



AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF ACTIVE LIVING AND FALL PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR OLDER ADULTS IN ALBERTA

Summary Report

September
2010

About This Report

In 2009, the Alberta Centre for Active Living initiated this environmental scan through a grant from the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation. An external consultant, Jennifer Hystad, MSc, was contracted to carry out the environmental scan and report on findings. Her experience with older adult physical activity and understanding of background issues were beneficial to this project. A provincial Project Advisory Committee guided the project and made important contributions.

This Summary Report offers insights about the core findings of the scan and highlights a series of recommendations.

Ethics approval for the scan was received from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta.

The project was conducted between September 2009 and March 2010, and included an online survey, one focus group and four telephone interviews.

Purpose

The purposes of the environmental scan were to:

- assess the type and number of active living and fall prevention programs for older adults in Alberta;
- assess the level of activity of the Active Independence: Home Support Exercise Program (AI:HSEP) in Alberta; and
- assess the level of activity of the Steady as You Go (SAYGO) program in Alberta.

This environmental scan was undertaken, in part, to help make decisions about future delivery of these two programs in Alberta.



Background on HSEP and SAYGO

About the Active Independence: Home Support Exercise Program

The Home Support Exercise Program (HSEP) was developed by the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging (CCAA) at the University of Western Ontario to increase physical activity among frail older adults (65+). The program consists of a set of 10 simple exercises that can be done in the home or in small groups.

In the original model, home-support workers and their supervisors attended training sessions in order to learn how to safely and effectively deliver the program. Home-support workers then encouraged clients to perform the HSEP exercises during their regular visits.

The program is evidence-based. An outcome evaluation of the HSEP (Johnson et al., 2003) reported that participants who continued with the exercise program over four months showed improvements in:

- functional mobility,
- endurance,
- balance sit-to-stand,
- lower body strength,
- balance confidence, and
- psychophysical well-being.



In Alberta, the HSEP was expanded to include healthy eating information (through funding from Alberta Health and Wellness), and a special version for Aboriginal elders was developed (through funding from the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch). The name Active Independence was chosen by seniors in Alberta as another name for the HSEP program.

About the Steady As You Go Program

Steady As You Go is an education program for older adults to prevent fall-related injuries. SAYGO #1 is a free, two-part exercise and education program for older adults who are healthy and living independently. It is offered in the community, and participants need to be able to attend a class outside their home. SAYGO #2 is adapted for the frailer population. Originally developed by the former Capital Health Authority, the program is now delivered primarily in the Edmonton and Calgary areas by Alberta Health Services.

About the Environmental Scan

The environmental scan process included a survey, one focus group, and telephone interviews.

- A list of potential survey respondents was collected from the Alberta Centre for Active Living databases, the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research Fall Prevention Network, the Lodge Activity Coordinators Association of Alberta and the Project Advisory Committee.
- Thirty-five practitioners were recruited via e-mail and completed an online survey.
- Four practitioners with experience in the AI:HSEP participated in a focus group discussion.
- Finally, three telephone interviews were held to discuss AI:HSEP.
- One telephone interview was conducted with a practitioner regarding the SAYGO #1 program.

Findings from the Environmental Scan

What's Happening in Alberta

The scan was successful in collecting information about a number of active living and fall prevention programs across the province; in both rural and urban settings. These programs are offered to older adults of various levels of functioning.

The scan identified numerous active living and fall prevention programs across the province.

A surprising result of the scan was the current prevalence of AI:HSEP programs across all parts of Alberta. Fourteen of thirty-five survey respondents indicated that they offer the AI:HSEP program, and four offered the SAYGO program. The other 17 programs in Table 1 represent a wide range of active living and fall prevention programs.

Table 1: Number of respondents by Alberta zone

Location	Other Programs	AI:HSEP	SAYGO	Total
North Zone	2	4	2	8
Edmonton Zone	3	1	0	4
Central Zone	4	5	1	10
Calgary Zone	6	0	1	7
South Zone	2	4	0	6
Total	17	14	4	35

The following comments about AI:HSEP programs in three parts of Alberta help to show the importance of the program. A description of the SAYGO offerings is also provided.



AI:HSEP, South Zone

Included in the original AI:HSEP pilot project, the South Zone is a hotbed of activity. Delivering AI:HSEP to hundreds of older adults in the area, AI:HSEP has become an integral component of this Zone's fall prevention initiatives.

Currently administered through the Therapeutic Recreation Department of Alberta Health Services, AI:HSEP is offered in nine communities. Innovations to the program include a phone coach, lesson plans for facilitators and a database to track each client. Staff attribute the success of the program to strong management support and promotion of the program to staff through learning sessions.

