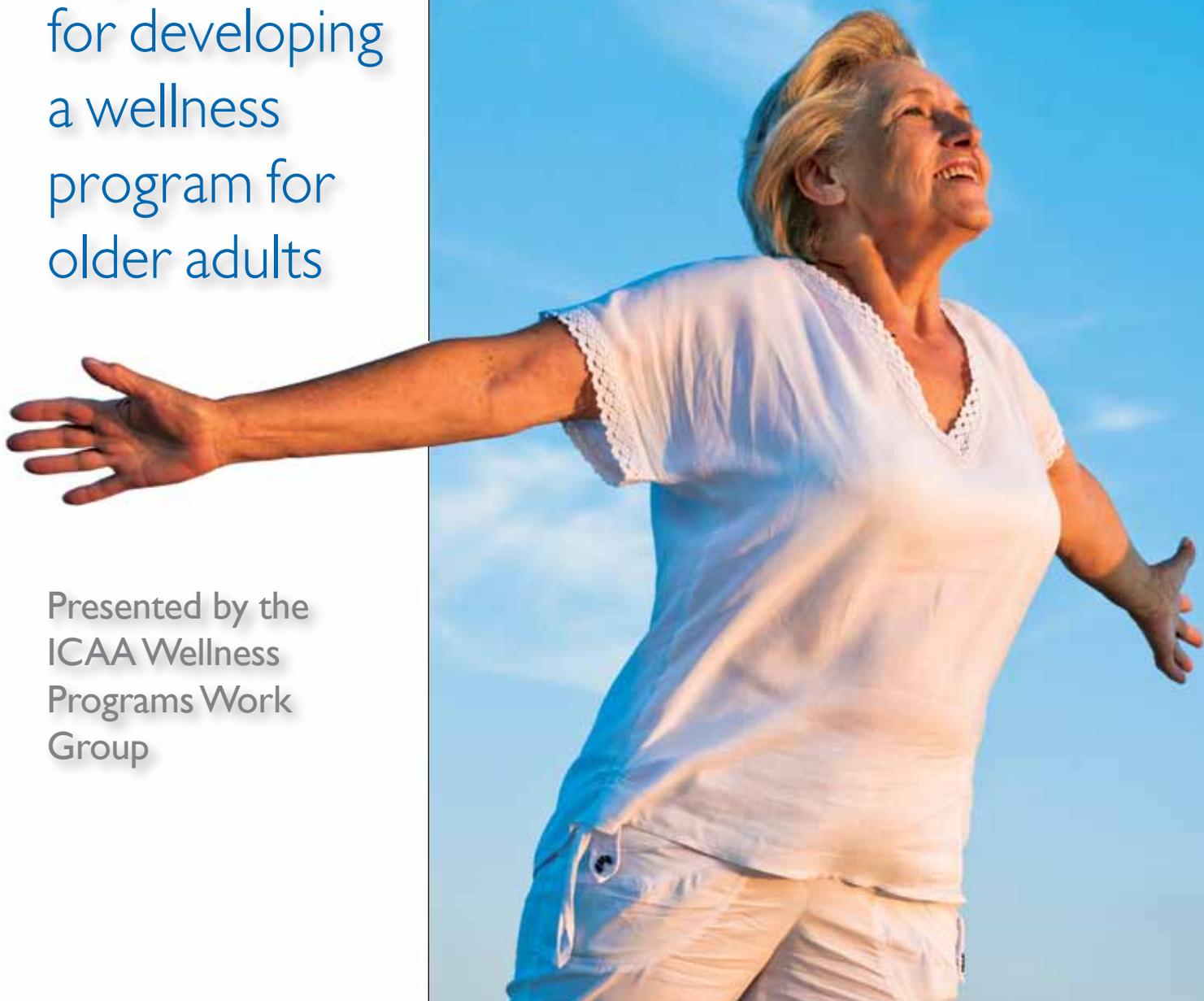


Key elements for developing a wellness program for older adults

Presented by the
ICAA Wellness
Programs Work
Group



Active aging promotes the vision of all individuals—regardless of age, socioeconomic status or health—fully engaging in life. As the World Health Organization explains, “the word ‘active’ refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labor force. Older people who retire from work, are ill or live with disabilities can remain active contributors to their families, peers, communities and nations. Active aging aims to extend healthy life expectancy and quality of life for all people as they age.”¹

The vision of active aging is reflected in the concept of “wellness.” What is wellness? A definition offered by the National Wellness Institute is that “wellness is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence.”² In the Whole-Person Wellness Model developed by Jan Montague, the concept is relative to the individual, integrating each person’s multiple dimensions into positive living and meaningful activities.³

A **wellness culture** for older adults is as broad as life itself. A culture within a given community—whether it be in a small social circle such as a family or a group with shared interests, or within a larger structure, such as a meal program, retirement community or living environment—reflects the experience of its members. The culture is the sum of each group’s ways of living and shared common interests.

