

Limited Activity

Many older adults suffer from poor physical or mental health as a result of chronic disease, but this does not mean that aging has to be a time of disability and despair. As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

Why It Matters

Chronic diseases affect 80 percent of adults aged 65 and older.¹ Many of these conditions limit an adult's daily activities. Physical limitations may keep older adults trapped in their homes, leading to a sense of isolation and deteriorating mental health.

The good news is that many chronic diseases are preventable or manageable.

Arthritis – the leading cause of functional limitation – can be managed through physical activity such as walking, biking and swimming.² Efforts to get older Coloradans out of the house and engaged in light physical activity, especially in social settings, can improve physical and mental health outcomes.

Defining the Indicator

The percentage of adults ages 65 and older who report that poor mental or physical health kept them from doing usual activities such as self-care, work or recreation for eight or more days in the past month.

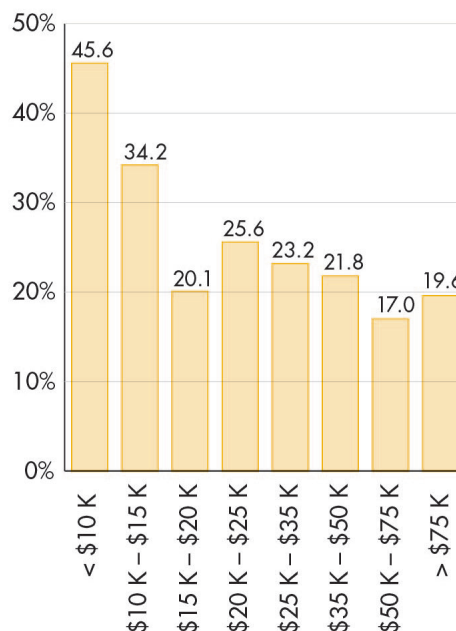
In Colorado

Colorado's population is aging rapidly. By 2030, the 65-plus population is expected to be three times larger than it was in 2000.³

With a growing 65+ population, it is concerning that more than 20 percent of older adults report limited activity. In 2012, 21.8 percent of Colorado adults 65 and older said their activities were limited. This put Colorado 17th in the nation – an 11-place drop from its rank of 6th in 2011.

Differences in income are associated with differences in physical activity levels. Older adults with incomes of less than \$10,000 per year are much more likely to report limited activity due to poor physical or mental health (45.6 percent) compared with those who make more than \$75,000 per year (19.6 percent). Lower-income Coloradans may not have access to neighborhoods with safe walking paths or be able to afford membership in a fitness club.

Older adults who report limited physical activity eight or more days within the past month by income, Colorado, 2012



Older Adults with Limited Activity

Percentage of adults ages 65+ who report that poor mental or physical health kept them from doing usual activities:

21.8%

Colorado Rank

17/50

Best State

South Dakota

South Dakota Older Adults with Limited Activity

18.3%

Data from 2012

What if We Were No. 1?

If Colorado were ranked first instead of 17th



21,600

Fewer older adults would report limited activity due to poor physical or mental health – more than the entire seating capacity of the Pepsi Center in Denver.

Promising Practices

Encouraging seniors to take part in light physical activity can result in better physical and mental health.⁴ This is particularly the case if the activity is conducted in a community-based setting offering opportunities to socialize.

One promising development along these lines is what's known as Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs). NORCs can be apartment buildings, condominium complexes, or neighborhoods of single-family homes. Health and social workers provide health care management and prevention programs, recreational activities, volunteer opportunities and links to nearby resources. In one study, 72 percent of NORC residents agreed or strongly agreed that they leave their homes more often than they used to, and an even greater percentage said they participate in activities and events more often.⁵ Colorado currently has one official NORC in Edgewater and one developing in Wheat Ridge.

There is a strong link between physical health and behavioral health. Attempts to integrate behavioral and physical health may benefit older adults struggling with the isolating effects of chronic conditions. Several clinics in Colorado are testing new models that place primary care and behavioral care under one roof. Additionally, Colorado received a State Innovation Model Pre-Testing Assistance Award from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to prepare a plan to integrate behavioral health and primary health care.



NWCOVNA PHOTO

Making a Difference

NWCOVNA Wellness and Aging Program

Northwest Colorado Visiting Nurse Association's Wellness and Aging program helps older adults stay physically and mentally healthy and make stronger connections to their communities. The program offers health-focused classes and programs in Steamboat Springs, Craig, and the surrounding area. Wellness Day programs include fitness classes, workshops, foot care clinics and nutritious lunches. The popular weekly program also partners with local colleges to provide art and writing workshops to participants. By offering activities that promote well-being and community building the Northwest Colorado Visiting Nurse Association is helping older Coloradans age healthfully.

www.nwcovna.org/wellness_aging.php
www.ColoradoHealth.org/nwcovna

¹ Helping People to Live Long and Productive Lives and Enjoy a Good Quality of Life. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/aging.htm>

² Ibid.

³ Colorado Health Institute. (2013). Reaching Our Peak. http://coloradohealthinstitute.org/uploads/downloads/Reach_our_Peak_final_low_res.pdf

⁴ Buman et al. Objective light-intensity physical activity associations with rated health in older adults. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 172 (2010): 1155-1165.

⁵ Bedney, et al. "Rethinking Aging in Place: Exploring the Impact of NORC Supportive Service Programs on Older Adult Participants." Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Society on Aging and National Council on Aging, Chicago, IL, March 7-10, 2007.

