

Arkansas



Promoting the State's Healthy Aging Initiative, Encouraging Healthy Activities Among Seniors

Public Health Problem

In Arkansas, the fledgling healthy aging initiative had a visibility problem. Too few people were aware that it is never too late to take advantage of prevention. A growing body of evidence shows that programs that promote physical activity, regular immunizations, and safe environments designed to prevent falls can provide tangible benefits for older adults. For example, modest strength-building activities can increase muscle and bone strength even for people over age 90.

Program Example

The Aging States Project was a national assessment that highlighted the need for states to integrate the expertise and capacity of the public health and aging services networks to reach older adults with programs based on the best available science. Arkansas was 1 of 10 states that received a \$10,000 grant from CDC and HHS's Administration on Aging in 2003. Working with the Arkansas Division of Aging and Adult Services, the Arkansas Department of Health used the funding to bring visibility to the state's new Healthy Aging Coalition. The department also used the funds to organize the Hernando DeSoto Exploration Day, a 1-day event designed to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and encourage smoking cessation among older Arkansas residents with low to moderate incomes.

Implications and Impact

The infusion of the migrant funds into the state's fledgling healthy aging initiative catalyzed a groundswell of activities. For example, the Arkansas Division of Aging and Adult Services was awarded \$25,000 of tobacco-settlement funds to help cover the costs of Hernando DeSoto Exploration Day and to launch the Hernando DeSoto Society for Exploring a Healthier Lifestyle, which works to continue the Exploration Day activities. In addition, the state is creating a Healthy Aging Report Card to document the health status of older Arkansans. The health department also is crafting a chronic disease plan that will identify common goals and define how the state will manage crosscutting subjects such as aging.

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