

# Active Aging Week 2006: prepare your action plan



## **Celebrate active lifestyles September 25 to October 1**

How can you entice people who may be interested in physical activity, but are intimidated or not sure where to start? How do you keep motivated those who are currently active, but may need a new stimulus to stay engaged? Active Aging Week is the answer for both groups.

During the last week of September, organizations across North America will host special events that offer older adults an opportunity to have fun, meet new people, and learn more about how activity can

improve their quality of life. It's a great time to showcase your age-friendly facility and staff.

You can choose to feature one activity or one day, or to schedule events during the entire week of September 25 through October 1. The goal is to offer free programs so older adults can test the waters of activity and your organization as an age-friendly location. Organizations have offered free lectures, health fairs, group-exercise classes, sample personal training sessions, open houses and tours, previews of future programs, and group walks.

Now is the time to start planning for a successful and productive week.

### Planning tips

As you plan activities for Active Aging Week, think about offering something for multiple levels of function, from those in assisted living through senior athletes. An advantage of supporting different functional levels is the chance to include staff and healthcare workers, such as physical and occupational therapists or nursing assistants, who might otherwise be unfamiliar with the physical activity opportunities. Some other pointers follow:

- Ask your residents and clients to help plan the event, recommends Carolyn Leevy, fitness director at Foulkeways at Gwynedd, a continuing care retirement community near Philadelphia. Involving your group in the planning helps insure the activities will meet their interests, and creates a network of advocates who will promote the events through word of mouth and encourage others to join in. The residents or clients who help plan the event can use their talents, for example in marketing or graphic design, while spreading the work among many hands.
- Use the materials available on the ICAA website to advertise the upcoming events. There are planning and implementation ideas, PDFs of 4-color posters you can download to build awareness, and a select group of free Client Handouts you can photocopy and give away during the week. Check out the list of resources at the end of this article for information.
- Be specific about why you are offering something for free. When Donna Duckworth advertised a free yoga class at Workout Plus Fitness Center in Quakertown, Pennsylvania,

she received many telephone calls from people asking why the class was free. She explained the class was a “community service,” which satisfied the callers. In retrospect, those calls turned out to be valuable. Duckworth had about 20 participants during the 8-week class, and several became members of the fitness club.

### Think theme

One way to organize activities involves using a theme. A theme allows you to appeal to different levels of function during the week, while you approach the topic from different directions. The variety appeals to more people, and builds a better understanding of the subject area.

**Theme idea 1: walking.** Walking is the most popular activity among older adults; in fact, 68.3% of these adults prefer walking, according to a survey from the US Centers for Disease Control reported in ICAA’s *Active Aging in America*. Here are some walking-related ideas:

- Invite a podiatrist or shoe expert to lecture on foot health and choosing shoes.
- Plan a progressive walking week. On day one, offer a stroll; the next day, a nature walk; on the third, talk about step counters and hand out walking logs; and on the next days, host longer or more vigorous walks or a fun-walk or fun-run.
- Use a group walk to involve everyone. At Foulkeways last year, Active Aging Week was launched with a community stroll around the campus. Leevy said all residents were involved, including those in independent and assisted living and skilled care, who were aided by other residents and staff.

- Create a step challenge game. Hand out the step counters and walking logs, and ask residents to track their steps. The week’s cumulative total could be amazing! Expand the concept to include all types of *steps*, including time or steps spent on cycles, recumbent cross trainers and similar equipment.

**Theme idea 2: balance training for fall prevention.** Most older adults do not want to fall, and this concern can attract people to activity who might have no interest in exercise. An advantage to focusing on fall prevention is that you can gauge the interest people have in attending more long-term classes or workshops. You might try:

- Incorporating a few balance activities into all group exercise and personal training sessions held during Active Aging Week. Don’t forget that aquatics classes can also feature balance. While instructors may already do this, ask them to point out the exercises and mention Active Aging Week.
- Offer tai chi, which aids balance and coordination, or yoga or pilates, which emphasize clarity of movement.
- Offer a lecture on simple design changes for the home to reduce the risk of falls (toss out those small scatter rugs that slip and slide).
- Bring in a speaker for a balance training and fall prevention workshop.

### Spread the active-aging message

Active aging means living life as fully as possible within the 6 dimensions of wellness (emotional, vocational,

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physical, spiritual, intellectual, social). Physical activity is an important wellness dimension that positively influences all of life's areas by improving physical function and mental skills, improving outlooks and offering social contact. As part of Active Aging Week, why not expand your wellness offerings? For example, you might organize:

- *Volunteer fairs.* A new study from The Experience Corps Program in Baltimore showed that when older adults volunteered to tutor school children, their own levels of physical activity increased. There are probably schools, community centers, churches and public interest groups in your area that would happily present their needs to your participants.
- *Cognitive games.* Puzzles, visual tricks, poetry recitations—there are numerous ways to encourage cognitive skills. The ICAA Active Aging Week website has an article that features a wealth of places to find fun items for *brain aerobics*.
- *Quick courses in computers.* Older adults use the Internet to look up health information and to email family. Why not help them within these intellectual and social

dimensions by having short workshops on how to judge if a website is legitimate or how to send and receive digital photos? No computers at your location? Work with a community college, university or the library to access theirs.

