

# A Pilot Program to Determine the Feasibility of Organizing a Walking/Healthy Lifestyle Program for Seniors in a Rural Community

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## Introduction

Family Health Teams encourage patients to follow healthy lifestyles, including participating in **physical activity**, but many patients are faced with barriers such as distance and cost of programs. In rural areas, these barriers become more pronounced.

With the many benefits of exercise and the large number of seniors aged 65 years and older (16.7% in Ontario, 22.7% in Huron county), access to affordable exercise programs are needed to maintain the health of seniors.

## Purpose

The objective of this pilot program was to determine the feasibility of offering patients of a Family Health Team the opportunity to participate in a free walking and healthy lifestyle program in a rural area.

## Barriers to Physical Activity

Many barriers were encountered when setting up the program. These barriers included:

- Overall costs of the program
- Price of the workout gear
- Location and distance
- Accessibility to residents
- Safety in the environment
- Risk for injury
- Enrollment at any time of the year
- Skill involved

## The Program

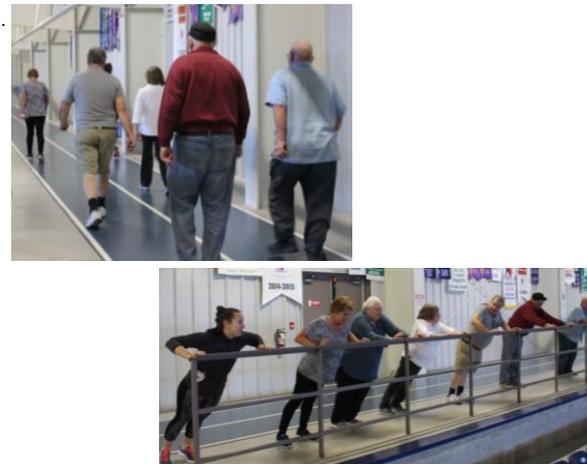
The Dietitian and Nurse practitioner of the Clinton FHT collaborated with the YMCA to offer patients a one hour walking/healthy lifestyle program at the Central Huron Community Complex.

The program includes walking the track, doing strength exercises and learning about nutrition and healthy living topics.

## Clinton FHT's one hour Walking/Healthy Lifestyle program for seniors



## Aerobic and Strength Exercises



## Results

Our program was designed to allow new participants to join at any time of the year.

Ten to 12 participants attended class regularly.

### After the program, participants reported having:

- More energy
  - Ability to maintain weight
  - Favorable blood lab results
- Participants also reported having looked into other fitness programs on other days.

### Reasons for continued attendance:

ranged from medical health problems necessitating continued lifestyle changes, to staying fit and meeting friends.

Participants noted that comradeship also kept them interested in attending the program.

## Conclusion

- Creating a no-cost to the participant fitness program, that includes a healthy living education component, is effective in reducing barriers to healthy lifestyle choices in a rural area.
- While one day per week may not lead to substantial changes in one's health, it gives participants the initiative and direction to pursue more physical activity per week and attain healthy lifestyle goals.

## Future Direction

Enhanced collaboration with other agencies or partners. Pedometers will be given to participants to encourage activity on other days of the week. Broader nutrition and healthy living education, with enticing weekly themes and special monthly guests.