



# COMMUNITY BASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

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## 1.0 Introduction

Social participation is one of the vital and instrumental components in promoting healthy aging in communities. (Levasseur et al., 2020) define social participation “as a person’s involvement in activities that provide interaction with others in the community.” These interactions and activities promote the feeling of belonging and ensure individuals’ overall mental and physical well-being.

Communities can enhance the social participation of older adults through various strategies. According to research by (Suragarn et al., 2021), social connection or participation can be enhanced through the following approaches: 1.intergenerational programs, 2.aging-friendly communities, 3.community-based group physical activities 4.technology. For this study, focus will be on enhancing older adults’ social participation and health through community-based group physical activities. The research will provide evidence-based importance of physical activities to older adults’ overall health and social well-being. It will also provide examples of effective physical activity programs initiated by various communities to encourage and promote active participation in various communities across Canada and the US.

## 2.0 Community-based Physical Activities

Community-based physical activities is one of the vital ways to promote the health of older adults while fostering social relationships. For older adults, physical activity is important in preserving their independence, preventing disease, and enhancing their quality of life. Regular engagement in physical activities by older adults helps safeguard their mental and physical well-being. Apart from the health benefits these physical activities provide, they also serve as a significant avenue for social interaction and building of friendships amongst older adults. Research-based physical programs as according Belza and the PRC-HAN Physical Activity Conference Planning Workgroup (2007) such as **Fit and Strong**, **A matter of balance**, **EhanceFitness** and **Active for life** offers advantages for older adults to engage in flexible exercises and other strength training exercises to promote their health while also fostering social interactions.



Photo Credit :Caiaimage/Martin Barraud

Figure 3: Physical exercises



Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto  
Figure 3: Seniors' walking group.



Photo Credit: Getty Images  
Figure 4: Seniors' walking group.

### 3.0 Precedents of Community-based Physical Activities.

Across various communities in Canada, there have been initiatives to enhance social interactions between older adults through flexible physical activities such as walking, gardening, yoga, and others. This section will, therefore, look at some of these activities and where such actions have been initiated.

#### 3.1 Senior Walking Group

Flexible exercises such as walking in group settings provide an avenue for more significant interaction among older adults. Walking is a great way to improve older people's health and wellbeing. The benefits of walking are numerous, ranging from strengthening one's muscles, reducing the risk of anxiety and depression, and improving balance and coordination. Socially, walking is always a great way to get out and meet and socialize with other individuals. An evaluation conducted by Nicklas et al. (2020) showed how feasible and acceptable such community-based programs are amongst older adults. In Burnaby (BC), the Burnaby Neighbourhood House (a non-profit community-based organization) has a **seniors' walking group initiative** every Tuesday from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m (Burnaby Neighbourhood House, 2023). Even though this program is running until the end of October, it is an excellent way for older adults to connect with their neighbours and explore their environment. The time within lunchtime is also ideal as it allows older adults to come together and have a meal while engaging in interactive conversations and familiarizing themselves. The program also serves as a perfect avenue for active older adults to pass by and engage with other older adults who are inactive in community activities and are at risk of social isolation.



Photo Credit: Burnaby Neighbourhood House  
Figure 5: Burnaby Seniors' walking group poster.

#### 3.2 Community Gardening

Apart from group walking programs, flexible exercises such as community-based gardening programs also serve as an avenue for greater social participation. Studies have shown the benefits of gardening to the physical, mental, and social well-being of seniors. As a physical activity, gardening provides several benefits to seniors, including reducing their blood pressure, reducing the risk of falling because of increased muscle strength, and

Figure 6:  
Seniors'  
community  
garden.



Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

Photo Credit: Rawpixel

improving mobility. Community gardening allows seniors to engage in physical activities while relaxing and building relationships. It serves as a forum where seniors constantly communicate with each other, sharing ideas about what to plant and how to go about it. It also allows seniors to share their final harvested fruits and vegetables, strengthening their connection. In the Newfoundland and Labrador city of St John's, community gardening projects have been initiated in their various community centres. The Paul Reynolds Centre Community Garden pilot project in the city allows older adults and other groups in the city to be physically active while also building connections in the community (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, n.d). This is a great initiative that other communities can adopt to promote social participation amongst older people.



Photo Credit: Nashville Govt.

Figure 5: Seniors' dancing group.

### 3.3 Seniors' Dancing Groups

Dancing as a physical activity is a fun way of allowing older adults to improve their flexibility and balance. It also gives an opportunity for older adults to create dance routines together. Through these routine creations, they interact with each other, thereby building stronger connections amongst themselves. In Nashville (USA), they have a Metro Parks Senior Recreation program that explicitly provides activities for older Nashville residents (Nashville Government, n.d).

One of these programs is their **Senior Dance Clubs**, which allows seniors to join and practice new dance routines. Through these dance routines, they can provide companionship to one another.

### Final Thoughts

Community-based physical activities promote both the health and social life of older adults. These activities enhance the quality of life of older adults. The nature and outline of these programs fosters interactions amongst older adults thereby decrease the likelihood of depression and social isolation. Incorporating these activities in community programs will significantly benefit older adults as they can stay physically fit while staying connected with one another.

## Sources:

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