Older Adults: Off the Couch and Exercising
Creating a blueprint for action: Physical activity for mid-life and older adults

SUMMARY
Brigid McHugh Sanner, a health and behavior communications consultant to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), developed a national blueprint to help increase physical activity among adults age 50 and over.

Key Results
- RWJF convened the National Blueprint Conference, held October 31–November 1, 2000 in Washington, D.C., and attended by 65 individuals representing 48 organizations in health, medicine, social and behavioral sciences, epidemiology, gerontology/geriatrics, clinical science, public policy, marketing, medical systems, community organizations and environmental issues.

- A 40-page report, National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Age 50 and Older, emerged from the conference.


- The National Blueprint also reached more than 6 million people on television and almost nine million on radio.

Key Recommendations
The report's key recommendations included:

- Identify and promote the country's most activity-friendly communities and the impact they have on quality of life for older Americans.

- Create a health-impact assessment to help communities measure how well they serve the health needs of their citizens.

- Establish employer tax incentives based on the physical activity opportunities they offer their employees.
• Require health care professionals to go through more training on physical activity in older persons.

• Seek opportunities for nonprofit associations to work collaboratively with the for-profit sector to develop joint public education programs related to physical activity for older Americans.

• Develop a mass-market communications campaign to increase awareness about the importance of physical activity in the health of older Americans.

• Test the effectiveness and impact of emerging communications technologies (including the Internet) as a means of conveying information about physical activity for older Americans.

**Funding**

RWJF provided $119,444 to support the project from July 2000 to June 2001.

**THE PROBLEM**

Although it is well documented that regular physical activity can bring dramatic health benefits at any age and extend years of active, independent life, adults age 50 and older remain the most sedentary of the adult population. Many governmental, private and for-profit organizations address the problem, but there has been little coordination or collaboration among them.

**THE PROJECT**

To plan and develop the blueprint, the project director brought together representatives from six different organizations to serve as a steering committee:

• AARP
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
• National Institute on Aging
• American College of Sports Medicine
• American Geriatrics Association
• RWJF.

(See the Appendix for a list of committee members.) Meeting at RWJF offices, AARP headquarters, and via teleconference, the steering committee designed a forum where various organizations that deal with health and aging issues could discuss strategies to increase physical activity among older Americans.
RESULTS

The result was the National Blueprint Conference, held October 31–November 1, 2000 in Washington. It was attended by 65 individuals representing 48 organizations with expertise in health, medicine, social and behavioral sciences, epidemiology, gerontology/geriatrics, clinical science, public policy, marketing, medical systems, community organizations and environmental issues.

Four background papers were produced for participants and subsequent publication, along with additional background reports by the project director. A 40-page report, *National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Age 50 and Older*, emerged from the conference effort. (See the Bibliography for details.) The report categorizes strategies for overcoming barriers to physical activity among older adults into six different areas:

- Research
- Home/community
- Workplace
- Medical systems
- Public policy
- A general category called cross-cutting.

Recommendations

Some of the report's key recommendations are:

- **Identify and promote the country's most activity-friendly communities and the impact they have on quality of life for older Americans.**

- **Create a health-impact assessment to help communities measure how well they serve the health needs of their citizens.**

- **Establish employer tax incentives based on the physical activity opportunities they offer their employees.**

- **Require health care professionals to go through more training on physical activity in older persons.**

- **Seek opportunities for nonprofit associations to work collaboratively with the for-profit sector to develop joint public education programs related to physical activity for older Americans.**

- **Develop a mass-market communications campaign to increase awareness about the importance of physical activity in the health of older Americans, including**
messages related to what needs to happen to make opportunities for physical activity more accessible.

- Test the effectiveness and impact of emerging communications technologies (including the Internet) as a means of conveying information about physical activity for older Americans.

The grantee printed 7,000 copies of the blueprint report for distribution to conference participants, the media, through the CDC, and on request. Additionally, the National Blueprint was available on the RWJF website. The report, along with the four commissioned background papers, appeared as a special supplement of the Journal of Physical Activity and Aging in May 2001. The National Blueprint also received extensive television, radio and print coverage, reaching more than 6 million people on television and almost nine million on radio.

**AFTERWARD**

The project has led to an RWJF national program—*Active for Life®: Improving Physical Activity Levels in Adults Age 50 and Older*, to increase activity levels by replicating proven programs in real-world settings and identifying and testing communication strategies for the promotion of physical activity. It is administered through the Texas A&M University System Health Science Center; information on the program is available online.

RWJF also funded a second conference to facilitate communication among organizations using the blueprint report (ID# 042134), that was held in Washington in October 2002. The American College of Sports Medicine, the CDC and the National Council on Aging also have programs underway as a result of the first Blueprint Conference.

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APPENDIX

Blueprint Steering Committee Members and Organizations

(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program’s management; not verified by RWJF.)

AARP
Washington, D.C.

**Sarah Armstrong**
Director of Organizational Relations

**Katrinka Smith Sloan, MA**
Director, Membership Education and Information

**Mary Connolly Turner**
Program Consultant, Health

American College of Sports Medicine
Indianapolis, Ind.

**Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko, PhD**
Department of Kinesiology
University of Illinois at Urbana

American Geriatrics Society
New York, N.Y.

**Linda Hiddemen Barondess**
Executive Director

**Michael O’Grady MD**
Chief of Rehabilitation Medicine
Emory Health Care

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta, Ga.

**David Brown, PhD**
Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

David Buchner, MD, PhD
Chief, Physical Activity and Health Branch
Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

The National Institute on Aging
Bethesda, Md.

**Marcia Ory, PhD, MPH**
Chief, Social Science Research on Aging

**Jane Shure**
Director, Office of Communication and Public Liaison

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Princeton, N.J.

**Hinda Greenberg, PhD**
Director, Information Center

**Marla Hollander, MPH**
Program Associate

**Robin Mockenhaupt, PhD**
Senior Program Officer

**C. Tracy Orleans, PhD**
Senior Scientists and Senior Program Officer

**Brigid McHugh Sanner**
Consultant
BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Articles

The following papers were commissioned for the conference and subsequently published in a special supplement of the *Journal of Physical Activity and Aging, 9*(Supplement), 2001:


Reports


Sponsored Conferences


Presentations

- Audie Atienza, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA, "Home-Based Physical Activity Programs for Middle-Aged and Older Adults."

- Walter Bortz, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Palo Alto, CA, "Enhancing the Health of All Mature Americans."
- Michael Goldstein, Bayer Institute for Health Care Communications, West Haven, CT, "Promoting Physical Activity Among Middle-Age and Older Adults in Health Care Settings."

- Laura Linnan, University of North Carolina School of Public Health, Chapel Hill, NC, "Worksite-Based Physical Activity Programs and Older Adults: Current Status and Priorities for the Future."

- Michael McGinnis, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, NJ, "Where Do We Go from Here: Moving from Plan to Action."


- Anita Stewart, University of California San Francisco Institute for Health & Aging, San Francisco, "Community-Based Physical Activity Programs for Adults Age 50 and Older."