

Ever Active Adults (EAA) Program: Evaluation Report

By Marcia Oliveira (Master's student, Centre for Health Promotion Studies, University of Alberta); Enrique Garcia Bengoechea, PhD (Research Associate, Alberta Centre for Active Living); and Timothy Fairbank, BPE (Older Adult Coordinator, Alberta Centre for Active Living).

coordinators for professional development in physical activity. The centre then developed, piloted, and implemented the EAA course and curriculum. Through a continuing partnership, the EAA is now delivered across the province through the Alberta Fitness Leadership Certification Association (AFLCA).

Part 1: **What Is Ever Active Adults?**

The EAA program is an evidence-based educational course and curriculum developed by the Alberta Centre for Active Living. The goal of the EAA is to provide a professional development opportunity for program coordinators of publicly funded seniors' lodges in Alberta. EAA course participants receive leadership training to increase opportunities for physical activity among older adult lodge residents.

The centre's final role in the EAA project was to assess its effectiveness. In partnership with a graduate practicum placement from the University of Alberta's Centre for Health Promotion Studies, the Alberta Centre for Active Living surveyed EAA participants to evaluate how they perceived the impact of their EAA training on their physical activity programming in Alberta lodges.

The EAA resulted from a needs assessment conducted by the Alberta Centre for Active Living. This needs assessment included

- a review of current government recommendations and strategies;
- a review of the centre's older adult physical activity research projects (Mummery, 1996; Spence & Poon, 2000; Spence & Weiss, 2001; Watchman, Spence, & Poon, 1999);
- focus groups with Alberta lodge personnel.

The Alberta Centre for Active Living identified a need among Alberta lodge

What's in this Report?

What Is Ever Active Adults?	1
A Brief Look at the Results	2
How the Centre Designed this Evaluation	3
Results and Discussion	4
Summing Up	7
References	8

Sample Quotes from the Survey

- The EAA gave one participant an “awareness of common disabilities and ways to help residents with those disabilities.”
- A respondent realized that “physical activity of any kind is considered active living.”
- “It doesn’t need to be a specific exercise program alone, but many different activities together.”
- Another respondent “realized how important activity is to healthy living” and “the importance to motivate residents to take part in activities.”
- Another said the course would help her make seniors “aware of the importance to their health by maintaining a fitness program.”
- “To me the interaction between the people that attended and the different ideas that were presented was the most valuable component of the course.”
- A respondent’s group programming changed in terms of “keeping it more informal” and “making it fun.”
- Some respondents become more aware of residents’ safety, e.g., knowing better “when to push through the pain and when to stop.”
- A respondent had changed her own behaviour, “drinking more water and doing more exercise/walking.”
- Another respondent realized that residents “feel better” and are “more friendly with one another.”

Part 2: A Brief Look at the Results

We grouped the evaluation’s findings into four main categories that include participants’ perceptions of

- the value of the EAA course;
- programming changes;
- the EAA course’s impact on the lodge’s environment;
- support for and barriers to implementing physical activity programs.

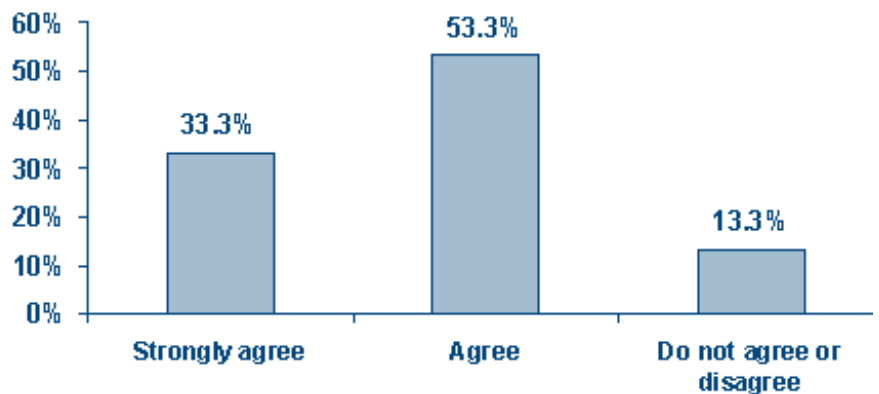
The first three categories describe whether coordinators perceive the EAA course as relevant to their lodges’ programming. The fourth category describes how the participants perceive their lodges’ support or lack of support for physical activity program implementation and change.

