

The Prevention Research Centers: Enhance Fitness

EnhanceFitness is a physical activity program for adults, aged 60 years or older, that emphasizes activities to increase endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. Participants improve in physical and social functioning as well as levels of pain and depression. Their health care costs are also significantly reduced.

Lead Agency:

The Prevention Research Center

Agency Mission:

The Prevention Research Centers work as an interdependent network of community, academic, and public health partners to conduct prevention research and promote the wide use of practices proven to promote good health.

Principal Investigator:

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Partner Agencies:

Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound and Senior Services of Seattle/King County
Administration on Aging, National Council on Aging

General Description:

Researchers collaborated to develop a physical activity program for adults aged 60 years or older. The program emphasizes activities to increase endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. The pilot study showed that participants improved significantly in almost every area tested—from physical and social functioning to levels of pain and depression. The health care costs for participants attending at least once a week were significantly reduced. Now the program is offered at 158 community sites in 17 states, and the researchers continue to dissemination research. In 2003, the National Council on Aging recognized the physical activity program as one of the top ten physical activity programs for U.S. seniors.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

EnhanceFitness is feasible and well-attended when offered in senior centers and other community-based settings. It is sustainable and portable. The number of participants continues to increase—by 76% in a recent calendar year.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

An analysis of Group Health Cooperative Medicare enrollees showed that people who participated in EnhanceFitness at least once per week had significantly fewer hospitalizations (by 7.9%), and lower health care costs (by \$1,057) than nonparticipants. The availability of such a successful program becomes more and more pertinent as the U.S. population ages, disability prevention among the elderly becomes a higher national priority, and health care costs continue to climb.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

The program was adapted for dissemination and portability by developing standards; manuals for instructors, administrators, and participants; and procedures for monitoring outcomes. Now in development as a “train-the-trainer” program and pilot programs in Hispanic and American Indian communities. It also receives funding from local foundations to help defray the cost of the program for low-income older adults of color.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

The decline in strength, endurance, flexibility, and balance that occurs with aging contributes to diminished independence, diminished vitality, and increased likelihood of disabling injury. EnhanceFitness has been *proven* to enhance physical and psychosocial function. Such gains can help ensure that older adults retain independence and a high quality of life.