

PRO HEALTH 65+

Health Promotion and Prevention of Risk – Action for Seniors



PROJECT POLICY BRIEF 3

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HEALTH PROMOTION INTERVENTIONS: EFFECTIVE IN ELDERLY POPULATION

ABSTRACT

Ageing remains one of the greatest challenges for modern societies. To assure active and fruitful life of older people, we need effective strategies of maintaining their best possible health and wellbeing in later stages of life. The implementation of validated health promotion interventions, possibly also earlier in the life cycle, may have profound impact for the elderly.

There is extensive scientific evidence accumulated in the last decades on the effectiveness of actions undertaken in health promotion, primary prevention and related areas for the benefit of elderly people. To facilitate decision-making in this area, the project Pro Health 65+ reviewed the research domain and outlined potentially effective strategies.

Closer analysis of the interventions indicated that the most effective actions include the involvement of elderly persons in physical exercises and other activities that increase physical activity. Furthermore, interventions including health education and communication, addressed to the overall community, may also be effective. Home visits by professionals could in addition bring benefits for elderly people by improving their health and wellbeing.

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INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is perceived as one of the greatest challenges for the health and social systems. Along with the longer life expectancy, peoples' retirement period is also becoming longer. Elderly people expect that they will be able to lead active and fruitful lives for as long as possible. On the other hand, ageing is associated with an increased prevalence of medical conditions and disabilities. The capacities of the health care systems are limited in tackling chronic diseases commonly occurring in old age. Health care systems must move one step further from reactive to proactive policies. It is time for enhancing the scope of health promotion and disease prevention interventions by implementing them as early as possible in the life cycle to assure the wellbeing of elderly people living in our societies.

Since the First International Conference on Health Promotion held in Ottawa in 1986, this field has seen tremendous progress. The concept of health promotion emerged as a new approach to the challenge of health maintenance and improvement. It offered a new quality of thinking about health with a strong emphasis on its positive understanding and not only regarding the avoidance of diseases. After several decades of health promotion practice, it became obvious that health promotion interventions should be seen in the context of complex interrelationships encompassing citizens, communities, health care systems and surrounding environments. Although we still adhere to the definition of health promotion phrased in the Ottawa Charter as "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health", the scope of possible health promotion interventions is being actively extended to respond to emerging public health risks, including those associated with the population aging.

Based on secondary data gathered within the project Pro Health 65+, this policy brief outlines the types of health promotion interventions which could positively affect health-related and social outcomes in the elderly population. There is extensive scientific evidence accumulated in the last decades on the effectiveness of such interventions. To facilitate decision-making in this area, this brief provides an overview of the research domain and outlines potentially effective strategies.

POLICY CONTEXT

The need of actions which may increase or maintain the population health has been widely formulated in the past decades. In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a document "Active Ageing. A Policy Framework" (http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/active_ageing/en/). This document contains roadmap for designing "active ageing policies" which will enhance the health of older population but also underline the urgency of health promotion and preventive activities addressed to elderly, and the participation of a target group in these efforts. But for the preparation of an effective strategy, which may improve and maintain the health of the elderly, a specific knowledge is needed:

- What kind of health promotion interventions and activities may be helpful in maintaining and enhancing health of older population?
- Which of the health issues and specific medical conditions can be resolved by the implementation of the health promotion interventions?

The activities undertaken in the frame of scoping review and described in this policy brief give a broad view of the health promotion and preventive interventions targeting the elderly. It also shows the effectiveness of interventions focused on general health, quality of life and disease oriented strategies. Also, it assesses the effectiveness of more specific health issues like mental health, cognitive function, physical activity, frailty, nutrition, disability, independence and social functioning, and social activities. This classification and assessment combines health promotion interventions with the specific health issues of elderly and may be helpful in building strategies aimed at improving and maintaining the health of older people on both, national and European level.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

DATA POOL

The data reported in this policy brief come from systematic reviews and meta-analyses published in the academic literature in the period 2000-2015. Specifically, they concern the effectiveness of interventions which belonged to health promotion or related areas of primary prevention and social support addressed to older age groups. To obtain a broad view of the domain, the mapping approach based on a scoping review of the domain was employed. It was also expected that the scoping review would detect research gaps and determine future areas of research. The review design and process is reported in details in: *Duplaga M et al. (2016). Scoping review of health promotion and disease prevention interventions addressed to elderly people*. Below, the key findings relevant to policy and focusing on the effectiveness of the health promotion interventions are briefly described.