When the members of the group make the investment to strive toward an optimal sense of well-being, a culture of wellness is born. The wellness culture is measured by the intention of leaders to provide, and participants to engage in, those experiences that enable all members to participate in life-affirming choices, programs and activities.

Older adults are active participants in developing and directing the wellness culture.

The culture equally involves every person who is within its sphere, regardless of role. Older adults, staff members, family members, advisors, suppliers, friends and neighbors—all are responsible for promoting the wellness culture through their actions as well as their words. They are responsible to themselves, and to one another.

The **wellness model** is used by organizations that serve older adults to translate the active-aging philosophy into overlapping dimensions that form a structure for individuals to explore their own lives, and for professionals to develop programs that provide older adults with opportunities to do so. The dimensions of wellness⁴ are often classified as:

- emotional
- environmental
- intellectual/cognitive
- physical
- professional/vocational
- social
- spiritual

While organizations may vary the model by adding to or altering the number of wellness dimensions, the purpose remains the same: to reflect the areas of a person’s life.

A **wellness program** is a planned combination of structured and unstructured opportunities with the goal of promoting physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, environmental and/or vocational health and well-being so participants are encouraged to become their best selves, regardless of personal challenges.

For this paper, the terms “wellness” and “wellness program” refer to all the enriching lifestyle and health-promoting opportunities offered by an organization. Organizations may have individual brand names for programs, or assign the word “wellness” to specific departments. Some organizations equate the term “wellness” solely with a fitness program or healthcare services. However, whole-person wellness

Programming within the dimensions of wellness

involves all the dimensions, and that is the reference point for the key elements of a wellness program.

To implement a comprehensive wellness program, the organization has several options:

- Form a wellness team composed of at least one representative from each function or department, including supporting roles such as maintenance, food services and administration along with activities, fitness, healthcare services, social services and the other roles found in the organization. Older adults are included as members of the wellness team.
- Structure a single wellness department responsible for all lifestyle and preventive health services, reporting to a single wellness leader who coordinates all aspects of the program. Older adults are ongoing advisors to the wellness department.
- Maintain separate departments, but require cross-department interaction with mutual performance goals based on implementing the wellness culture. Reward staff members who work with those in other departments to plan joint programs, share budgets and promote one another's wellness opportunities.
- Include participation in the wellness culture in job descriptions and performance reviews.

WELLNESS PROGRAMS FOCUS ON MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

The goal of a wellness program is to engage each individual in planned activities and unstructured opportunities that have personal meaning and provide a sense of purpose. Engagement in life is a defining factor in successful aging because research has shown that engagement can play a significant role in health and subjective well-being in later life.⁵

Dimensions	Descriptions	Examples
Emotional	managing and directing feelings; coping with challenges and behaving in trustworthy and respectful ways	peer counseling, stress management, humor/laughter, personal histories, celebrations, rewards, purpose
Environmental	ways to use the environment for wellness, as well as eco-friendly products, services, processes and designs, which contribute to a healthier world	meditation gardens, walking paths, city and community eco-friendly design, recycling, green building, use of nontoxic cleaning and maintenance supplies
Intellectual, cognitive	engaging in creative pursuits and intellectually stimulating activities; problem-solving and reasoning	classes with a cognitive component, cultural activities, arts and crafts, journaling, games/puzzles, reading, lifelong-learning programs
Physical	choosing lifestyle habits that maintain or improve health and functional ability	exercise, nutrition, sports, sleep, self-care, alcohol/drugs and tobacco cessation, medical self-care, fitness programs
Professional, vocational	maintaining, improving or transferring skills; abilities and attitudes that help self or others stay productive and satisfied with the work they produce	paid work, volunteer work, skills classes, mentoring, tutoring, hobbies, caregiving, resident-led programming
Social	interacting with others for mutual benefit; awareness of the larger community and participation within it; connecting with others	clubs, volunteering, dancing, visiting friends and family, group and intergenerational activities, travel, technology (Skype, email, Facebook)
Spiritual	living with a meaning/purpose in life; exploring beliefs and values that create personal peace and understanding	group and/or individual faith-based activities, personal meditation/reflection, mindful exercise (yoga, tai chi), experiencing nature

