

PROJECT BRIEF

Development of a Senior Housing Health Environment and Health Behavior Index

Background

Wisconsin seniors are among the nation's worst for prevalence of obesity and rank high for reporting no leisure-time physical activity and poor nutritional habits. Previous research has suggested that environmental factors exert a major influence on health-related behaviors at the individual level, such as physical activity and eating behaviors. A comprehensive assessment index would enable retirement communities to objectively assess the health promoting potential of the built environment, and identify strengths and weaknesses of existing and future health-related programs and practices.

Purpose

To develop, implement and test the Senior Health Environment and Health Behavior Index (SHEHBI).

Objectives

- Develop a self-assessment template for physical activity and nutrition modules of the SHEHBI to be used for facility assessment, development, and programming.
- Employ the assessment process using the SHEHBI in three local senior retirement communities.
- Compare actual physical activity and nutrition practices of residents in different senior environments.

Timeline

June 11, 2008 – December 31, 2009

Progress to Date

- Comprehensive literature review completed.
- SHEHBI developed and pilot tested in small focus groups of seniors and administrators living in retirement communities.
- Data collection of SHEHBI occurring in three local senior centers.

Preliminary Findings

- Older adults in retirement communities report more medical conditions and score lower on tests of physical abilities, however, are at least as active in aggregate as their counterparts who reside in an independent home environment.
- Awareness of community supports for nutrition and physical activity

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behaviors does not seem to be related to use of those supports.

- The influence of living environment on health behaviors may be mediated differently based on the nature of the behavior in itself (physical activity or nutrition) and on the personal characteristics of the residents (e.g., gender, age, sex, and exercise habits).
- Nutrition behaviors may be more influenced by the surrounding community immediate surrounding community than physical activity behaviors.

Behaviors. *American Physical Therapy Association, Health Policy and Administration/Geriatrics* combined sections.

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Partner Institutions

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Academic Accomplishments to Date

Zalewski, K. (2009). Using the environment to increase physical activity participation for seniors in continuing care retirement facilities: Development and use of the CCRC Health Index for Physical Activity

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