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From Data to Community Action: A Case Study Building on the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Community Profiles

Nina M. Silverstein  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, nina.silverstein@umb.edu*

Brittany Gaines  
*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Darlene Adams

Dorothy Wideman

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Background

The Healthy Aging movement is a driver in the promotion of Evidence-Based programs such as Chronic Disease Self-Management (CDSMP) programs related to falls prevention and diabetes. Such programs are critical in any recommendations for short or long term interventions to communities to address challenges to aging well.

Applied Research in Aging Seminar

- Students in an undergraduate gerontology Applied Research in Aging seminar are learning research methods by addressing healthy aging challenges in one Boston community.
- South Boston was chosen because of its high number of challenges evidenced on the profile and its access to the University for students to interview key stakeholders.
- A UMass Boston alum who is Director of Senior Programs for the South Boston Neighborhood House will helped to identify the key stakeholders.

Student Activities

With the help of our Tufts Health Plan Community Partner, we selected South Boston to focus on for our group project.

- The students:
  - Finalized a list of key stakeholders in South Boston
  - Completed online training for the protection of human subjects; submitted and had the project approved by UMass Boston IRB
  - developed an interview guide targeted at healthy aging challenges within the community
  - conducted in-person interviews

Outcome

The major outcome will be the completion of the “Healthy Aging Strategic Planning Worksheet” with specific recommendations for initial, intermediate, and long-term healthy aging interventions and outcomes.

For example, South Boston has a higher prevalence of hip fractures compared to the state average. A possible recommendation emerging from the stakeholder interviews might be to consider offering evidence-based program such as Matter of Balance.

Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report

Community Profile: South Boston

Contact Info and Video
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This project builds on multi-year funded research from Tufts Health Care Foundation that resulted in the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Data Report.

www.mahealthyagingcollaborative.org

Principal Investigator:
Beth Dugan, PI

Co-Investigators:
Frank Porell & Nina Silverstein;

PhD research assistants:
Chae Man Lee
Kristina Turk
Brittany Gaines
Joo Suk Chae
Mei Chen
Hyo Jung Lee.

Community Profile: South Boston

Contact Info and Video
South Boston was selected as the target community given its lower or worse than state rate on a number of healthy aging indicators including prevalence of:

- Alzheimer’s disease
- COPD
- heart disease
- depression
- colon cancer
- lung cancer

In addition, residents of South Boston had significant challenges with service utilization and were less likely to have annual dental visits.

Key stakeholders were identified for in-depth interviews designed to share the data and discuss implications as well as short and long term strategies for making positive steps toward healthy aging.

"...of the traditions that we have here. We have the beautiful Castle Island. [And] as the song “Southie is My Hometown” says we’ll take you and break you, but never forsake you. Southie is my hometown, we take care of each other here.”

- Lu O’Brien, Senior Advocate, West Broadway Task Force

"...of the people in the community...the older adults in the community have often lived there for a long time and have strong community connections and that’s an important piece in growing old.”

- Emily Shea, Commissioner, Boston Commission on Affairs of the Elderly
South Boston is a great place to grow old in because...