An engaging program involves participants according to their level of capability and interest, and encourages them to become part of the experience. A person's feelings of well-being are affected by a vast array of influences, many of which can be altered by personal choice. A program based in a wellness culture provides choices according to the interests and needs of the population to be served. Speaking with individuals to learn about their specific backgrounds, interests and desires is an important way to insure the program benefits individuals and the group.

Two important factors in programming for older adults are levels of physical function and cognitive function. A well-rounded program includes opportunities for people at all levels of function.

FRAMEWORK FOR A SUCCESSFUL WELLNESS PROGRAM

Successful wellness programs have seven key elements. Just as the dimensions of wellness overlap and coordinate to provide rich environments for living, the seven program elements intertwine to flow synergistically across departments and disciplines.

1. Priority—include wellness as a key component of the business model
2. People—select and train the right people at needed staff levels
3. Planning—focus strategies on the population's diverse needs and opportunities
4. Program—design formal and informal opportunities for the population
5. Performance—track outcomes, evaluate results, and manage the program and people
6. Promotion—market the program to participants, families, colleagues and influencers
7. Problem-solving—take action based on new information or challenges

Within each element there are numerous considerations and levels, not all of which

can be covered in this paper. But this framework sets the cornerstone for design and delivery of a wellness culture and program. It allows for the flexibility needed by each organization, while clarifying what is needed for a complete, successful program that serves older adults and the organization.

Priority—include wellness as a key component of the business model

A comprehensive and well-managed wellness program provides benefits to the individual and to the organization. A survey conducted by the International Council on Active Aging shows that organizations invest in wellness programs and the physical plant, and plan to do so in the future, to increase the life satisfaction of older adults (93%), attract new customers/residents (83%), and to meet the demand of current customers/residents (61%).⁶ Wellness is a tangible way to meet the organization's mission, as well as a competitive advantage that will help insure the sustainability of the organization.

As a priority in the organization, wellness is part of the strategic business plan. The responsibility for the culture and the overall direction of the program belongs at the executive level.⁷ The wellness philosophy/program has a mission statement, goals, objectives and budget.⁸ As a priority, the planned wellness program and the physical environment for unstructured opportunities are adequately resourced in terms of budget and staffing, reflecting the commitment of the organization.

Encouraging a wellness culture is present in the organization's overall mission, not just in the portion of the organization charged with the responsibility to implement the structured program. Staff members realize that the overall health and well-being of their clients and residents depend on staff actively encouraging participation in the program as well as participating in the pro-

gram themselves. Championing wellness is an organizational responsibility, not the responsibility of a single person or department.

People—select and train the right people at needed staff levels

The people who deliver the program are crucial to its success. All members of a staff or team believe in and contribute to a wellness culture, regardless of their job titles and departments. In addition, a lead staff person champions the program and coordinates communication and activities among the entire staff. The wellness program functions well when the lead staff person is supported by a wellness team that includes representatives from every other department in the organization.

Surveys of staff titles, educational backgrounds and responsibilities show that staff members with direct responsibility for implementing wellness objectives come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Their titles and responsibilities also vary.^{9,10} In addition to their background education and technical expertise, staff members should bring:¹¹

- understanding of the psychosocial perspectives of adults who are aging
- knowledge to adapt to functional and cognitive abilities
- effective communication skills
- sincere interest in and enthusiasm for the older adults they work with
- cultural sensitivity and understanding; an ability to understand diversity
- humor, resourcefulness, empathy and leadership

Regardless of organizational structure, the people who directly implement the wellness program generally fall within two categories:

Generalists lead multiple types of activities, whether basic health educa-



tion, trivia games, book clubs, social gatherings and special events. Generalists are needed to provide a well-rounded program since they touch all the dimensions.