The following graphs and discussion highlight the main findings.

The Value of the EAA to Participants

The results in Figure 1 show that 87% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the EAA course gave them the tools and knowledge needed to increase physical activity opportunities in their lodges.

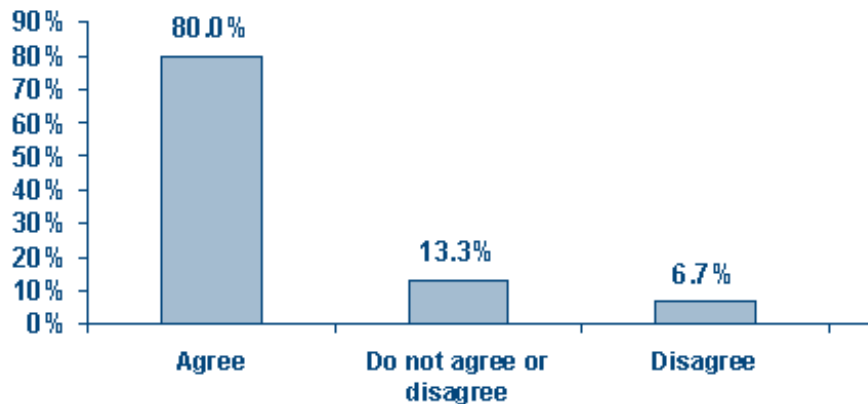
Figure 1: EAA gave me the tools and knowledge that I need to increase physical activity opportunities in my lodge.



Perceptions of Programming Changes

As shown in Figure 2 on p. 3, 80% of respondents reported changes in their exercise programs. These changes mainly took the form of new and different ways to exercise.

Figure 2: The physical activity programming in my lodge has changed since taking the EAA course.

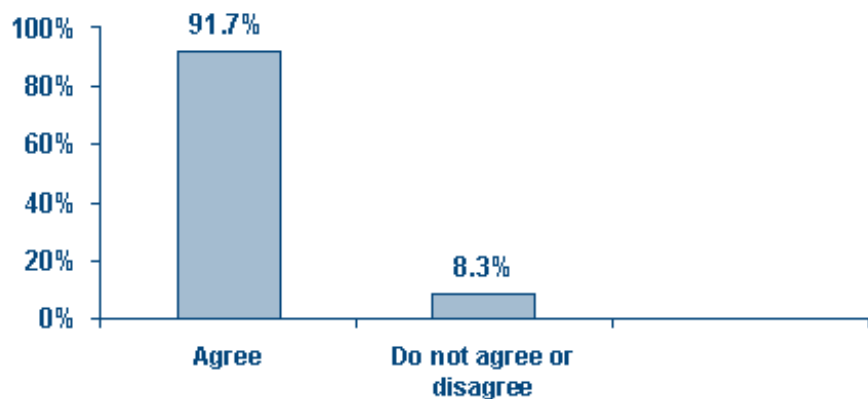


In addition, 78.5% of participants reported changes in their programming for groups after taking the EAA course. Forty per cent have also introduced changes in their programming for individuals.

The EAA Course’s Impact on Lodge Environments

Figure 3 shows that 92% of respondents felt that the lodge’s social environment had positively changed since implementing the physical activity programming changes.

Figure 3: The lodge’s social environment has positively changed since my implementation of physical activity programming changes.



Seventy per cent of the responses also reported positive changes in the lodge’s physical environment since implementing the physical activity program changes.

Support for and Barriers to Implementing Physical Activity Programs

The EAA evaluation showed that 50% of participants have been able to implement and support their lodge’s physical activity programs to the extent that they would like. The most common barrier to implementing change was lack of time.

