

Active Healthy Aging in Renfrew County

Time for Action



Draft Report Prepared by:
Louise A. Edmonds
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Final Report Prepared by:
Lara Mylly
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Executive Summary

Introduction

In partnership with Barry's Bay Home Support Services (BBHSS) and other stakeholders, the Whitewater Bromley Community Health Centre (WBCHC), the need for increased coordination and planning for physical activity services for older adults across Renfrew County has been identified. Developing an Active Aging Community of Practice (CoP) or network for Renfrew County is one option to be considered towards the goal of a more coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of physical activity programs and services for older adults.

The first of the Baby Boom generation turned 65 years old in 2011. Maintaining adult fitness will be an important goal as these adults progress through their retirement years and beyond. A healthy active lifestyle has been correlated with many health benefits while the cost of inactivity is high. Building capacity to provide physical activity programming for older adults (55 years and up) is therefore a priority. Governments are continuing to expand their investment in active aging and this is a priority for Renfrew County given the dramatic increase expected in the population of Renfrew County adults who will reach 55 or older in the next decade and beyond.

Methodology

Several key activities were conducted including: 1) a brief review of the literature; 2) review of practices and programs from other municipalities engaged in physical activity planning for older adults; 3) consultations with 37 key informants from municipal, recreation, health, seniors and community sectors that serve the older adult population and; 4) a review of services, initiatives, and community organizations and networks that serve older adults in Renfrew County.

Findings

Most people interviewed were aware of the Baby Boom generation though few had developed strategic plans relative to the impact of this demographic, specifically the social and economic costs of falls. Municipalities must prepare for an aging society and ensure more opportunities for active, healthy aging.

With a population of 101,326, (2011 Census) spread across an area larger than Prince Edward Island (PEI), special challenges in coordination and communication are a reality. Many networks and organizations are working to address and provide seniors' services and programs in the County. More coordinated planning for seniors would eliminate overlap, better coordinate and increase efficiency across committees as well as fill service gaps relative to physical activity and aging.

Healthy aging in Renfrew County municipalities will require the coordination of several sectors: health care, municipal governments and recreation, community senior citizen centres and seniors' groups themselves. There is widespread support for more coordinated, collaborative planning around active aging. There is also an association of partners interested in increasing physical activity for older adults in the County.

A network supporting active aging should be established to engage in strategic planning and knowledge transfer. This would increase integration and collaboration and also increase opportunities specifically for older adults. A coordinated strategy could address many issues identified in this project including: addressing service gaps for older adults, supporting equity of service, advocating for more publicity and awareness of opportunities of the importance of physical activity and aging and to share best practices.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Ensure consultation between regional representatives with local networks/agencies relevant to active aging prior to implementation of regional programs in Renfrew County;
2. Evaluate potential for the evolution of an "active aging network or Community of Practice" with capacity to coordinate an active aging strategy and audit of resources for Renfrew County;
3. Ensure community members who are older adults are included in the active aging strategy as a key stakeholder group;
4. Support primary care providers through training and resources so they can ensure physical activity is promoted as part of the medical response wherever possible;
5. Establish defined exercise pathways to support active aging for people along the continuum of aging (55 yrs. +) and ability levels (includes Home Support Exercise, Falls Prevention programs, evidence-based, Senior Fitness Classes etc.);
6. Consider capacity to expand Elderly Persons Centres (EPC) as part of an active aging audit to extend reach of EPCs to more communities in the County;
7. Provide evidence-based training, resources and promising practice methods for planning and implementation of community-based physical activity interventions (i.e. Stand UP! Falls Prevention classes; Senior Fitness Instructor Course training for community leaders to facilitate senior fitness classes);
8. Ensure physical activity is a core element of health promotion, prevention and chronic disease self-management tools/programs;
9. Develop and implement policies and funding systems that increase access to affordable physical activity opportunities (i.e. walking, cycling, and hiking) that support an active aging strategy.