

# Access to Active Living for Older Adults



## The Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA)

is a nationally incorporated non-profit organization that brings together partners throughout Canada who believe that active living is essential to improving health and the quality of life as we age. This partnership of organizations and individuals represents governments, seniors, health and professional organizations, the private sector, researchers and academics who work together on a mission to encourage older Canadians to maintain and enhance their well-being and independence through a lifestyle that embraces daily physical activities.

## Background

With funding provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada, ALCOA proposed to strengthen communication among its members and other community based organizations and individuals. Through surveys and focus groups, several issues were discussed relating to the following areas:

- ✓ barriers for older adults to be physically active both from the perspective of the older adult and the agencies
- ✓ proposed recommendations to remove these barriers

ALCOA would also develop a strategy for on-going communication with older adults and community agencies.



## Results

The analysis of the survey from over 200 older adults provided the following results:

1. Most older adults think there are three major parts of active living:



- ✓ Getting out and doing something (exercise, playing darts, dancing or some other activity)
- ✓ Being with other people and socializing
- ✓ Eating in a healthy and nutritious way

2. Barriers to physical activity are consistent with the research and are still issues for many older adults. They include:

- ✓ Accessibility – transportation, class times, safety issues to get to the facility
- ✓ Programs – safety (fear of injury), suitability, availability, insufficient information, leadership
- ✓ Cost – programs, transportation to facility
- ✓ Psycho-Social Support – motivation, social interaction

3. When asked what motivates those who are currently active, their response was:

- ✓ Social interaction (42%) (companionship, being active with partner, meeting new people, getting out of house/home, laughing)
- ✓ Stay active in mind and body (45%) (to be healthy, stay in shape, feel good about myself, rehab, to live longer, learning new things, feel good, acquire more energy, maintain health weight, decrease health issues associated with aging, to be mobile and independent, to be productive)
- ✓ Fun/enjoyment (13%)



## Project Overview

There were 105 survey responses received from service providers who work at a variety of agencies and organizations. A specific survey for older adults was distributed and 130 responses were received. The information obtained from the surveys was then used as a basis for discussions with several focus groups, held in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta. One hundred and twelve older adults, both active and inactive, participated in these focus groups. The information on barriers received from the surveys and focus groups, reinforced previous research conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and other similar organizations.

The information gathered through these various methods was discussed at a final meeting with ALCOA representatives. The discussion to review the information and propose recommendations was grounded in the health promotion framework, Circle of Health Learning Guide<sup>®</sup>, which was developed by the Prince Edward Island Health and Community Services Agency.



### Contact Information:

ALCOA, P.O. Box 143, Shelburne, ON, L0N 1M0  
ph) 1.800.549.9799 fax) 1.519.925.3955  
email) [alcoa3@ca.inter.net](mailto:alcoa3@ca.inter.net) web) [www.alcoa.ca](http://www.alcoa.ca)

## Recommendations

The Circle of Health<sup>®</sup> identifies five areas for consideration:

1. Health as a resource to meet peoples' needs
2. Strategies for how we can improve health
3. Participants who are involved in health promotion
4. Determinants for what makes and keeps people healthy
5. The values relating to why we want to promote health

What are the determinants to keep older adults healthy?

1. Genetics
2. Employment & Working Conditions
3. Health Services
4. Physical Environment
5. Personal Health Practices & Coping Skills
6. Culture
7. Healthy Child Development
8. Income and Social Status
9. Gender
10. Social Support Networks
11. Education

Who can address these issues?

1. Individuals
2. Families
3. Society (as a whole)
4. Systems (governments, schools, volunteer groups)
5. Communities (people who have a common interest or who live in the same area)

How can these issues be addressed?

1. Re-Orient Health Services
2. Strengthen Community Action
3. Build Healthy Public Policy
4. Create Supportive Environments
5. Develop Personal Skills

Several program concepts to overcome these barriers were discussed at the final ALCOA meeting. These are noted below. However, three programs (noted in bold) addressed many of the factors in the Circle of Health<sup>®</sup> framework.

The thirteen areas suggested for consideration included:

1. Programs covered under health care for those "at risk"
2. **Feeling Better Programs 1 & 2**
3. Reduced rates
  - On transit at low traffic times
  - Subsidized Taxis
  - Service clubs/car dealership vans
4. Information in Welcome Wagon packages
5. Older Adult Tax Credit
6. **Access to Free Activities (e.g. walking)**
7. Fitness Discount Card
8. **Exercise at Home Programs**
9. Buddy system
10. Employee Groups
11. Offer "mini" classes for new potential members
12. Volunteering – "bring a pal"
13. Increase Awareness



The three programs that best address many of these barriers are as follows:

1. **Feeling Better Program 1**, offered through the Evergreen Seniors Centre in Guelph, was the first program to offer home support (one-on-one) exercise programs, with older adult volunteers, trained by the Centre for Activity and Aging, located in London, Ontario. The program then expanded to Feeling Better 2 which offers group classes in local libraries, community centres, church basements, etc., once again run by older adult trained volunteers.

The Feeling Better Program 1 has been able to remove many of the noted barriers for older adult involvement in physical activity. For those individuals who have limitations with accessibility, program suitability, availability, cost, etc., this one-on-one program addresses those issues and provides safe effective at home exercise programs. Feeling Better 2 has also addressed many of the concerns relating to cost, location, suitability etc.

2. **Supportive Environments and Age Friendly Cities** are essential to allow all residents (young and old alike) to live actively within their community. These age friendly cities are now being considered in many cities across Canada. Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Saanich, British Columbia, Sherbrooke, Quebec and Halifax, Nova Scotia, will serve as official participants in the WHO's Age Friendly Cities Project. For more information on that initiative visit:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2006/06/2006-06-08-03.html>

or

[http://www.umanitoba.ca/centres/aging/media/Portage\\_la\\_Prairie\\_A-F\\_report.pdf](http://www.umanitoba.ca/centres/aging/media/Portage_la_Prairie_A-F_report.pdf)

Mobility in Aging, a strategic initiative of the CIHR Institute of Ageing, has a significant amount of research and information associated with mobility and older adults. More information on this initiative may be found at:

<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29994.html#1>

3. **SMART** is a program of the Victoria Order of Nurses – (Seniors Maintaining Active Roles Together). It is a gentle exercise program for older adults, a partner program with the "Feeling Better Program" as mentioned above. This program is designed to improve ones ability to participate in activities of daily living and affords older adults the opportunity to attend structured fitness classes within the community. A SMART volunteer may instruct Group and/ or In-Home exercise programs. For more information visit: [http://www.von.ca/pdf/seniors\\_smart\\_followup\\_english.pdf](http://www.von.ca/pdf/seniors_smart_followup_english.pdf).

## Future Action Required

Many of the thirteen suggested areas for consideration noted above, would require a future project initiative to develop and evaluate the efficacy of such program ideas further. Although all ideas showed merit and would warrant further discussion, these three current programs definitely addressed many of the barriers for older adults and perhaps could be expanded beyond their current geographical boundaries.

As a practitioner, director, or a consumer, these ideas and/or programs could be further investigated for possible inclusion into your current or new program offerings.