Specialists bring expertise and credibility for a particular wellness dimension. For example, in the physical dimension, a nutritionist and chef bring expertise to nutrition education and the management of chronic conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease. The physical activity/fitness function is led by a person with a credential in exercise sciences. In the intellectual dimension, a college professor brings expertise to a lecture series; a music therapist brings specialist knowledge to a program that includes the emotional, intellectual and vocational dimensions.

Successful wellness programs require adequate staffing. A successful wellness program is a team effort with a blend of specialists and generalists. Anecdotal reports confirm that a room or space devoted to an activity but without staffing is not used.



Planning-focus strategies on the population's diverse needs and opportunities

As an organizational priority, the wellness program is planned on an annual basis and updated periodically. Wellness programs have a mission statement and clear objectives that are used to guide the plan, and to serve as markers when measuring results. Available resources of places and people are considered along with an explanation of additional items or staff members needed to meet the plan's objectives.

A single individual leads the planning process and writes the plan, but the elements of the program plan result from a team effort. Participants, colleagues and family members influence program planning. In addition to colleagues on the staff, outside experts can add spark to the program by bringing specialized knowledge in music, astronomy, health conditions, travel and other subjects.

Planning can be based on an environmental assessment (what others are doing) and a local needs assessment (what an organization's population wants/needs). A program adjusts to meet the needs and interests of participants with the goal of engaging as many people as possible in the offerings. This requires moving beyond a checklist of possible activities to conversations that help planners get to know clients more fully, discover their aspirations and fears, and understand possibilities of things they have always wanted to do, but never before had the chance. Layered on top is the "need to have" program elements, such as health education, that may not appear on an older person's list.

The dimensions of wellness serve as a guide to check that program offerings meet the goals of the program and offer a variety of opportunities. Part of the plan includes how the program will provide opportunities in each of the dimensions. An annual plan keeps the dimensions in balance so that the overall program is multifaceted.

An example is a fitness room without a full-time instructor. Comparably, a person who is not educated or trained in an area cannot be expected to "be all things to all people." For example, an exercise physiologist providing fitness cannot be expected to lead and direct a theater group, unless that person has experience in that field.

Staff members must be able to adapt to individuals' abilities, as well as encourage each person to be as involved as possible. Ongoing professional development aids staffing in improving technical skills as well as gathering the new ideas and formats that keep a program fresh and relevant. Appropriately trained staff members are needed to educate, encourage participation, and build the sense of community that fosters health and well-being.

In addition to the organization's wellness team, professionals outside the organization can provide input, new ideas and collaborative opportunities. External advisors can include professionals in the arts, therapies, travel or fitness.

The annual plan accounts for people at different levels of physical and cognitive function as well as their cultural perspectives. A comprehensive plan accommodates for people who are very active, those who are frail and sedentary, newcomers and veterans. Likewise, an inclusive program has multiple entry points throughout the year. Older adults will be at different stages of their lives; some have no history of participating in programs and especially in physical activity. The program plan insures that there are different entry points and types of activities to encourage people to participate.

A program will also be adapted to the physical environment. For example, the facilities and safe open spaces available near apartments for low-income older adults likely differ from those available in an independent or assisted living residence. A program targeted to older adults in a YMCA or community center will coordinate with other programs and spaces aimed at youth. The program planner must decide on the types of programs and staffing that will “fit” in those places.

A practical value of the annual plan is the coordination of schedules from different departments. Food service, chronic disease management programs, chaplaincy, activities, fitness, recreation—all these functional areas produce calendars, and all their programs are within the dimensions of wellness. Coordinating among departments helps prevent conflicts and insures mutual sharing of resources.

Program-design formal and informal opportunities for the population

Program offerings in a comprehensive wellness program are formal and organized (for example, scheduled classes and activities) or informal (gardens, craft rooms or fitness centers are available at any time). Since activities take place both indoors and outdoors, the environment must be safe, accessible, attractive and engaging.

The active-aging and wellness philosophies celebrate what older adults can do, rather than assume inability or lack of interest. Both planned and unstructured activities are adapted to people of all abilities.

Planned programs take advantage of available spaces and staff members to establish a defined schedule of activities. The program offerings build the credibility of the wellness program’s value, which builds trust from participants that the program’s quality will remain regardless of staff changes or changes to spaces. The planned programs are the bedrock of the wellness culture, the elements that outsiders and clients see whenever they look at an upcoming schedule. The activities serve to establish the definition of wellness and the competitive advantage compared to other programs.

