in strengthening activity.

What HPRC is doing about promoting physical activity

HPRC works with community organizations that promote physical activity among large numbers of middle-aged and older adults through proven programs and policies.

One of HPRC's flagship programs is the exercise program EnhanceFitness. Beginning in 1989, in collaboration with Group Health and Senior Services, HPRC conducted research to develop a physical activity program for older adults, which eventually became EnhanceFitness and is now under the management of Senior Services. As of August 2011, the program offered in 533 sites in 30 states.

Selected physical activity-related activities

Built Environment, Accessibility, and Mobility Study (BEAMS). HPRC investigators are examining the barriers and facilitators to physical activity among adults 50 and older with mobility disabilities.

EnhanceFitness (EF). HPRC leads EF research and evaluation. Our investigators lead and participate in the EF Researchers' Forum, speak at annual trainer and instructor meetings, assist other investigators in conducting research about EF, and disseminate EF findings through articles and presentations. HPRC also plays a key role in adapting EF for frailer older adults, ethnic and cultural communities, and people with cognitive impairment and chronic conditions, such as arthritis (www.projectenhance.org).

PEARLS (Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives for Seniors). Our investigators work with aging services organizations, senior centers, and social service agencies to disseminate PEARLS. The in-home, brief counseling program teaches depression management techniques, including engagement in physical activity (www.pearlsprogram.org).

Workplace Solutions. HPRC investigators are working with the American Cancer Society (ACS) to develop and test dissemination of two workplace health promotion initiatives that include physical activity components: Workplace Solutions, designed for large employers, and HealthLinks, designed for small and mid-sized employers (www.acsworkplacesolutions.com).



Our vision...

A world of physically active middle-aged and older adults.

CDC Healthy Aging Research Network (HAN)

HPRC is the **coordinating center** of this national PRC thematic research network. Network priorities include physical activity and aging and their intersection with the built, social, and policy environments.

CDC-HAN **edited the 2011 special issue** of the *Journal of Aging Research* on Mobility and Aging: Transference to Transportation.

In a year-long **initiative on environmental and policy change to support healthy aging**, CDC-HAN produced a four-module webinar series, four related action briefs, and an online, searchable database of resources related to mobility and the built environment (www.epc-clearinghouse.org). The initiative materials are available at www.agingfriendly.org.

Through CDC-HAN, HPRC **helped conduct environmental community audits** to identify characteristics of the built environment that promote or hinder walking and physical activity for older adults.

Coalitions and Partnerships

HPRC collaborates with partners to develop policies, programs, and social and physical environments that promote physical activity for older adults.

Healthy Aging Partnership (HAP). HAP is a coalition of community organizations in King County, Washington. HPRC is a member of the steering committee and participates in its projects.

Washington Alliance for Healthy Aging (WAHA). HPRC actively participates in this state-wide group, which focuses on promoting the dissemination of research, best practices, and strategies for healthy aging.

Washington Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (WCPPA). HPRC has been a member since WCPPA's inception in 1999.

For more information about our physical activity work and publications, see depts.washington.edu/hprc/activity.

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Healthier Communities Together

HPRC is a research center at the University of Washington School of Public Health.