

LivWell Wellness Program: Improving Health, Wellness, and Social Connection for Older Adults

Affordable Housing



About This Report

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About Parker Health Group, Inc.

Parker Health Group, Inc. is a not-for-profit, New Jersey-based aging services organization with over 115 years' experience that is committed to empowering older Americans. We are a diverse community of over 1,000 dedicated and passionate employees, caregivers, volunteers, thought leaders, researchers, educators, and partners. Parker supports older adults and their families—at home and in our residences—with coordinated care, trusted guidance, and services that help people age well where they live.

For more information, visit parkerlife.org.

About Springpoint

Springpoint is a nationally recognized nonprofit senior living provider, with a legacy of over 100 years serving the Mid-Atlantic region. It consists of Springpoint Senior Living and its eight Life Plan Communities, an assisted living/memory care community, a skilled nursing/rehabilitation community and 19 affordable housing communities. It also includes Springpoint at Home, providing homecare and care management services, and Springpoint Choice, a membership program offering security of long-term care planning for members.

For more information, visit springpointsl.org.

About the LTSS Center

The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston conducts research to help our nation address the challenges and seize the opportunities associated with an aging population. LeadingAge and the University of Massachusetts Boston established the LTSS Center in 2017. We strive to conduct studies and evaluations that will serve as a foundation for government and provider action to improve quality of care and quality of life for the most vulnerable older Americans. The LTSS Center maintains offices in Washington, DC, and Boston, MA.

For more information, visit LTSSCenter.org.

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Key Takeaways

Springpoint Senior Living partnered with Parker Health Group to create and implement LivWell. This wellness initiative promotes active, healthy lifestyles for older adults by integrating physical fitness with social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston evaluated the program's impact on residents and assessed resident and staff perceptions across six Springpoint affordable housing communities.



Program Participants and Utilization

- ➔ On average, participants were 80 years old; they were predominantly female and racially diverse.
- ➔ In-person exercise classes were well attended.
- ➔ Television-based exercise classes, brain health, and health education saw lower attendance.

Health & Wellness Outcomes

- ➔ Significant improvements were found in flexibility, lower-body strength, mobility, mood, and exercise frequency.
- ➔ Participants reported a reduced incidence of falls and unsteadiness, as well as reduced reliance on arms to stand.
- ➔ Participants' average weight decreased by approximately three pounds over 18 months.
- ➔ Improvements in physical outcomes were associated with in-person exercise.

Perceptions of the Program

- ➔ Residents and staff viewed LivWell as highly valuable for physical health, social connection, and emotional well-being.
- ➔ Brain health classes and ["Stick-To-It," a drumming-based movement class](#), were among the program's most popular offerings.
- ➔ Barriers included language differences, scheduling conflicts, and residents' concerns about mobility and physical limitations.

Evaluation Methods

The LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston evaluated the LivWell program at six Springpoint affordable housing sites where it had been implemented for at least six months. The evaluation was, in part, designed to:

- ➔ Describe program participants and program utilization.
- ➔ Determine the program’s impact on residents’ health and wellness outcomes.
- ➔ Gauge the perceptions of LivWell participants and staff regarding program benefits, challenges, and potential solutions to those challenges.

The research team used a mixed-methods approach. Researchers analyzed program participation and assessment data for 220 residents, tracking changes in health outcomes using data collected from residents who completed assessments at 6-month (N=160), 12-month (N=106), and 18-month (N=86) follow-ups. Qualitative data were gathered through 12 focus groups with 34 participating residents, as well as one-on-one interviews with three LivWell program staff members and nine housing staff members.

Evaluation Findings

Resident Assessment Data

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

At the time of the evaluation, the average age of participants was 80 years. Most participants were women and racially diverse, with 44% identifying as white, 34% as Asian, 15% as Hispanic, and 6% as Black.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics		
N=220	Mean/n	Range/%
Age	80	62-98
Female	187	85
White	96	44
Asian	76	34
Hispanic	33	15
Black	12	6
Other	3	1

Program Utilization

In-person exercise classes were the most popular, with residents attending an average of 30 classes over six months. Participation in these classes increased during the first year of the program and then remained steady.

In contrast, attendance at brain health, health education, and TV-based exercise classes was lower. Participation in brain health classes remained consistent, whereas use of TV classes declined over time, falling from 20% in the first six months to 9% in months 12 to 18.