Unstructured activities are not planned or time-bound, but available to people who are self-directed. For example, a garden walk with benches and shade, or a fitness center available when clients choose to use it, or a library with a computer center. Individuals’ self-responsibility and personal choice enable them to spontaneously participate at a level that is appropriate for them.

The people delivering the programs, whether facilitators, educators or companions, play the critical role in delivering programs that are meaningful for participants. A motivating and accepting atmosphere, variety, innovation, interaction and engagement are keys to successful programs and result from the actions of the leaders and participants.

Every program has a life cycle. It is very important to evaluate ongoing programs for freshness. Avoid getting caught in the “it’s working, leave it alone” cycle, as eventually even great programs can become stale and wane. The time to make a change is before you *need* to make the change. Sometimes

a visiting guest or instructor, or even a new name, can spark interest in participation. Recognize that it is good management to end a program when it is at the end of its useful life.

Performance—track outcomes, evaluate results, and manage the program and people

Tracking outcomes is important for quality improvement, to motivate the older adults served, and to justify investment in the program. Evaluation occurs for individual sessions/classes as well as for the wellness program as a whole. Program evaluation does not wait until the end of a single cycle: evaluate early, often and at the end. Be nimble and able to adapt or change the program to meet the program participants' needs and give them what they want.

Outcomes include participation numbers, retention of participants, and number of new participants, as well as ratings of satisfaction, changes in behavior, utilization of spaces and facilities, change in falls or fall confidence, change in physical fitness measures, and health status of participants. Those are outcomes requested by senior executives and program managers, according to the work groups developing indicators for the ICAA/ProMatura Wellness Benchmarks.^{12,13}

For example, outcomes could be reported changes in eating habits following a nutrition lecture with cooking demonstration, a yearbook produced by participants as part of a computer class, or a performance by a theater group whose members wrote the play. Outcomes valued by healthcare providers and insurance companies might include changes in strength or cardiovascular endurance, or tracking of appropriate biometric measures, such as blood pressure.

Another performance indicator is the promotion of the lifestyle opportunities and service integration with other departments. For example, how often does marketing feature the lifestyle and wellness, and how

many referrals are generated by the lifestyle opportunities? How many times does the leader of food service, or of the social calendar, partner with others to produce a multidimensional program?

Evaluation likewise includes the sights and sounds of the program. Are the participants engaged? Is there laughter or conversation occurring? Do new ideas flow? Comments provided in written and verbal form often show the best ideas for the future. For example, a large percentage of respondents saying “we need a pool” can help spur a plan along.

To promote ongoing engagement in the program, the organization can have regular participant meetings to receive feedback and comments, gather input on scheduling, and generate new ideas for activities, trips and social gatherings. Since capabilities or interests change, it is important to maintain an ongoing dialogue with participants and, when available, family members and caregivers. Anonymous surveys administered once or twice a year are also a great way to solicit feedback.

Program evaluation is as much a celebration of what the organization does well as it is an opportunity to identify areas that need improvement. Taken together, evaluations of what is working and what is not as successful set the stage for quality improvement. The program manager uses evaluation to assess the completeness of the program in relation to the wellness dimensions, and to decide which formal and unstructured activities need to be expanded, maintained or retired. Is there a need for a change in personnel, or addition of new staff to meet a program goal?

Participants (and their families) are also interested in outcomes, because these show whether their investment of time, effort and money is worthwhile. Wellness staff use individual participant data for wellness

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Example planning grid

This example of a grid for one month of programming is repeated throughout the year. The annual plan may include themes or special events for each month. Examples are focusing on cardiovascular health in February (Heart Month) or planning for Active Aging Week in September. Then, programs planned for each month are checked to insure all the dimensions of wellness are included.

January Theme: healthy living							
	Cognitive, intellectual	Emotional	Environ- mental	Physical	Professional, vocational	Social	Spiritual
Diabetes support group	X			X			
Healthy cooking demo	X			X			
Weekly services, all faiths		X				X	X
Meditation group		X					X
Fitness assessments				X			
Walk 'n talk group			X	X		X	
Fall prevention class	X	X	X	X		X	
Guest lecture, winter skies	X		X				
Quilt club	X	X			X	X	
Theater group rehearsals	X	X			X	X	
Friday happy hour mingle		X				X	
Garden club visit to herb store	X		X	X		X	

Derived from planning maps explained in: “Programming through the dimensions of wellness” by Susan Richie (ICAA Functional U, July/August 2009) and “Map your way to wellness” by Mary George-Whittle, Mary Chapman and Janice McGuire (ICAA Functional U, September/October 2011)

coaching and to show changes over time, such as improvements in strength from regular attendance in a fitness class, or number of steps walked. As a group, participants can see the results of their participation in computer and journalism classes or the hours of volunteering provided in the community. Seeing changes, whether improvements or maintenance, is rewarding and motivating.

