

Evidence-based guidelines on health promotion for older people

The unprecedented demographic changes in Europe require substantial adjustments in health care systems and provisions. Health promotion and prevention need to be developed in order to reduce the necessity for cure and care. Health is a basic human value and an important resource for every day life. Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their health. This is especially vital for old age. In this connection the European Commissions' White Paper "Together for Health", which outlines its health strategy from 2008–2013, names fostering good health in an ageing Europe as one important strategic objective.

It is possible to improve the quality of life of older people by empowerment, physical and mental activity. Different types of health promotion activities for older people, including environmental adaptation, which make active ageing possible represent a new and innovative field that is vital for the future. There are various individual projects and programmes in EU-member states that offer health promotion activities on a local or regional level. However, they are frequently not known on a national or international level.

To improve knowledge in this field on European level, the healthPROelderly-project collected information on health promotion initiatives for older people and developed guidelines for experts in this field. Specifically, healthPROelderly-partners carried out a literature search on health promotion for older people in 11 European countries, collected more than 160 good practice examples for health promotion initiatives in its database, analysed 33 best-practice examples in detail and developed guidelines for planning and implementing health promotion activities for older people. Reports on the literature overview, the database as well as the analysis of best practice examples are available under www.healthproelderly.com.

Important pillars of good practice in health promotion activities for older people are:

- Taking into account that older people are a heterogeneous target group and **targeting activities to specific** cultural, personal and physical **needs**
- Ensuring the **physical and geographical accessibility** of health promotion activities for older people
- **Giving older people a voice** from the start and involving them in all phases of the health promotion programme
- Developing **multi-faceted and holistic interventions** which take into account the physical, mental and social health needs of the older person
- **Involving different types of stakeholders** in planning and implementation
- Basing the design of the health promotion programme around existing **evidence and proven techniques**
- Employing **strategies and methods** which are appropriate and reliable to reach the specified target groups and achieve the stated outcomes of the intervention
- Using and learning from on-going, comprehensive and mixed-method **evaluations**
- **Publicising** the health promotion activities' accomplishments to a wider audience, using various media

There are a variety of health promotion activities all over Europe that have shown their effect on improving the quality of life of older people and have included some or all of the above mentioned aspects (www.healthproelderly.com/database). However, many of these activities have been carried out as projects with limited funding, since there are little to no coherent policies in this field. Through lack of funding and lack of mainstream provision in this area, many successful projects and programmes which have built up know-how and expertise could not be continued.

In order to provide the basis for the development of further successful activities in health promotion of older people, the following improvements are necessary on national and European levels:

- Launching **information campaigns** on the positive effects of health promotion for older people
- Developing **national programmes** on health promotion for older people which take into consideration that older people are not a homogenous group, e.g. with regard to age, ethnic background, socio-economic status
- Providing the **(financial) resources and the infrastructure** for health promotion projects for older people at the regional and local levels by arguing the importance of health promotion with results from previous successful interventions and evidence-based evaluations
- Maintaining successful health promotion projects for older people with **integrated, long-term funding** that is sufficiently flexible to meet the unique needs of local communities
- Maximising the impact of national resources dedicated to regional and local health promotion through greater **collaboration and coordination across important national organisations**
- Supporting the **creation of networks** on the national and especially local levels that provide for information exchange between all important actors in the field of health promotion for older people
- Promoting **training and capacity building** that gives professionals in the area of public health the knowledge, skills, and tools to implement community health promotion approaches and principles in their work with older people
- Financing **community based research** on the (long-term) effects of health promotion and financing **evidence-based interventions**
- Promoting the **dissemination of models of good practice in health promotion**, e.g. by maintaining a database of successful health promotion interventions for older people in your country and awarding best practice models

For more information visit www.healthproelderly.com

Contact: charlotte.struempel@redcross.at, Tel. 0043 1 589 00 128

