



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 May 16

STEPPING OUT SAFELY: HEALTHY AGING 2012

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 073-13 re “Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012” be received for information.

Key Points

- Falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths, hospitalizations, and Emergency Room visits among older adults in London and Middlesex.
- With the aging of the population, a focus on health promotion and injury prevention, particularly preventing falls, is important to enable older adults to maintain quality of life as they age.
- The Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012 initiative has provided health promotion information to over 4,000 older adults in London and Middlesex. Feedback has been positive, with 93% of participants rating their experience as good or excellent.

Background

Falls in older adults remain a significant health issue. Similar to national and provincial statistics for unintentional injuries, falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths, hospitalizations, and Emergency Room visits among older adults in London and Middlesex.

A broad set of health determinants influences the risk of falling and fall-related injuries in older adults. These fall risk factors are categorized into biological/intrinsic, behavioral, socio-economical, and environmental. Many of these risk factors are modifiable with appropriate interventions.

The first wave of baby boomers turned 65 in 2011 and the number of older adults will increase significantly over the next two decades. Research findings indicate that older adults are very receptive to positive health promotion messages. A focus on health promotion and injury prevention, particularly preventing falls, is important to enable older adults to maintain quality of life as they age.

The initial Stepping Out Safely event was implemented in 2005 with two goals; to raise awareness about falls related risk factors and to educate older adults on falls prevention strategies. In 2005, 70 older adults participated and by the ninth event in 2012, the event was at capacity by the end of the first registration day, with 135 participants. The event is organized to be fun and interactive, including presentations, displays and activities related to specific themes such as bone health, nutrition and physical activity. Free bus transportation was offered to registrants from various locations.

Partnership - Key Element

The Stepping Out Safely Committee was formed in late 2004 to plan the first Stepping Out Safely event. The working group had representatives from the Council for London Seniors, Kiwanis Seniors Community Centre, Middlesex-London Health Unit, and Third Age Outreach of St. Joseph's Health Care. Since then, the partnership has expanded to include both non-profit organizations and area businesses. Older adult volunteers also participated on the committee. This committee has no stable funding and depends upon in-kind contributions and sponsorships. The continued support from community partners working in a collaborative manner has sustained an annual Stepping Out Safely event. By 2012, the partnership table had grown to 79 members.

Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012

In 2011, the community partners wanted to organize an event on a larger scale, and the seven month-long Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012 initiative was developed. From April to October 2012, over 100 local activities were delivered connecting over 4,000 older adults with healthy aging information. Activities were organized under monthly themes that included: leisure and the arts; celebrating aging; safety; physical activity; nutrition; and medicine clean out. Over 200 seniors participated in the Stepping Out Safely event in October, a successful wrap-up 'party' celebrating healthy aging.

Feedback from the participants who attended the Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012 activities was positive. At the Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging wrap-up event, a participant commented,

"I had so much fun! The presenters are wonderful. I have learned a lot on ways to keep going and active. Keep up the good work!"

An online survey was sent to the community partners for their feedback. Of community partners who completed the online survey, 93% rated the participation experience as good or excellent, and that the Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012 initiative fulfilled their organizational mandates. Eighty percent were "highly likely" to participate in future Stepping Out Safely activities.

Conclusion

Collaboration is the key element in the successful implementation of the Stepping Out Safely: Healthy Aging 2012 initiative. Under the leadership of the Steering Committee and with the support of many community partners and volunteers, this seven month-long project provided healthy aging information to many older adults. It also has fostered networking opportunities for community partners. Plans are underway to continue the annual Stepping Out Safely event for 2013.

This report was prepared by Ms. Amy Mak, Public Health Nurse, and Ms. Mary Lou Albanese, Manager, Healthy Communities and Injury Prevention Team.

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This report addresses the following requirement of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Prevention of Injury and Substance Misuse Health Promotion and Policy Development requirement #4: The board of health shall increase public awareness of the prevention of injury in falls across the lifespan.