Managing the program and the people who deliver or attend programs is an administrative task as well as a strategic exercise. Ongoing evaluation allows for objective decision-making and opportunity for innovation, and provides rationale for changes in the program.

Promotion—market the program to participants, colleagues and influencers

The best program will not be utilized or recognized unless people know about it. Promoting the program occurs in many ways, from word-of-mouth to newsletters and presentations, among others. Promotion needs to speak to the audience and be constant. Outcomes are especially

important to show concrete results when promoting the program. This includes both objective data as well as personal testimonials. There are several layers to promotion:

Internal marketing of the program to current participants, families/guests, colleagues and perhaps even the marketing department.

External marketing to potential participants, potential residents in a retirement community, professionals in the area, social service and healthcare providers.

Social marketing to older adults to encourage behavior change, such as stopping smoking or increasing physical activity. Remember that social marketing for behavior change is different from social media marketing, which uses sites like Facebook.

A person who has a genuine connection to the wellness program and champions it every day is a key team member for marketing and promotion. The champion helps people understand the value of the program (beyond that there are “X” number of

Resources

ICAA Career path for wellness professionals. Available at www.icaa.cc

ICAA Functional Levels. Five categories of physical functional ability with physical activity program recommendations. Available at www.icaa.cc/activeagingandwellness/functionallevels.htm

ICAA/ProMatura Wellness Benchmarks. Metrics for wellness programs in senior living. Available at www.icaa.cc/business/benchmarks.htm

The business case for wellness programs in retirement communities and seniors

housing. White paper from ICAA. Available at www.icaa.cc/business/whitepapers.htm

The case for engagement: A metric with meaning for the active-aging industry. Opinion statement from ICAA. Available at www.icaa.cc/business/whitepapers.htm

Practical strategies for providing wellness in outdoor environments. White paper presented by the ICAA Environmental Wellness Work Group. Available at www.icaa.cc/business/whitepapers.htm

activities), the impact on quality of life, and the choices of words and images.

Everyone is responsible for promoting the wellness program, regardless of job title. Fitness instructors talk about the trivia games for cognitive health, housekeepers remind residents to go to Active Aging Week events, lifestyle coordinators talk about the new yoga classes, healthcare personnel recommend cultural events. Marketing staff spend time learning how participation in different types of activities can lead to improved function, ability to lift objects, and cognitive health. Everyone is educated so they can truly answer the question, “What’s in it for me?”

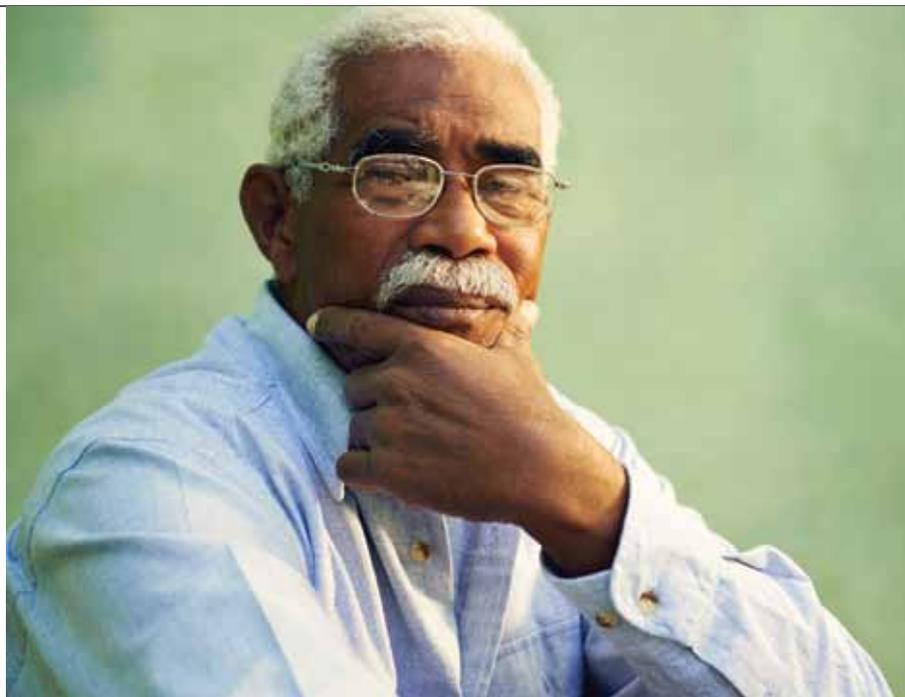
Finally, if a community and all its members truly embrace a wellness culture, much of the promotion will come naturally in the sense of well-being they exude and the positive energy felt by all who enter the community.

