



News Release

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Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health

From research to real world: Study highlights successful physical activity programs for older adults

(COLLEGE STATION, TX) — Researchers at the University of South Carolina’s Arnold School of Public Health, in collaboration with researchers at the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health (HSC), recently looked at data from the *Active for Life*[®] program and found that physical activity programs developed and tested in research settings can be successfully implemented and diffused through community organizations.

Active for Life[®] was established in 2003 at the HSC-School of Rural Public Health, with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding. The program goals were to learn how research-based programs can be adapted for large-scale dissemination, understand factors that affect program adoption by community organizations, broaden the reach of programs, and understand what is needed at the community level to sustain programs. *Active for Life*[®] specifically addressed physical activity among mature adults. The program used two lifestyle interventions, *Active Choices*[™], a telephone-coaching program, and *Active Living Every Day*, a group-based program.

Researchers looked at data from 5,000 program participants between 2003 and 2007. The findings, published in the October issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, showed significant increases in total physical activity, as well as increases in moderate to vigorous intensity. Participants also showed increases in satisfaction of body appearance and function, and small decreases in body weight. Those who took part in the *Active Living Every Day* program also reported a decrease in perceived stress and depressive symptoms.

Sara Wilcox, Ph.D., the lead author of the paper and associate professor and director of the South Carolina Behavioral Science Laboratory, said the study is significant because it shows that community organizations can adapt and successfully deliver research-based programs.

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Wilcox commented: “Many programs shown to be effective in research studies are never disseminated more widely and thus don’t impact public health. This initiative was different because it showed that community-based organizations could put these two programs in place, reach a large number of older adults, and produce meaningful changes. We now plan to identify specific factors that made the programs successful.”

Marcia G. Ory, Ph.D., M.P.H., national program director of *Active for Life*[®] and Regents Professor at the HSC-School of Rural Public Health added: “Widespread dissemination of *Active for Life*[®] was the vision from the start. What’s exciting is the partnerships generated among community organizations, aging service networks, and health care settings. These partnerships helped us reach large numbers of older adults and will be a major factor in sustaining the programs.”

In one of the program sites, the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio and Hamilton County Public Health (HCPH) partnered to reach older adults in their community. Stacy Wegley, M.P.H., director of health promotion and education for HCPH commented: “The program allowed people to begin at whatever level of physical activity they were. No matter how sedentary or active they had been, they could start at that point and increase their physical activity level.”

The Ohio program as well as many other program sites are continuing through a variety of community, state, and federal funding sources and are helping older adults maintain their health and functioning.

Active for Life[®] grantees are Blue Shield of California in Woodland Hills; Church Health Center of Memphis; Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, Cincinnati; Greater Detroit Area Health Council; FirstHealth of the Carolinas, Pinehurst, N.C.; Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington Inc., Rockville, Md.; The OASIS Institute, St. Louis, Mo.; San Mateo County Health Services, San Mateo, Ca.; and YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

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For two centuries, the University of South Carolina’s scholarship, research and outreach efforts have contributed to the greater good of society. With 39,000 students on eight campuses and more than 350 degree programs – including law, engineering, public health and medicine – and 240,000 alumni, the University is improving the lives of individuals in South Carolina and around the world. South Carolina has received the highest research designation awarded by the Carnegie Foundation, and the University’s undergraduate international business program is ranked best in the nation in U.S. News & World Report.

The Texas A&M Health Science Center provides the state with health education, outreach and research. Its seven colleges located in communities throughout Texas are the Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas, the College of Medicine in College Station and Temple, the College of Nursing in College Station, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the Institute of Biosciences and Technology in Houston, the Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy in Kingsville, and the School of Rural Public Health in College Station.

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