**Part 3:
How the Centre
Designed this
Evaluation**

The Evaluation Sample

The Alberta Centre for Active Living invited participants who attended the EAA course in March 2003 to take part in this evaluation. The centre mailed the EAA evaluation package to 34 EAA-trained lodge coordinators. Fifteen surveys were completed (a return rate of 44.11%). The extent to which this relatively low return rate may have influenced the results remains unclear.

The EAA evaluation findings are based on the centre’s analysis and interpretation of the completed surveys. Fourteen of the fifteen respondents were female physical activity coordinators at lodges (one female respondent was a volunteer at a lodge).

The Survey

We asked participants completing the EAA survey to provide demographic information (e.g., work experience, education) and to give us their perceptions about lodge physical activity programming (e.g., what they perceived to have changed or not changed in designing and implementing physical activity programs). The survey combined qualitative (open-ended questions) and

quantitative information (scales and multiple-choice questions).

The evaluation package mailed to EAA-trained coordinators contained a cover letter, an information letter, the survey, an envelope for contact information, and a large prepaid return-to-sender envelope. We asked participants to disregard the package if they did not wish to participate in the evaluation.

The use of a survey somewhat limited the quality of information that the evaluation team was able to collect. Notably, the questions did not allow respondents to elaborate their responses or to clarify them. A predetermined evaluation budget, human resource limitations, and time constraints determined this choice of evaluation method.

Despite these constraints, we are confident that our findings reflect overall how respondents perceive the changes in their physical activity programs as a result of their EAA training.

EAA Data Analysis and Interpretation

After participants returned the surveys to the Alberta Centre for Active Living, we organized the data to facilitate easy analysis and interpretation. Our evaluation combines quantitative (descriptive) analysis of the closed questions and qualitative (content) analysis of the open-ended responses.

Part 4: Results and Discussion

Value of the EAA Course to Participants

Eighty-seven per cent of participants either strongly agreed or agreed that the EAA course gave them the tools and knowledge needed to increase physical activity opportunities in their lodges. Several themes also emerged from participants' responses to a question about the most valuable parts of the EAA course.

a. Working with people with special conditions

Most participants found learning about exercises for people with special conditions one of the most valuable parts of the course. As one respondent put it, the course gave her an "awareness of common disabilities and ways to help residents with those disabilities."

Our evaluation found that respondents expressed concern about working with people who have disabilities. Lodge coordinators interact with a population that, according to Buijs, Ross-Kerr, O'Brien Cousins, & Wilson (2003), is likely to have health problems and associated disabilities. By teaching residents different ways to be physically active, the EAA course helped coordinators to realize that anybody can participate in lodge physical activity programs.

b. Focusing on active living

Survey participants reported that the EAA course made them see physical activity as active living, rather than exclusively as a set of prescribed and/or structured exercises. One respondent realized that "physical activity of any kind is considered active living." Another respondent stated, "It doesn't need to be a specific exercise program alone, but many different activities together."

c. Importance of Physical Activity in daily lives

Most respondents also cited a new awareness of physical activity's importance in seniors' daily lives. For example, after taking the EAA course, one respondent "realized how important activity is to healthy living" and "the importance to motivate residents to take part in activities."

Another respondent saw the course as relevant in making seniors “all aware of the importance to their health by maintaining a fitness program and to stick with it.”

d. Sharing ideas and resources

Most respondents valued the chance to share ideas and resources with EAA course facilitators and other lodge coordinators: “To me the interaction between the people that attended and the different ideas that were presented was the most valuable component of the course.”

This finding could relate to the work of McPherson (1998) who suggests that in most rural locations the network of professional contacts and/or access to a support system are limited.

During the EAA course, coordinators interacted with other professionals who might experience the same barriers in their work environments. Physical activity coordinators valued the opportunity to network, learn about, and access resources and services for older adults in Alberta lodges.

Perceptions of Programming Changes

Eighty per cent of participants agreed that exercise programs in their seniors’ lodges have changed since taking the EAA course. Most of these changes involved including new and different ways to exercise.