Problem-solving—take action based on new information or challenges

The interests and needs of the older population may emerge and change over time. Evaluations and outcomes measurements may show that portions of the program are not meeting goals, or that participation is dropping off. Information gathered through performance measurements can indicate areas that need adjustments, such as program elements, budgets and staffing. Physical restrictions of space, equipment or storage may emerge.

All these challenge the program, and the program adapts to meet the need.

The members of the wellness team are an excellent resource for brainstorming ideas to overcome these challenges. Since colleagues are part of the wellness culture, they too can propose a sharing of resources. Full-time wellness staff members work with part-time contractors to find solutions or make changes.



With a problem-solving mindset, team members can suggest innovative use of spaces and materials. Pots and boxes can serve as percussion instruments for a drumming circle, corridors and staircases can be used as walking trails, the local library or recreation center may serve as the place for a book club or discussion group.

There will always be challenges to a program, but a belief in the wellness culture and a willingness to try something new can maintain the flow of the program. In addition, the commitment to the program and willingness to provide solutions show senior managers that the wellness staff is committed to the wellness culture and to the older adults being served.

IMPLEMENTING AN ACTIVE, ENGAGING PROGRAM

A wellness program is dynamic. The interests and sensibilities of the older population change over time, and often a program serves multiple generations of older adults. To achieve the purpose of providing a variety of engaging opportunities for an individual’s personal growth, the program



itself must continually adjust based on the seven elements. These elements are important whether a wellness program for older adults is brand new, or whether a current program is ready to be reinvigorated.

Sustaining the program requires an ongoing investment of creativity along with an effective use of the physical plant, budget, staffing and equipment. The activities may need to take place in spaces not originally intended for wellness activities, such as conference rooms, sidewalks or patios. As part of a wellness philosophy, program activities travel to where the people are, meaning that staff must think how to adapt programs outside of a purpose-built wellness center or fitness room or arts studio. The cost of supporting the program is an ongoing challenge. Continually testing wellness activities against the purpose of the program, measuring outcomes and marketing the program are means to gain needed resources.

A wellness culture focuses on quality of life for older adults; supporting quality of life is the mission of many organizations serving older adults. A dynamic wellness program is a key strategy to fulfill that mission.

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International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

ICAA, the association that leads, connects and defines the active-aging industry, supports professionals who develop wellness facilities, programs and services for adults over 50. The association is focused on active aging, an approach to aging that helps older adults live as fully as possible within all dimensions of wellness; and provides its members with education, information, resources and tools.

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Selected readings

The International Council on Active Aging has published many articles on the design and development of wellness programs and environments, along with profiles of successful programs. The articles are available to ICAA members in the content library at www.icaa.cc. This list of selected articles is pertinent to program development.

How four organizations launched their formal wellness programs (case studies). Marilyn Larkin. *Journal on Active Aging*, September/October 2012

How Spring Lake Village created a thriving wellness culture. Diane Waltz. *Journal on Active Aging*, July/August 2013

Programming through the dimensions of wellness. Susan Richie. *ICAA Functional U*, July/August 2009

Map your way to wellness. Mary George-Whittle, Mary Chapman and Janice McGuire. *ICAA Functional U*, September/October 2011

Bridging the gaps in wellness programming through the continuum of care. Gina Formica and Jennifer Conway. *Journal on Active Aging*, September/October 2013

Leaping across a program plateau. Lisa Bloder and Melissa Bossert. *ICAA Functional U*, July/August 2012

Emerging roles for the wellness workforce. Patricia Ryan. *Journal on Active Aging*, September/October 2012

