

OLDER ADULTS GET HELP TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE

Peer Exercise Program Promotes Independence (PEPPI) engages older adults in physical activity

Public Health Problem

- Active living should be a goal for all adults - to preserve function, delay or prevent chronic diseases and maintain independent living.
- A pilot project in central Arkansas determined that the older adult population was in need of a physical activity intervention.

Program

- The University of Arkansas Medical School and the Arkansas Department of Health expanded the PEPPI pilot exercise project to other regions of the state for adults over sixty. The exercise program is based on research conducted at Tufts University which has demonstrated the benefits of this type of training for older adults.
- Older adult peer leaders receive training in flexibility, balance, strength and endurance exercises and lead exercise classes for their peers in places such as senior centers, churches, or housing complexes. There are now well over two hundred trained peer leaders in the state.
- The PEPPI program gives older Arkansans the opportunity to learn how to exercise using correct techniques in a safe environment among people of similar age and health conditions and to increase their level of physical activity.
- Specific program goals for the number of older adult centers offering the PEPPI program have been set.

Impact

- Most participants saw an improvement in endurance and lower body strength and roughly half saw improvement in four other fitness measures.
- This program is now offered statewide.
- PEPPI won the national Health Educators Institute, Special Population Health Education/Health Promotion Award and is recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a model program.
- Partnerships with the Division of Aging and Adult Services, Area Agency on Aging, Centers on Aging, and the Healthy Aging Coalition, leveraged additional funds for implementation from an Administration on Aging & National Council on Aging grant to offer an additional evidence-based physical activity program in two regions.

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