Program Utilization			
Class	Initial - 6 Months Mean (Range) N=217	6 -12 Months Mean (Range) N=121	12 - 18 Months Mean (Range) N=98
Exercise	35 (0-136)	29 (0-114)	27 (0-95)
Brain Health	.80 (0-9)	.80 (0-5)	.80 (0-6)
Health Education	.50 (0-4)	.10 (0-2)	.15 (0-2)
TV Exercise Classes	2 (0-62)	5 (0-84)	2 (0-68)

Impact on Participant Health and Wellness Outcomes

The evaluation shows that the LivWell program significantly improved residents' health and well-being over 18 months, as measured at three assessment points.

Changes in physical function, safety, and independence

- ➔ **Increased strength and mobility:** Participants showed significant improvements in flexibility, lower-body strength, mobility, and functional performance.
- ➔ **Reduced fall risk:** The percentage of participants reporting falls decreased, from 21% at the initial assessment to about 13% at each subsequent assessment.
- ➔ **Greater independence:** The percentage of participants standing from a chair with assistance decreased from 51% at baseline to 34% at 18 months.
- ➔ **Stability:** Self-reported feelings of unsteadiness decreased initially and then remained stable.

Changes in health behaviors and weight

- ➔ **Increased physical activity:** The percentage of participants meeting the guideline of 150 minutes of exercise per week increased from 62% at baseline to 76% at follow-up assessments.
- ➔ **Weight loss:** Average weight remained stable for the first 12 months, then decreased significantly by 3 pounds over the next 6 months.

Health & Wellness Outcomes Changes

✓ Gains

Recommended Exercise minutes, strength, mobility, flexibility, and mood

✓ Decrease

Reported falls, using arms to stand, and unsteadiness

✓ Weight



~3 lbs by 18 months

Changes in participants' health and wellness outcomes associated with in-person exercise classes

After accounting for socio-demographic characteristics and health-related factors, more frequent participation in an in-person exercise class was significantly associated with the following:

- ➔ Increased physical activity
- ➔ Decreased likelihood of reporting unsteadiness
- ➔ Decreased reported use of one's arm to stand up
- ➔ Lower mood ratings



Effects of In-Person Exercise Class Participation



In-person
exercise classes



activity



unsteadiness



arm use



mood

Insights from Program Participant Focus Groups

Feedback from LivWell program participants indicated high satisfaction and significant improvements in their physical and mental well-being.

Primary Motivations for Joining and Goals

Participants were interested in joining the program for three primary reasons:

- ➔ To stay physically active and improve overall health
- ➔ To gain health benefits, such as managing pre-existing conditions and improving balance
- ➔ To connect and interact with other residents

High Participant Satisfaction

Nearly every participant was very satisfied with the LivWell program. Participants described the fitness instructors as professional, patient, and skilled at tailoring exercises to individual needs. Participants liked the following classes the most:

- ➔ **Brain health classes:** Participants noted that these classes keep the mind active and sharpen memory.
- ➔ **Fitness and wellness activities:** Participants frequently highlighted the “Stick-To-It” drumming-based movement class, meditation sessions, and outdoor walking groups.

Most participants liked the health history questionnaire and fitness assessments they completed at the start of the program and every six months. They felt these tools helped them monitor results, track progress over time, identify specific areas for improvement, and decide which exercises to focus on.

Challenges

Participants cited personal physical limitations and scheduling conflicts as their most common challenges. However, even those with limitations felt the program was helping them.

Biggest Improvements

Participants reported significant improvements, including:

- ➔ **Physical health:** Participants reported improved balance, increased strength and flexibility, enhanced physical functioning, and greater mobility. Many also reported better control of blood pressure and diabetes.
- ➔ **Social connection:** Participants reported a stronger sense of social connection and community.

Insights from Housing and Program Staff Interviews

How Housing Staff Described Their Role

Housing staff described their role as encouraging residents' participation in the LivWell program. They also reported promoting the program through various channels, including:

- ➔ Newsletters
- ➔ One-on-one conversations
- ➔ Flyers
- ➔ Onboarding sessions for new residents
- ➔ Resident meetings

Staff also indicated that they informed residents about the program's purpose, activities, class schedule, and benefits, and addressed any concerns residents had about participating.