AI:HSEP, North Zone

Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC) offers the "Older Adult Fitness and Wellness" two-year diploma program that includes the AI:HSEP curriculum. Open to students, teachers and the general public, this program is offered every fall, through the Be Fit For Life Centre in the GPRC, Grande Prairie. Graduates of this program receive AI:HSEP materials and certificates from the Alberta Centre for Active Living. The first training session was in the fall of 2009 at the GPRC. Another training session is planned for the fall of 2010.

The AI:HSEP trainer in the Grande Prairie region offered five training sessions between 2006-2008 to Alberta Health Services Home Care staff and one session in a seniors' residence. Requests for training continue, but without dedicated funding these requests are no longer filled by Alberta Health Services.

AI:HSEP, Integrated Home Living, Seniors Health, Edmonton Zone

Based on the evaluation of the successful Strathcona Falls Project, one way to support the AI:HSEP program would be to have the Greater Edmonton Foundation and other lodge settings adopt this program as an integral part of their Falls Risk Management Programs.

Lodges that choose to adopt this recommendation would need support in the form of training and resources to implement the AI:HSEP into their fall prevention initiatives.

SAYGO Offerings

Of the four programs offering SAYGO, three offered the original version of the program and one offered the version adapted for the frailer population.

Respondents reported offering the program in a one- or two-part workshop including the program booklet. In some instances, a formal six-month follow-up phone contact was incorporated.

Challenges with the SAYGO program included difficulty with the scoring and low compliance with the post test.

Networking and Building on Success

Qualitatively, we heard the importance of creating opportunities for practitioners to network and build off of other older adult program successes; essentially to "get on the same page."

The Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research (ACICR) reported that it has developed two initiatives to aid practitioners in networking:

- The Alberta Seniors' Falls Prevention Network is a resource that links individuals working in the area of seniors' falls prevention by promoting programs, resources, research, events and conferences in the area.
- The Finding Balance Practitioner Algorithm was created to assist health care professionals in assessing and attempting to reduce the risk of falls with their clients.

About Leadership of Programs

The scan identified the backgrounds of the various practitioners leading active living and fall prevention programs in different locations.

Although the primary leaders included those with a professional designation or training in physical activity (Physical Therapist, 38%; Certified Fitness Leader, 35%) many programs were led by those without such designation or training (e.g., Home Support Worker, 24%).

- This draws attention to the importance of the active living or fall prevention program being evidence-based and structured, enabling practitioners without a physical activity background to safely lead these programs.

Identifying Barriers and Supports for Program Delivery

Online Survey

The online survey identified the following program delivery barriers and supports.

Barriers:

- lack of staff time (50%)
- competing staff priorities (38%)
- poor interest and awareness by clients (35%)

Supports:

- increasing awareness and promotion (26%)
- increasing funding (17.4%)
- improving client attitudes (13%)



Focus Group and Interviews

Qualitative data obtained at the focus group and from the interviews identified the following program delivery barriers and supports:

Barriers:

- limited staff time and competing staff priorities are barriers to delivering active living programs
- there are no common standards of practice around active living and fall prevention – as key components in seniors' health

Supports:

- active living and fall prevention programs need to be promoted to managers to ensure they are a priority
- managerial support to address limited staff time and competing staff priorities, so staff have time to deliver active living programs
- policy development – including standards of practice around active living and fall prevention – as key components in seniors' health

Identifying Barriers and Supports for AI:HSEP

The focus group and interviews generated interesting data regarding AI:HSEP.

Where the program is still being used, it is regarded as filling an important role to a niche population of older adults. Specifically the benefits of the program were identified as:

- being flexible (individual/group);
- progressive;
- evidence-based; and
- serves a niche client.

Other identified benefits of the program included:

- it is relatively inexpensive to offer;
- it has a consistent and structured delivery; and
- it does not include an overwhelming number of exercises (only 10 exercises).

Further, AI:HSEP does not require practitioners delivering the program to have formal education in physical activity programming and/or allied health professions. Once practitioners have AI:HSEP training, they have the capacity to deliver the program to frail elderly under the supervision of a nurse, recreation therapist, occupational therapist or other allied health professional. This makes AI:HSEP a good fit for home support Workers, Health Care Aides, Personal Care Attendants and Activity Coordinators in seniors housing facilities and seniors centres.

If AI:HSEP is being delivered to “well” seniors as a health promotion program, trained practitioners/leaders providing the program do not need to be supervised.