Building a wellness team: what skills to look for and how to promote engagement (case studies). Marilyn Larkin. *Journal on Active Aging*, September/October 2013

Hiring the people skills. Patricia Ryan. *Journal on Active Aging*, July/August 2005

Measure what matters: using benchmarks as a tool for program evaluation. Patricia Ryan. *Journal on Active Aging*, March/April 2010

Outcomes tell your wellness story. Patricia Ryan. *Journal on Active Aging*, March/April 2013

Why retirement communities invest in new wellness centers. Marion Webb. *Journal on Active Aging*, June 2013



A catalog of ideas to promote a wellness program

A well-designed and implemented promotional campaign can differentiate a retirement community or older-adult program in a health club or active-aging center from the competition in your marketplace.

Visual imagery and real-life testimonials are two of the most effective components of promotion. Use video and photography of existing participants, their friends and families engaged in program activities.

- Include video or written testimonials from participants, residents and family members detailing the difference any one (or more) activity has made in physical, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being.
- Post videos on social media sites like YouTube as well as on the company website.
- Produce video photo frames displaying the great things that happen in programs.

All forms of **social media** are an important way to showcase your program in pictures and/or with written testimonials. For example, Facebook pages managed by the wellness department are becoming a standard for senior living communities.

- Post your monthly activity calendar and invitations to events, followed by photos/videos of the event.
- Share expertise on dimensions of wellness, report new research findings, and

engage with families, associates and the public.

- Send emails with photo attachments to participants and family members, and encourage them to share these with their own connections.

A wonderful way to promote your program is to **invite potential participants** to classes, outings and/or social events so they can experience the benefits firsthand.

- Send invitations through email, direct mail or word of mouth.
- Offer classes or events outside your building or retirement community. For example, conduct a balance class at the clubhouse of a local 55+ active-adult community or host an art exhibit at the local seniors center with demonstration classes.
- Advertise in the local paper or to media sources.

A very important part of promoting the wellness program is **engaging new and existing residents or participants** by learning more about their preferences, interests, capabilities, needs and goals.

- Meet with each person for a two-way dialogue, not simply a recitation of what currently is being offered. Wellness staff can point out existing programs that align with the person's experience and desires.



- Create a group of wellness ambassadors, regular participants who invite others to join in classes that are in line with their interests.

Promotion to local partners and stakeholders is key to ongoing program development and maintenance of the resources necessary for a successful program. This category may include referral sources, professionals focusing on older adults, professors, healthcare providers, and businesses with age-friendly services and products.

With this group it is important to share objective information about program outcomes along with background information confirming the expertise of the people administering your program.

- Involve respected community leaders in wellness program areas as experts who make your program more meaningful, current and relevant.
- Create a Wellness Blog where your internal associates as well as external contractors share information about wellness, including objective results of the program.
- Use the information on the blog to provide advertorials in local papers and magazines—an “Ask The Expert” column, for example.
- Advertise the involvement of participants, community residents and

associates who provide meaningful contributions to children, animals and communities.

Finally, share your innovative programming with peers at the community, state and local level by speaking at seminars and conventions and entering wellness awards competitions sponsored by the International Council on Active Aging, the Assisted Living Federation of America, LeadingAge and other organizations. Winning awards for your program generates positive media exposure that enhances the value of your programs in the eyes of stakeholders, partners, families and the general public.

Everything mentioned above certainly will surprise and interest people who do not have regular contact with the active-aging industry. The most important thing for the public at large to see is that wellness is not an isolated phenomenon available only to a few “super seniors,” but an ongoing culture change. While marketers love to show the exceptional people who skydive at 90 years old, it is also important to share the incremental quality of life improvements that make a difference for a larger majority of individuals. The strongest message is that wellness is personal, individually focused, and everyone can become part of it.

Mission

ICAA connects a community of like-minded organizations and professionals who share the goals of changing society's perceptions of aging and improving the quality of life for aging Baby Boomers and older adults within the seven dimensions of wellness (emotional, vocational, physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, environmental). The council supports these professionals with education, information, resources and tools so they can achieve optimal success.

Vision

The International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) is dedicated to changing the way we age by uniting professionals in the retirement, assisted living, fitness, rehabilitation and wellness fields to dispel society's myths about aging. We help these professionals to empower aging Baby Boomers and older adults to improve their quality of life and maintain their dignity.



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