Perceived Impact on Residents

Staff from both LivWell and the housing sites said they believe participants gain two primary benefits from the program:

- ➔ **Social connection:** The program's greatest benefit is reducing social isolation by providing residents with opportunities to leave their apartments, interact with peers, and build friendships.
- ➔ **Improved physical health:** Residents become more active and enhance their physical health, mobility, strength, and flexibility.

Class Preferences

Staff members said they believe residents are more engaged in classes led by in-person instructors. They reported that residents prefer in-person classes and have limited interest in TV-based classes, which have significantly lower participation rates.

According to staff, the most successful classes included:

- ➔ Stick to It, a drumming-based movement class
- ➔ Outdoor activities
- ➔ Interactive classes such as resistance band workouts, dancing, chair ball, volleyball, chair yoga, and cornhole
- ➔ Brain health activities

Challenges and Solutions

The housing staff reported helping residents overcome hesitation and logistical challenges by:

- ➔ **Addressing mobility and physical limitations.** A common reason residents don't join LivWell is concern about being physically unable to participate. Staff members reassure residents that instructors modify all exercises to accommodate different ability levels and allow residents to participate at their own pace.
- ➔ **Navigating scheduling conflicts:** Residents often have other appointments or attend programs outside the community. Housing staff sometimes coordinate LivWell activities with other community programs to minimize scheduling conflicts.
- ➔ **Language barriers:** In diverse communities, language can be a significant barrier. Staff noted that some instructors use translation tools, such as Google Translate, but these tools have limited effectiveness.

Factors to Consider for Program Implementation

Affordable housing communities are well-positioned to implement wellness initiatives that promote healthy aging for underserved populations. Organizations interested in implementing similar programs should consider the following steps:

- ➔ **Adapt the model to fit your community.** LivWell is a comprehensive wellness initiative, but communities can achieve similar benefits by implementing components that align with their resources, capacity, and residents' needs.
- ➔ **Start with accessible activities that meet residents' needs.** Choose activities such as walking groups, chair exercises, and brain health games that can be facilitated by trained volunteers, current staff, or community partners. Consider surveying interested residents to assess their availability for classes and activities.
- ➔ **Partner with community organizations and volunteers.** These partnerships can help address capacity constraints at housing sites. Collaborate with local senior centers, fitness instructors, volunteer groups, healthcare organizations, or universities to offer classes, wellness education, or guest speakers. Keep in mind that students in majors such as physical therapy, social work, and kinesiology could use practicum hours to assist you.
- ➔ **Offer flexible, inclusive programming.** Emphasize that activities can be modified to accommodate varying physical abilities and mobility levels. Provide bilingual support with help from residents, volunteers, or translation tools. Offer classes at different times to accommodate residents' schedules and preferences.
- ➔ **Consider using multiple engagement strategies.** Housing staff can play a critical role in encouraging participation in a wellness initiative. Provide staff members with key talking points about the program's physical and social benefits. Outreach methods can include simple brochures, flyers, launch events, and presentations at resident meetings. Resident ambassadors or program champions can invite their neighbors and other residents.
- ➔ **Emphasize fitness and community.** Market the program as a fitness and social program that helps residents get physically fit while connecting socially with others.
- ➔ **Monitor participants and track their progress.** Track class attendance and conduct brief check-ins or simple surveys to assess residents' experiences and perceived outcomes, including improvements in fall prevention, physical activity, physical functioning, social connection, and independence. Communities with additional capacity can implement data-collection tools and performance dashboards to monitor residents' progress and program outcomes.
- ➔ **Plan for growth.** Start with a simple program and determine what works by gathering participant feedback to identify needed adjustments. Then scale the program by exploring funding opportunities through grants and, if possible, by integrating costs into operating budgets.

Conclusion

The LivWell evaluation demonstrated that developing and implementing a structured health and wellness initiative in affordable housing is feasible and beneficial. The program improves residents' physical health and strengthens social connections. Specifically, participants reported the following:

- ➔ Increased exercise frequency
- ➔ Increased flexibility, lower-body strength, mobility, and functional performance
- ➔ Reduced reports of falls and unsteadiness
- ➔ Strengthened social connections that help reduce social isolation





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