AI:HSEP is now being successfully delivered in many settings. Examples include Adult Day Support, Supportive Living, such as Lodges, and Designated Assisted Living (DAL) Facilities.

Barriers to AI:HSEP

Some of the barriers identified in the focus groups and interviews included:

- Alberta Health Services has a limited capacity to support the AI:HSEP
- there is a lack of funding for practitioner training
- lack of staff time for professional development
- poor client motivation and confidence to participate in the program
- ownership of the program by the CCAA

Supports

The focus groups and interviews identified the following supports as being beneficial to AI: HSEP:

- ongoing promotion
- low-cost/free resources
- Master Trainer(s)
- a program “champion” in Alberta to maintain visibility

Participants highlighted the importance of a provincial presence to support AI:HSEP. It was generally agreed that the program needed visibility in Alberta, and the best way to achieve this is through a program champion, such as the previous Older Adult Coordinator at the Alberta Centre for Active Living.



HSEP and Other Programs

Other active living programs in Alberta were identified in the scan, such as *Active Anytime Anywhere*, *Physical Culture*, and *Purposeful Movement*.

When asked if AI:HSEP duplicates programs, all participants agreed that AI:HSEP serves the specific purpose of reaching lower functioning older adults who cannot access other programs.

Also, because the design of the AI:HSEP program is progressive in nature, it can move these older adults toward accessing community-based programs once they improve. Notably, AI:HSEP has been combined with existing programs, including:

- Seven Ways to a Healthy You
- Keep Fit Classes
- Walking to Wellness
- Hall exercises in Lodges

It was uncovered through the scan that AI:HSEP can be an effective exercise component of a comprehensive fall prevention program.

AI:HSEP and Alberta Health Services

A barrier to offering the AI:HSEP in Alberta in the recent past was the limited capacity of Alberta Health and Wellness to support the program.

Now, with Alberta Health Services (AHS) in place, AHS has released a new strategic direction that aligns with AI:HSEP, although capacity to support AI:HSEP is still limited.

The strategic direction identifies “improving population by focusing on health promotion.” AI: HSEP is evidence-based, addresses access to health services and personal health practices.

Recommendations

The scan demonstrated that there are many active living and fall prevention programs offered in Alberta.

It was evident from the scan that AI:HSEP has an important role in Alberta. Further, maintaining an Alberta presence was seen as key to the future success of the program.

The following recommendations relating to AI:HSEP are based on the overall findings of the scan:

1. It is recommended that AI:HSEP should continue in day programs and integrated home living.
2. It is recommended that AI:HSEP be an exercise component of a falls prevention program in Alberta seniors’ housing facilities.
3. AI:HSEP needs a champion (i.e., Master Trainer) to keep it visible, provide motivation and generate support for the program (this comment was repeated many times). It is recommended that a regular, ongoing position for an AI:HSEP Master Trainer in Alberta be established.

4. To differentiate AI:HSEP from other programs, it is recommended that the promotion of the AI:HSEP program should focus on its strengths, such as being evidence-based, progressive, adaptable, and designed for frail adults who cannot access community-based programs.
5. As the capacity for operating AI:HSEP by Alberta Health Services (AHS) or the Alberta Centre for Active Living (the Centre) is limited, it is recommended that the Centre maintain a coordinating role, linking Alberta practitioners with training opportunities and keeping an updated inventory of trainers in Alberta. Future partnerships between the Centre and key program deliverers will be critical for the future survival and success of the program in Alberta.
6. Many groups of professionals are involved in fall prevention programs but it seems that certified fitness leaders with a specialty in older adult physical activity are not being used for fall prevention program delivery. It is recommended to increase promotion of the benefits of using Older Adult Fitness Leaders (certified by the Alberta Fitness Leadership Certification Association) as key players in fall prevention.
7. AI:HSEP has typically worked with Alberta Health Services (AHS), Seniors Health. It is recommended that a broader search be undertaken to determine other potential users of the program to increase its usage.
8. It is recommended that AI:HSEP be more actively promoted for use in other programs/settings, such as:
 - Adult Day Support programs;
 - Supported Living accommodations, e.g., lodges; and
 - Designated Assisted Living (DAL) facilities.

Other Recommendation

The following recommendation relates to the SAYGO program:

- The SAYGO program is being delivered successfully in some Alberta locations/settings. It is recommended that the program continue to be offered where it is already in place, and that the program be further supported so that it can be offered in more locations.

Acknowledgements

The Alberta Centre for Active Living would like to acknowledge the funding support for this project from the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation.

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable work done by the Project Advisory Committee.

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