FINDINGS

EFFECTIVE HEALTH PROMOTION INTERVENTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE ELDERLY

The systematic reviews that assess interventions addressed to elderly persons combining health promotion with other actions, prevailed over those exclusively assessing health promotion interventions. Among combined interventions, those consisting of health promotion and primary prevention are the most frequent category. The most frequent targeted areas, which could be identified in relation to health promotion interventions alone or combined with other actions, include quality of life, general health status, physical activity and medical conditions.

The interventions employing or targeting physical exercise and physical activity are most frequently demonstrated to have a positive impact on specific outcomes established in studies assessed in systematic reviews and/or meta-analyses identified as comprising components of health promotion (Table 1). Apart from benefits from interventions relying on various forms of exercises or physical activity as such, they are also successfully applied in relation to general health status, quality of life, cognitive function, mental health, frailty as well as in relation to specific medical conditions. Physical activity interventions assessed as effective, have lot of different forms but the most common are: walk, simple exercises (supervised or not), yoga, Nordic walking but also flexibility, stretching, endurance, strength training and other various types of exercises typical for gym or fitness centres. Of course, the burden and intensity of the physical activity interventions are tailored to the elderly.

Table 1. Effective health promotion interventions targeting physical activity

Type of effective HP intervention	Number of SR/M-As	Publication period
supervised group centre-based exercises	1	2002
various types of home-based exercises	1	2012
endurance and strength training	3	2008-2013
resistance exercise program	2	2010-2013
tai chi training	1	2011
pilates exercise	1	2015
flexibility training, stretching exercises	2	2012-2014
various other types of physical activity and exercises	8	2008-2014
dance	1	2014
interactive computer games involving stability training	1	2015
home visiting	1	2000
preventive primary care outreach interventions	1	2005

Home visits and home based interventions are assessed as effective in the context of various aspects of health promotion (quality of life, general health status, physical and general activity, mental health) and groups of elderly people addressed. Effective home visits and home based interventions are delivered by health professionals (e.g. nurse) or carers. This type of interventions are mostly addressed to the elderly, which are not able to take care of their life without the help from the other people (because of the specific illness or health condition). Home visits and home based interventions contain educational elements and usual care.

Educational interventions, alone or combined with other actions, may be an effective strategy in relation to such targeted areas as nutrition, frailty, oral health or general health issues in the context of specific medical conditions. Education is a basis of health promotion and preventive strategies. Educational interventions assessed as effective, are focused on the delivery of information about the diet of the elderly or how the older people should care about the oral hygiene. Educational strategies are also effective in the field of frailty and falls prevention, or specific medical conditions. In this case, most of the interventions are combined, e.g. education (how to tackle falls and injuries) and giving devices decreasing the risk of fall or injuries, or reducing the consequences of falling (hip protectors).

Socialization among elderly is one of the key issues. We can notice that people who are living alone (e.g. widowed), suffer because of the alienation or withdrawal. This situation may affect the health of the seniors. The interventions involving social activities or activities having social context and assessed as effective, contain elements like dancing or listening to music. This type of activities may bring benefits in the relation to quality of life, cognitive function, mental health and maintaining physical activity.

Interventions addressed towards the community including community education, communication via media (TV, radio or small media use) or safety displays, may be an important component of effective strategies for tackling frailty or selected specific medical conditions. This type of interventions are often implemented as an extension

of strategies pointed above. The aim of the actions that address the community (using educational and communication strategies via media), is to enhance the effects and potential benefits of the health promotion interventions.