Below are some of the other main responses to a question on programming changes.

a. Daily physical activity

After taking the EAA course, most respondents placed a greater stress on the importance of daily physical activity and focused more on active living.

b. New activities

Many coordinators had introduced new activities into their programs, e.g., resistance training, as suggested in the EAA course and curriculum. Most respondents now consider resistance training an important part of their physical activity programs. Some lodges had also initiated successful walking programs.

c. Increased commitment

In general, lodge coordinators seemed more committed to planning their activities and perceived residents as more committed to participating in physical activity programs.

d. Changes in programs for groups

Approximately 79% of participants reported changes in their programs for groups as a result of taking the EAA course.

Respondents identified several changes in their programming since taking the EAA course. One respondent said that her group programming changed in terms of “keeping it more

informal” and “making it more fun.” These changes have made physical activity more enjoyable for the residents in her lodge.

Another important change is that the EAA course has made lodge coordinators more aware of residents’ safety during exercise classes. Many coordinators said that they pay more attention when residents are exercising. Some respondents realized when they should caution residents to avoid injuries during exercise class. For one participant, this meant knowing “when to push through the pain and when to stop.”

This greater awareness of residents’ health and safety has led many respondents to perceive their programs as more suited to individual residents’ needs. This change suggests that, after taking the EAA course, physical activity leaders were both more conscious of residents’ needs and how to apply different kinds of physical activity in different situations. (Coordinators saw this change as one of the most valuable parts of the EAA course).

e. Changes in programs for individuals

Forty per cent of respondents stated that they have introduced programming changes for individuals.

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

Some respondents emphasized that they do not work on an individual basis in their lodges. Other respondents said that they try to find ways to accommodate individual needs in their group programming. “They ask for their own exercises,” said one respondent, explaining how she works individually with people who do not participate in group programming. “Encourage them to do what they can,” reported a respondent who had found a way to work one-on-one with residents.

f. Changes in coordinators’ behaviour

The EAA course had affected coordinators’ practices in other ways as well, e.g., in their own behaviour. One respondent told us that she had started “drinking more water and doing more exercise/walking.” As she advises residents to become more active, she felt obliged to change her habits too.

After taking the EAA course, most respondents also said that they felt both more confident and interested in planning and implementing new exercises for residents.

The EAA Course’s Impact on the Lodge’s Environment

a. Changes in the social environment

Ninety-two per cent of respondents believed that their lodge’s social environment had positively changed since implementing physical activity programming changes.

Respondents perceived improvements both in their own networking with other coordinators and in the residents’ well-being and rate of participation in lodge activities (including the physical activity program). One respondent realized that the “residents feel better.” Another said that she could tell that residents “are more friendly with one another” and that “residents are happier and content.”

Some lodge residents started going beyond lodge boundaries to participate in physical activity, e.g., those in the mall-walking groups and outside walking groups.

To sum up, respondents perceived that residents participated in more lodge activities and interacted better with one another.

b. Changes in the physical environment

Seventy per cent of responses reported positive changes in the physical environment since modifying physical activity programs.

According to one respondent, changes in lodge residents can also affect a lodge’s physical environment. For example, one lodge’s more active group of residents were changing the physical environment by arranging the lodge to allow the residents to play. Most responses associate changes in the physical environment with the increased circulation of residents within the lodge.

However, some respondents seemed to have difficulty understanding the survey question about their perception of changes in the lodge’s physical environment as a result of their programming changes. This question did not provide enough information to make definite conclusions about changes in lodges’ physical environments.

Support for and Barriers to Implementing Physical Activity Programs

a. Respondents who perceived support

Fifty per cent of participants have been able to implement and support their lodges’ physical activity programs to the extent that they would like.

Respondents identified receiving support from residents (e.g., participating in physical activity programs) and managers (e.g., providing adequate space for programs) as key in allowing them to implement and support their lodges’ physical activity programs.

b. Respondents who did not perceive support

Thirty-six per cent of participants did not report changes in their physical activity programs. Participants attributed this lack of support to

the following barriers (listed in order of importance). For example, participants felt a lack of

- time (38.5%);
- information or resources (36.4%);
- equipment (33.33%);
- space (33.33%);
- trained staff (30%);
- interest from residents (27.27%).

