



City of Reykjavik

Health improvement for the elderly, final report – excerpt

Appointment and purpose

On 23 October 2015 the mayor of Reykjavik appointed a working group for seniors' health improvement. The group is a sub-group of the Steering Committee for Public Health and Equality for Reykjavik and was formed in light of the important role public health and health improvement play in quality of life. Seniors (67+) are becoming a larger proportion of the population in Reykjavik as well as elsewhere in Iceland, and enhanced activity and improved health among members of this group is important for the entire community's quality of life. The improvement of older adults' health is also connected to the city's cooperation in WHO's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities, into which Reykjavik was accepted in May 2015.

The working group's mandate was to generate proposals aiming to elevate the health and activity level of the elderly in order to enhance their quality of life and positive aging. The group's main tasks were to document health promoting programs and opportunities for the elderly already on offer by the municipality and others within Reykjavik, to propose actions for improvement, and to explore opportunities for cooperation among public entities such as swimming pools and community centers as well as sports clubs and private health clubs.

Information was requested from the municipal community centers regarding opportunities and programs in each neighborhood, both city-run operations and those offered by private companies and non-profits. This generated many avenues of inquiry on which the group followed up.

In all, the group contacted and requested information from 122 entities, public, private and non-profit. Half of those contacted responded to the requests. The focus was on physical activities to promote health; although the spiritual is also important it is more difficult to quantify. Of the respondents, two churches offered programs of physical activities, a walking group and exercise classes. It was suggested that libraries hosted walking groups, but no responses from them supported that. Many of the health clubs, sports clubs, and others that were contacted offered programs directed specifically at older adults. The costs involved varied widely. Many of those contacted who did not at this time offer senior-specific programs indicated an interest to do so, and requested information about what needs and wishes senior citizens might have in that regard.

The opportunities for physical activities offered by the city through its community centers (various exercise classes, dancing, yoga, bocchia, and more) vary from one neighborhood to another and represent to some extent the residential distribution of older adults in the city.

Proposals

1. That the city of Reykjavik take part in in the project "Multimodal Training Intervention: An Approach to Successful Aging". The program is intended to promote independence and self-sufficiency for longer,



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through a diverse program of exercise and fitness. The entire annual cost of the program borne by the municipality is roughly equivalent to the annual cost for one individual staying in a nursing home.

2. That exercise maps be produced for all neighborhoods. Clear and simple neighborhood maps on which have been drawn walking paths intended for people of varying abilities based on the presence of benches, hills, lighting and more. The walking paths should be useful in people's daily lives, being near service centers, community centers, swimming pools, sports facilities, shopping, health clinics and more. The maps should show distances, sidewalks with ice/snow-thawing-equipment, locations of benches, etc.
3. Lower the age of those who are admitted free of charge to city swimming pools to include those who are 67 years of age and older. The age for free admission was raised to 70 in 2011. It is important that senior citizens have access to exercise early and need not wait to begin exercising until after their health has deteriorated. Every year makes a difference.
4. That the city support regular health promoting activities in the two city neighborhoods having no community center run by the Reykjavik Department of Welfare. At least three options should be offered weekly.
5. The elderly also like to play – install and maintain outdoor equipment suitable for seniors. Install new putting greens and retrofit existing ones, install more outdoor bocchia courts, install equipment to enhance enjoyment associated with outdoor areas, such as placards with information about e.g. history and local birds, star telescopes, etc.
6. That the city's food services for the elderly be scrutinized in terms of procurement, quality, and service, nutrition, needs, and choice. Current production and delivery methods do not allow for much further scaling up.
7. That seniors' access to nutritional advice be improved, e.g. through the regular services of a nutritionist at the city's community centers.
8. Install more benches and better lighting along popular walking paths. This need was noted at the Age-friendly-cities kickoff. This could be done in conjunction with the exercise maps in proposal 2.
9. Complete access – sanding and salting sidewalks. Thawing operations and other solutions to slippery sidewalks should be improved in places that are important for the elderly, e.g. marked walking paths on exercise maps, areas around community centers and places of physical activities etc.
10. That a volunteer group of seniors be formed as a pilot program at one service center, with the intention of encouraging and supporting healthy activities among seniors in the neighborhood.



