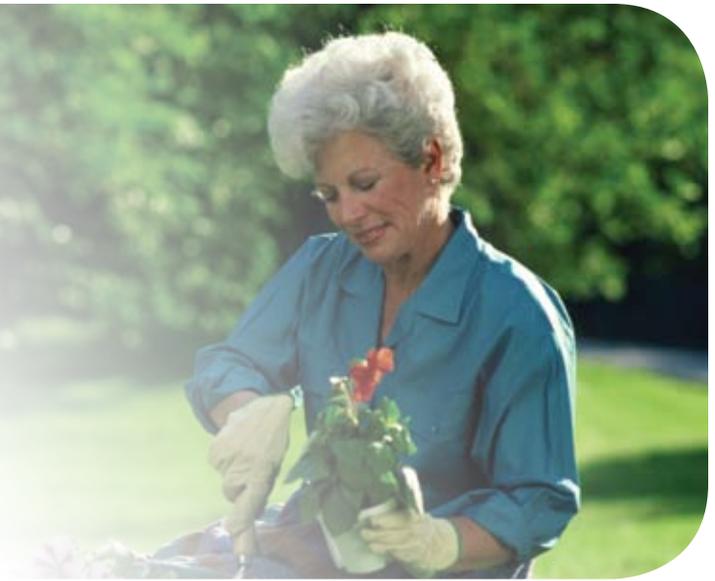


TAKING CHARGE

Activating Senior Networks



Specifically targeting seniors in Appalachia, *Taking Charge* uses a community-based model to motivate seniors to manage their health. Capitalizing on existing formal and informal social networks, *Taking Charge* partners with community volunteers and service agencies to motivate seniors to manage to their health, continue to live independently and age-in-place.

Trusted community members, service agencies and social networks engage seniors through peer training. *Taking Charge* focuses on the prevalent health and safety issues facing senior West Virginians: diabetes, arthritis, heart health, falls, inactivity and poor nutrition.

As a result of these efforts, 124 community members from 23 different organizations were trained. To measure the program's effectiveness, cultural appropriateness and content relevance, pre and post surveys were administered at the time *Taking Charge* was initially presented and then again 30 days later.



Paired pre and post survey results show:

- Almost 500 participants trained by their peers, 80% were females and 96% were white
- Participants reported increased frequency in attending health check-ups, talking with their doctors, taking medications as prescribed and choosing healthier foods after being introduced to *Taking Charge*
- Participants experienced an improved sense of their general health
- Participants felt more secure in managing their health

Despite these successes, the program's effectiveness was hindered due to several factors. When asked why participants did not use the program or its health materials:

- 23% responded they were uninterested in the program
- 21% had forgotten about the program
- 56% claimed 'other reasons' for not participating

Of 20 community leaders surveyed, nine had not shared the *Taking Charge* program. Barriers included:

- Inability to locate groups to which to present the curriculum
- Busy schedules
- More time needed to schedule a presentation
- Presentation scheduled at a later time

In its second year of funding, *Taking Charge: Activating Senior Networks in Rural Appalachia* is expanding social networks by partnering with allied health professionals. Building partnerships between allied health professionals and senior social networks is proving to be a viable strategy in meeting the increasing needs of seniors choosing to age-in-place.

West Virginia Extension Service and the Center for Excellence in Disabilities at West Virginia University are working to partner with the following to meet the project's overall objective of motivating seniors to manage their health:

- Allied health professionals such as pharmacists, nurses, physician assistants, occupational and physical therapists and social workers
- Pre-service students in the WVU schools of pharmacy, nursing, dental hygiene, community medicine, gerontology and social work
- Center on Aging at WVU
- Rural health clinics
- Free clinics, such as Health Right

Taking Charge: Activating Senior Networks is expanding the Taking Charge program with the following program components to further empower seniors in managing their health:

- Free home assessments in all 18 project counties
- Mini grants up to \$1,000 for participating community volunteers and organizations to build networks and disseminate health-related information
- Additional materials, such as fact sheets, and a new edition of the *Taking Charge Resource Directory*



959 Hartman Run Rd.
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-293-4692
www.cedwvu.org

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