

Structuring Physical Activity Programs, Services and Environments to Address Barriers for Women 55–70

In order to increase participation in physical activity among women 55–70 we must first understand the barriers they are facing. By understanding these barriers, physical activity programs, services and environments can be modified to attract more women 55–70.

Addressing Barriers to Physical Activity for Women 55–70

As part of these focus groups, women brought forward the following solutions in relation to physical activity environments, programs and services:

Environments

- **Create accessible spaces** – snow cleared sidewalks; non-slip floors, etc. The *Addressing the Built Environment to Encourage Physical Activity for Women 55–70* fact sheet can help.
- **Create welcoming environments** – ask regulars to welcome new participants; provide opportunities for people to connect during classes; encourage staff to learn everyone's name and say hello.
- **Create comfortable spaces** – women only weight training areas and pool times; lycra free zones; plants in front of mirrors; showers with curtains.
- **Get creative around transportation** – offer education sessions on how to use the bus; encourage participants to car-pool; provide transportation subsidies.

Programs and Services

- **Invest in staff training** – understanding health issues; adapting activities; developing new programs/services; communications; addressing cliques and other negative situations. The *Building Capacity to Deliver Physical Activity Programs, Services and Environments for Women 55–70* fact sheet can help.
- **Hire knowledgeable and approachable instructors** – instructors should provide their qualifications, describe what will happen and encourage questions at every class; hire more women 55–70 as instructors – approach women who already participate in your programs.
- **Variety is important** – create a menu of choices – women's only, intergenerational, multi-cultural, sports, fitness, adventure, etc. Partner with other groups to provide the greatest variety of options.
- **Be flexible** – offer programs and services for women 55–70 throughout the day and evening and provide flexible memberships where women can stop and start easily.
- **Communicate effectively** – provide detailed descriptions of programs and services – time, place, date, cost, age target, level, class outcomes, clothing, what to bring (water, a mat), etc.
- **Build confidence** – offer skills sessions and try-it sessions where women can bring friends.
- **Include a social component** – offer refreshments; encourage women to go for a coffee; plan end of the year parties.
- **Reach out** – develop outreach programs for women 55–70 in cultural centres, apartment complexes, churches, etc. many do not identify with mainstream programming.

Identified Barriers to Participating in Physical Activity and Sport for Women aged 55–70. Cross Canada Focus Groups, 2006

Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Impacting Barriers
Poor Body Image	Weather (too cold or too hot)	Understanding Physical Activity Measures
Fears	Transportation	Mental and Physical Health
Skill	Infrastructure	Caregiving
Guilt	Cost	Not Having a Buddy
Negative Attitudes		Isolation (living alone)
Lack of Confidence		Programs not the Right Type
Competing Priorities		Lack of Supportive Environments
Life Transitions		Lack of Role Models
Feel like an Invisible part of society		Poor Marketing/Communications

Source: Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. 2007. *Focus Group Report: Physical Activity and Women 55–70*.

Incentives and Motivators

- **Goals/rewards** – Setting goals or having a reward you are trying to achieve is an incentive and motivator for many women. You can incorporate these into your programs.
- **Having a buddy** – Having someone to do things with is motivational. Providing opportunities for women to meet buddies is something you can do.
- **Cost savings** – Money saving incentives such as discounts or two for one encourage women to participate in physical activity.
- **Invitation** – Personally invite women to participate to make it special. Women are more interested in being invited than getting a generic flyer.
- **Having fun** – Laughing and having fun is a huge motivator for women. Build this in whenever you can.
- **Pedometer** – Using a pedometer is a great incentive for keeping active. It is seen as an easy, inexpensive tool that regularly reminds you to keep moving.
- **Competitions, events or challenges** – Competitions, events or challenges are motivators for many women.
- **Music** – Having good music playing in the background is motivating. Ask women what they want to hear and play it.

Ask Women 55–70

If you are looking to change or modify your programs, services or environments ask women 55–70 what they think. This will allow you to focus your energies accordingly. The *Organizing Focus Groups and Community Consultations* fact sheet can help.

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For more information on the *CAAWS Women 55–70 and Physical Activity* project please contact caaws@caaws.ca or visit the website at: www.caaws.ca/women55plus/index.cfm

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