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11. That daily living rehabilitation is emphasized in home services. The purpose is to empower the elderly to re- assume tasks and daily activities that they were unable to perform when the home service started.

12. Preventative visits to seniors who are not receiving home services. During these visits the main focus would be to offer information and advice regarding exercise, nutrition and social participation. These visits might in part be staffed by volunteers, in collaboration with employees of the city's seniors' services.

13. Public transportation in accordance with the needs of older adults. Bus routes and stops should be analyzed, in cooperation with the Reykjavik Association of Senior Citizens, in terms of the needs of senior residents, and reorganized as need be.

14. Leisure activities bus for the elderly. According to service center staff, user committees have repeatedly requested a bus service designed to pick up passengers around the neighborhood and take them to the community centers or other places where daytime leisure activities are offered.

15. Funding to support new ideas and projects proposed and/or implemented by residents and designed to enhance social activities has been offered through a small designated pool of money in one city neighborhood, arranged by that neighborhood's service center. The experience has been good, and such pools of funding should be available in all neighborhoods.

16. That specially designed bicycles, making it possible for volunteers to take 1 – 2 individuals, who cannot ride on their own, out on bicycle tours, be made available at community centers.

17. That the city's Department of Sport and Leisure initiate collaboration with the Reykjavik Sports Union and individual sports clubs to utilize facilities that are already in place to benefit senior citizens in their activities. Many sports clubs have already indicated their interest in such arrangements.

18. That the city initiates collaboration with the Primary Health Care system regarding exercise prescriptions, to optimize daily living rehabilitation. Primary health care staff organizing exercise according to prescription should be regularly informed about options for exercise for the elderly.

19. Coordination. The city needs to address barriers between city departments and other stakeholders to improve practices in the policy area. Further collaboration with other municipalities in the capital area should be explored.

20. Consider a pilot program in collaboration with the shopping center "Mjódd", located near a large senior apartment center and community center. The idea is to make the shopping center a more attractive place for indoor walking, with distance markers, benches and possibly synthetic sports grass no longer in use by sports clubs.



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21. That private health clubs be encouraged to offer seniors a free trial of at least one month when they begin exercising, and continued discounted admission (i.e. those that do not already offer senior discounts).

22. That Reykjavik city emphasize more strongly that information about exercise as well as other activities for senior citizens be available, clear and accessible, online and through other outlets. The city's website needs to be analyzed and amended to suite better older users; this should be done in cooperation with the city's Senior Citizens' Committee. Information must also be accessible off-line in places where seniors can easily find it, such as neighborhood newspapers, community centers, swimming pools, dining halls, assisted living apartment buildings, etc.

23. The city of Reykjavik mail a letter to all residents as they reach the age of 67, with information about exercise and activity options that is open to them.

24. That the website Hreyfitorg – "Exercise marketplace" which is run by the Directorate of Health, be utilized to impart information and regularly updated with opportunities offered by the city.

25. That neighborhood newspapers be used more than currently is done to advertise and promote the activities available at community centers as well as other services for the elderly.

26. Increase preventative education for seniors regarding substance use and abuse (drugs, alcohol, tobacco), in collaboration with medical personnel such as geriatric and substance abuse specialists.

Appendix: Overview of available exercise options for older adults in Reykjavik, by neighborhood

Neighborhood: Árbær

- Community center:
 - Morning exercises with the radio, four days a week, free.
 - Yoga, twice weekly, IKR 1160/month.
 - Walking group, weekly, free.
 - Boccia, twice weekly, free.
- Swimming pool:
 - Aquatic exercises, four times weekly, free.

Neighborhood: Breiðholt

- Community Center Seljahlíð
 - Exercise program, five days a week, free
 - Boccia, weekly, free.
- Community Center Árskógar



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- Exercise program, twice weekly, free
- Chair dance, weekly, free
- Boccia, weekly, free.
- Community Center Gerðuberg
 - Exercise program, twice weekly, free
 - Boccia, weekly, free.
 - Walking/exercise group, twice weekly, free.
 - Song, dance and exercise, weekly, free.
 - Line dancing, weekly, IKR 400 each class
- Swimming pool:
 - Aquatic exercises, twice weekly, free.