Part 5: **Summing Up**

The risks of sedentary lifestyles among older adults are well-known. Physical inactivity has been identified as a common risk factor for many chronic health diseases. An active lifestyle, i.e., one with regular physical activity, has been demonstrated to improve older adults' quality of life and independence. Regular physical activity will also reduce the risk of many chronic health diseases (Health Canada, ALCOA, & CSEP, 1999).

The EAA aims to improve the quality of life of lodge residents by increasing opportunities for physical activity in Alberta seniors' lodges. The evaluation findings indicate that the EAA course was successful overall in achieving its goals. These results may also guide other stakeholders and policy-makers to develop and support older adult physical activity programs and policies.

The evaluation data revealed that EAA-trained coordinators had five main perceptions resulting from their EAA training.

- The EAA course had given coordinators the tools and knowledge needed to increase physical activity opportunities in their lodges.
- The EAA course and curriculum had positively affected coordinators' practices (their training provided resources that allowed them to successfully modify or implement physical activity programs).
- Coordinators perceived positive changes in their lodges' social and (to a lesser extent) physical environments after implementing physical activity program changes.
- Coordinators realized that lodge residents' well-being and quality of life can be positively affected by appropriate physical activity programs.
- Coordinators identified receiving support from residents and managers as key in allowing them to implement and support their lodges' physical activity programs.

Working with practitioners, organizations, and communities to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.

References

Buijs, R., Ross-Kerr, J., O'Brien Cousins, S., & Wilson, D. (2003). Promoting participation: Evaluation of a health promotion program for low income seniors. *Journal of Community Health Nursing, 20*, 90–107.

Health Canada, ALCOA, & CSEP. (1999). *Canada's physical activity guide to healthy active living for older adults*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

McPherson, B. D. (1998). *Aging as a social process* (3rd ed.). Toronto, ON: Harcourt Brace Canada.

Mummery, K. (1996). Physical activity and older Albertans: Results from the National Survey on Aging and Independence. *Research Update, 3* (3). Retrieved April 19, 2004, from www.centre4activeliving.ca/Research/ResearchUpdate/index.htm.

Spence, J., & Poon, P. (2000). Availability of physical activity programs in Alberta Senior Lodges: A pilot study. *Research Update, 8* (1). Retrieved April 19, 2004, from www.centre4activeliving.ca/Research/ResearchUpdate/index.htm.

Spence, J., & Weiss, C. (2001). Physical activity participation in seniors' lodges: Barriers and facilitators. *Research Update, 8* (4). Retrieved April 19, 2004, from www.centre4activeliving.ca/Research/ResearchUpdate/index.htm.

Watchman, T., Spence, J., & Poon, P. (1999). Availability of physical activity programs in Alberta nursing homes. *Research Update, 6* (2). Retrieved April 19, 2004, from www.centre4activeliving.ca/Research/ResearchUpdate/index.htm.

The authors would like to thank the following organizations for their support of this project:

- **The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks & Wildlife Foundation**
- **Alberta Community Development**
- **Health Canada**
- **Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta**

Alberta Centre for Active Living

Percy Page Centre
3rd Floor, 11759 Groat Road
Edmonton, AB T5M 3K6
Phone: 780.427.6949 or
1.800.661.4551
Fax: 780.455.2092
Web site:
www.centre4activeliving.ca
E-mail: active.living@ualberta.ca

Staff

Director: Judith Moodie
Research: Ron Plotnikoff, PhD,
Enrique Garcia, PhD
Older Adult Coordinator: Timothy
Fairbank
Communications and Marketing
Coordinator: Kathy Garnsworthy
Centre Coordinator: Betty Lee
Resource Coordinator: Rosanne
Prinsen
Bookkeeper: Carol Knull
Administrative Assistant: Margaret
Burns
Office Assistant: Gilda LaGrange
Canadian Health Network:
Pauline Poon, Maria Tan
Health in Action Project: Karena
Apps Eccles, Gwen Farnsworth