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Eliminating Barriers: Connecting Seniors to Services in Chittenden County

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Introduction

Physical activity is an important determinant of health in older adults, and helps to prevent falls and chronic illness. Physical activity programs have benefits for physical, social, and emotional health and help to improve physical abilities and reduce impairments in activities of daily living¹.

In Chittenden county, less than one third of older adults participate in group activity programs, but 48% report that they would like to be more active². Older adults may face barriers to participation including lack of information, accessibility, affordability, poor physical health, and social isolation.

Project aims:

1. Identify and quantify barriers to participation in physical activity programs by older adults in Chittenden County.
2. Identify the population of adults in Chittenden County that would be interested in such programs but does not currently use them.
3. Identify strategies that community organizations can use to overcome barriers to participation in programming.

Methods

- ❖ A 13-question survey was generated to assess group programming usage among seniors aged ≥ 50 years in Chittenden County, Vermont.
- ❖ Topics surveyed included: program preferences, barriers to access, advertisement, transportation, and motivating factors for participation.
- ❖ 144 Vermonters were surveyed using electronic (Lime Survey) and paper forms. Paper copies of surveys were completed at 5 physician's offices in Chittenden County and the Greater Burlington YMCA. The Greater Burlington YMCA and AARP Vermont distributed electronic survey links via Facebook.
- ❖ A workshop was held at the YMCA to elicit qualitative insights regarding group activity. A graph was set up for one month at the YMCA to assess current and desired activity levels among age groups.
- ❖ Statistical analyses (chi-squared tests) were conducted using SPSS.

Results

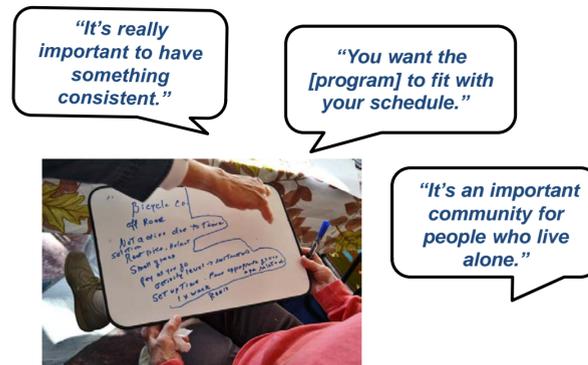


Figure 1. YMCA workshop.

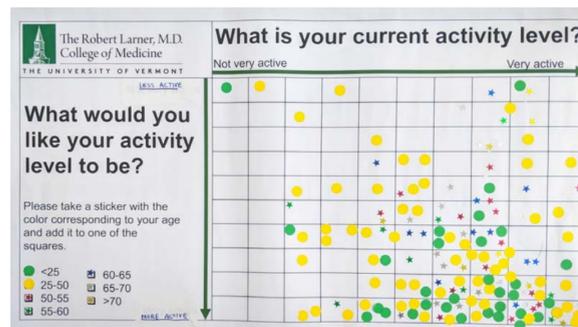


Figure 2. Assessment of activity levels.

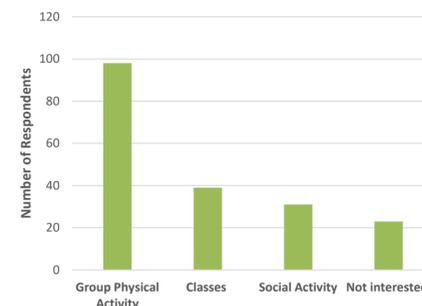


Figure 3. Preferred types of group activity

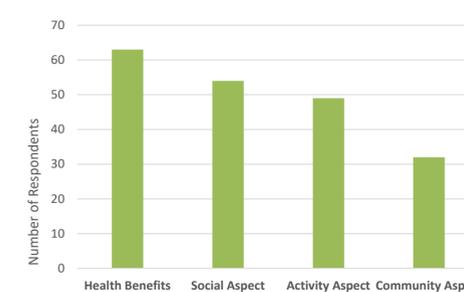


Figure 4. Motivation for attending activities

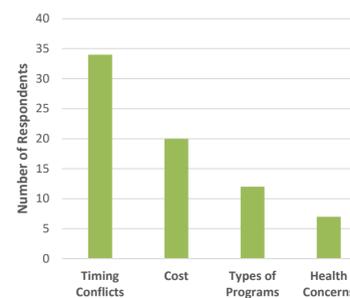


Figure 5. Barriers to attending activities

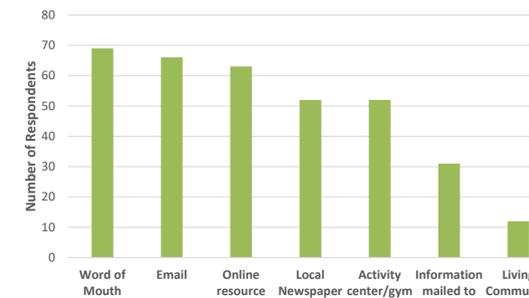


Figure 6. Ways respondents find out about activities

- ❖ **YMCA Workshop:** Group discussions from the workshop (Figure 1) highlighted the importance of the community aspects of group exercise.
- ❖ **Assessment of activity:** Seniors at the YMCA (indicated by star stickers in Figure 2) are motivated to improve current activity levels.
- ❖ **Demographics:** Out of a total of 144 survey respondents, 29 (20.1%) were male, 114 (79.2%) were female with one preferring not to answer. There were 71 respondents from Burlington, 12 from South Burlington, and 61 from other communities.
- ❖ **Living situation:** 86.1% (n=124) of respondents lived in an owned home/apartment, 11.8% (n=17) rented, and 1.4% (n=2) reported other living situations. 58.3% (n=84) live with their spouses, 25.7% (n=37) live alone, with 16% (n=23) reporting other living situations. 95.8% (n=138) of respondents were self-sufficient.
- ❖ **Lifestyle:** 54.9% (n=79) of respondents said they were active for greater than 5 hours per week, 33% (n=48) were active for between 2 and 5 hours, 7% (n=10) were active for between 1 and 2 hours, and 5% (n=7) were active for less than 1 hour.
- ❖ **Group Participation:** 46.5% (n=67) of respondents had participated in group programming in the past 6 months. Group participation was significantly higher among more active respondents ($X^2=4.535$, $df = 2$, $p=0.020$).

Discussion

- ❖ Timing conflicts were the most frequently cited barrier to access, and we recommend group programs have flexible schedules with several sessions per week.
- ❖ 52% reported word of mouth as their primary source of information. This was echoed in the workshop. We recommend that the YMCA incentivize current members to inform others about programs at the YMCA, and organize community events to advertise these programs.
- ❖ The second most prominent method of obtaining information among seniors was email, suggesting an electronic mailing list may be an effective way of advertising exercise programs at the YMCA.
- ❖ At 78%, the health benefit of exercise was the main motivator for participating in group exercise programs, and advertising the health benefits related to group programs at the YMCA may improve demand.

Conclusions

- ❖ Overall, our findings indicate that the majority of our respondents in Chittenden county are highly active; however, they frequently report significant barriers preventing them from participating in group programs.
- ❖ Our recommendations are to advertise programming, emphasizing health benefits, and offer flexible schedules via word of mouth and email.

References

1. Hamar, Brent, Carter R. Coberley, James E. Pope, and Elizabeth Y. Rula. "Impact of a Senior Fitness Program on Measures of Physical and Emotional Health and Functioning." Population Health Management 16.6 (2013): 364-72.
2. "Senior Engagement Study." United Way of Northwest Vermont. 2015.

Acknowledgements

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