Neighborhood: Grafarholt

No information was available about regularly scheduled exercise opportunities for seniors in this neighborhood

Neighborhood: Grafarvogur

- Community Center Borgir
 - Walking group, weekly, free
 - Quigong, twice weekly, free
 - Fundraising exercises, twice weekly, IKR 500 per class
 - Line and Ballroom dancing, weekly, IKR 500 per class
- Church
 - Walking group, twice weekly, free
- Sports facilities
 - Bowling, twice monthly, IKR 750 each time, coffee included
 - Putting, twice monthly, free
- Swimming pool:
 - Aquatic exercises, twice weekly, free.

Neighborhood: Háaleiti

- Community Center Furugerði
 - Exercises with the radio and more, twice weekly, free
 - Exercise program, twice weekly, free
 - Walking groups, five days a week, free
 - Boccia, twice weekly, free
- Community Center Hvassaleiti
 - Exercise with the radio, five days a week, free
 - Yoga, twice weekly, IKR 7000 per month, 6 weekly classes to choose from



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- Boccia, weekly, free
- Easy aerobics, weekly, free
- Chair exercises, weekly, free
- Line dancing, biweekly, IKR 500 per class
- Community dance, biweekly, free
- Community Center Hæðargarður
 - Exercise program, twice weekly, IKR 5000 per month
 - Exercises with the radio, twice weekly, free
 - Boccia, weekly, free
 - Line dancing, weekly, IKR 500 per class
 - Tai Chi, twice weekly, IKR 5000 per month
 - Laughter yoga, weekly, free
 - Putting, any time, free
 - Walking groups, twice weekly, free
- Community Center Selið Sléttuvegur
 - Exercises, weekly, IKR 2000 per month
 - Exercises with the radio, twice weekly, free
 - Walking group, weekly, free
 - Boccia, biweekly, free
 - Line dancing, weekly, IKR 500 per class
- Sports facilities
 - Exercise program, twice weekly, free

Neighborhood: Hlíðar

- Community Center Bólstaðarhlíð
 - Exercises, twice weekly, free
 - Walking group, weekly, free
 - Boccia, weekly, free
 - Dancing, weekly, free
- Community Center Lönguhlíð
 - Exercises, weekly, free

Boccia, twice weekly, free

Neighborhood: Kjalarnes

No information was available about regularly scheduled exercise opportunities for seniors in this neighborhood

Neighborhood: Laugardalur



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- Community Center Norðurbrún
 - Exercises with the radio, five days a week, free
 - Walking groups, five days a week, free
 - Boccia, weekly, free.
- Community Center Dalbraut
 - Exercises with the radio, five days a week, free
 - Walking groups, weekly, free.
 - Boccia, weekly, free
 - Chair dance, weekly, free
- Swimming pool
 - Aquatic exercises, four times a week, free.
- Laugarneskirkja (church)
 - Walking group, weekly, free

Neighborhood: Miðborg

- Community Center Vesturgata
 - Dancing, weekly, free
- Community Center Vitatorg
 - Chair dance, twice weekly, free
 - Dancing, weekly, free
- Swimming pool
 - Aquatic exercises, four times a week, free.
- Hallgrimskirkja (church)
 - Exercise classes, weekly, free to all, but mostly seniors attend

Neighborhood: Vesturbær

- Community Center Vesturreitir
 - Exercises, weekly, free
 - Walking groups, twice weekly, free
 - Yoga, twice weekly, IKR 800 per class
- Swimming pool
 - Aquatic exercises, twice weekly, free.

Sports facilities and physical therapy centers

Many opportunities: Aquatic and other exercise programs, gymnastics, horseback riding, rifle and handgun target practice, yoga, walking groups and more, in various locations around the city, prices ranging from free to appr. IKR 2500 per class