Join others in the industry by hosting Active Aging Week events in September. Working together, we can introduce more people to an active and healthy lifestyle. ☺

*For more information about Active Aging Week, visit the ICAA website at [www.icaa.cc/laaw.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/laaw.htm), or call toll-free 1-866-335-9777.*

## References

ICAA Research Review, 6(22). Volunteering benefits older adults. Retrieved June 16, 2006, from [http://www.icaa.cc/Newsletters2006/ICAAResearchReview\\_6\\_22.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/Newsletters2006/ICAAResearchReview_6_22.htm).

ICAA Research Review, 6(17). The Internet is critical information source. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from [http://www.icaa.cc/Newsletters2006/ICAAResearchReview\\_6\\_17.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/Newsletters2006/ICAAResearchReview_6_17.htm).

International Council on Active Aging. (2005). A population choosing many recreational and physical activities. In *Active Aging in America, Residential and Commercial Fitness, United States 2005*. Vancouver BC: International Council on Active Aging.

## ICAA resources

**Active Aging Week**  
Professional section,  
Campaign support  
[www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/aaw.htm)  
Includes ideas for maximizing Active Aging Week, sample press release and posters to download.

Additional posters in the same theme, but without the Active Aging Week dates, are available to ICAA members for free download  
[www.icaa.cc/Education/theICAAstore.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/Education/theICAAstore.htm).

**Marketing physical activity to the older adult**  
(file delivered on CD-ROM)  
[www.icaa.cc/Education/theICAAstore.htm](http://www.icaa.cc/Education/theICAAstore.htm)

This 58-page collection of past articles explains how to communicate the message of physical activity to the older adult market. ICAA and AAFP members can order for free; nonmembers pay \$49.

## Client handouts

A selection is available on the Active Aging Week consumer section. ICAA members can access even more by logging in to the member's only section.

# Active Aging Week planning timeline

This timeline example can help with planning. Add the planning items specific to your organization and events in the “Additional action items” column.

Before Active Aging Week	Planning actions	Additional action items
12 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form planning committee to choose events.</li> <li>• Establish budget.</li> <li>• Inform key people in the organization about Active Aging Week.</li> </ul>	
10 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize list of potential events.</li> <li>• Invite speakers or organizations to participate.</li> <li>• Reserve rooms.</li> </ul>	
9 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform managers and staff of the event activities.</li> <li>• Check on due dates to advertise the events in the organization's newsletters and other outside sources.</li> <li>• Visit ICAA website for promotional materials.</li> </ul>	
8 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize negotiations with speakers or organizations that will present.</li> <li>• Reserve rooms and check for schedule conflicts.</li> <li>• Determine marketing pieces needed.</li> </ul>	
7 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft the flyers and notices for the website and newsletters.</li> <li>• Mail press release to local papers, television and radio stations.</li> </ul>	
6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give notices to Webmaster for posting.</li> <li>• Finalize flyers.</li> <li>• Confirm work schedules and tasks for staff who will help during the event.</li> </ul>	
5 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out ICAA Active Aging Week posters.</li> <li>• Organize the people who will hang posters and distribute flyers.</li> </ul>	
4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm Active Aging Week activities with other departments.</li> <li>• Inform maintenance and housekeeping staff.</li> <li>• Send email about events.</li> <li>• Prepare talking points for exercise instructors, personal trainers and activities staff to announce the Week's activities.</li> </ul>	
3 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display the events on the bulletin board.</li> <li>• Prepare posters and signs.</li> <li>• Double check that events information is in newsletter.</li> <li>• Double check room and space reservations.</li> <li>• Confirm all speakers and room arrangements.</li> </ul>	
2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update voice mail blurbs to remind callers of the events.</li> <li>• Send out a second email.</li> <li>• Check that posters and flyers are in place; hand them out in dining areas, multipurpose rooms and other nonfitness locations.</li> </ul>	
1 week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out certificates of participation from the ICAA website to distribute to participants.</li> <li>• Review week's events with staff.</li> <li>• Answer questions.</li> </ul>	
During the week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribute feedback forms to participants.</li> </ul>	
1 week after the events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tabulate feedback forms.</li> <li>• Conduct a follow-up with the planning committee to discuss what worked well and what didn't for next year's events.</li> <li>• Mail a thank you to your volunteer staff.</li> <li>• Submit the results of your activities to ICAA.</li> </ul>	