



## Promoting Physical Activity to Reduce the Burden of Arthritis in Rural and Underserved Populations

### Public Health Problem

Arthritis is one of the most common health problems in the United States, with 49 million adults having doctor-diagnosed arthritis in 2001—nearly 1 of every 4 adults. An additional 21 million Americans reported chronic joint symptoms. Arthritis limits everyday activities for more than 8 million U.S. citizens, making it the leading cause of disability in the United States. In Illinois, 2.1 million adults had doctor-diagnosed arthritis in 2001, and an additional 940,000 adults reported chronic joint symptoms. Arthritis is more common in rural areas of Illinois, where 33% of adults have arthritis, compared with 24% in Chicago and 29% in other urban areas of the state.

### Program Example

Illinois is increasing its efforts to reduce the burden of arthritis by offering more physical activity programs targeted to people with arthritis in five counties, representing rural and underserved populations. The programs—offered in partnership with county health departments and reaching more than 700 new participants—include the Arthritis Foundation's People With Arthritis Can Exercise (PACE<sup>®</sup>) program, aquatics physical activity programs, and the Arthritis Self-Help Course. Project coordinators in each county report that demand for the programs has exceeded expectations. To meet this demand, project coordinators are recruiting more course leaders and are looking for additional venues to offer these programs, which have been proven effective in reducing the effects of arthritis.

### Implications and Impact

These programs are proven effective in reducing the impact of arthritis and chronic joint symptoms by improving people's function and reducing their pain and need for physician visits. Yet these programs are rarely offered in rural and underserved areas, where arthritis is more prevalent than in urban areas. This state's strategy to expand these community-based programs can be a model for other states that want to offer similar programs in rural and underserved areas. This program suggests that working through local health departments might be an efficient way to provide effective interventions to people with arthritis in rural and underserved areas.