There are some types of IT-based interventions which show promising results in the area of cognitive function, maintaining physical activity or educating about lifestyle for patients at risk or with diagnosed medical conditions. These interventions contain educational elements (giving information or instructions related to the specific illness or medical condition) but also some of the effective interventions are based on video games, targeting the mental health, maintaining cognitive functioning or increasing the physical activity and the body balance. IT-based interventions seems to be helpful in maintaining the health of elderly, but a large part of older people is not familiar with different kinds of information or new technologies. Especially among Eastern European societies, we can notice that only a small proportion of the older people know how to use these technologies. That is why, there is a need to promote the use of IT among elderly, which may increase the effects of health promotion strategies.

Answering the question “what types of health promotion interventions addressed to the elderly are effective?” is essential. An ageing population is a challenging phenomenon in developed and developing countries. The increasing percentage of older people among societies (on national and European level) affects the economic, public health, social and healthcare systems. Implementation of effective health promotion strategies mentioned above and tailored to described specific health problems and medical conditions among elderly will be helpful in maintaining the health of older population and also may bring benefits for the whole societies.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVEL

- Interventions relying on involving in various forms of physical exercises or supporting physical activity should be key components of health promotion programmes addressed to elderly populations
- Health education alone or combined with other actions should be considered in relation to specific targeted areas, e.g. frailty or nutrition.
- Home visits delivered by formal carers are an important type of intervention beneficial for selected groups of elderly persons.
- The activities supporting social involvement of elderly people brings benefits in relation to their quality of life, cognitive function and maintaining physical activity
- The evidence on feasibility of health promotion interventions should be further developed as there are still many gaps in relation to older populations.
- There are some emerging types of information technology solution, which can be used to develop effective strategies of tackling with frailty or improving health status in selected medical conditions in the elderly.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

PROJECT FOCUS

ProHealth 65+ is focused on health promotion and prevention of health risks among seniors. The project seeks to determine effective methods of promoting a healthy lifestyle among older population groups by bringing together knowledge and experience of main partners and health promoters from Poland, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands and exchange it with collaborating partners from Portugal, Greece, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Hungary. The effective implementation of training for health promoters working with this age group is the ultimate project goal.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Pro-Health 65+ project corresponds with directions of the EU strategic Health Program (the Second and Third Health Program). The project is focused on 'Investing in Health' as part of the Social Investment Package for Growth and Cohesion through professionally designed health promotion programs implemented by well-informed and efficiently operating health promoters. It is targeted at the elderly with the intention of providing them with good health and good quality of life, and enabling them to be active and socially integrated (Healthy Aging). It will be implemented as a collaborative project in close cooperation with partner countries using a variety of research and institutional experience. It will be important to add the project activities to other European and national activities so that they are complementary and compatible.

METHODOLOGY

This project is about research and implementation. It will use two sets of tools. For research, we will accumulate and develop knowledge: analyze previous studies related to the subject of health status of older people and the health determinants (social, economic and cultural) in different stages of life; identify and evaluate health promotion methods; analyze institutions of health promoters and also funding, distribution, and modelling of financial circuit and incentives; critically review cost-effectiveness analysis. Quality will be guaranteed by supervision of the Advisory Board and will be assessed in accordance with the rules of the project. For the implementation of project results, we plan to prepare a manual for health promotion that will help to fill the most common knowledge gaps among street-level health promoters and training materials for key institutions providing health promotion for the elderly. We will also conduct training in cooperation with the newly created Board of Health Promoters for selected street-level health promoters in the project countries.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Widespread knowledge and use of evidence based and economically effective methods of health promotion within different groups of street-level health promoters (health care practitioners, policy-makers, local and NGOs activists, social workers, trade unionists, journalists etc.) is one direct result of the project. Analyzing different institutions of public health, legal basis, sources and methods of financing and cost-effective ways of conducting the work in this area, will enrich the knowledge on possibilities and barriers related to promoting health. The project will contribute to the application of relevant health promotion methods in joint actions in the field of public health.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	PRO HEALTH 65+ Health Promotion and Prevention of Risk – Action for Seniors
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WEBSITE	http://pro-health65plus.eu
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