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**More than meets the eye**

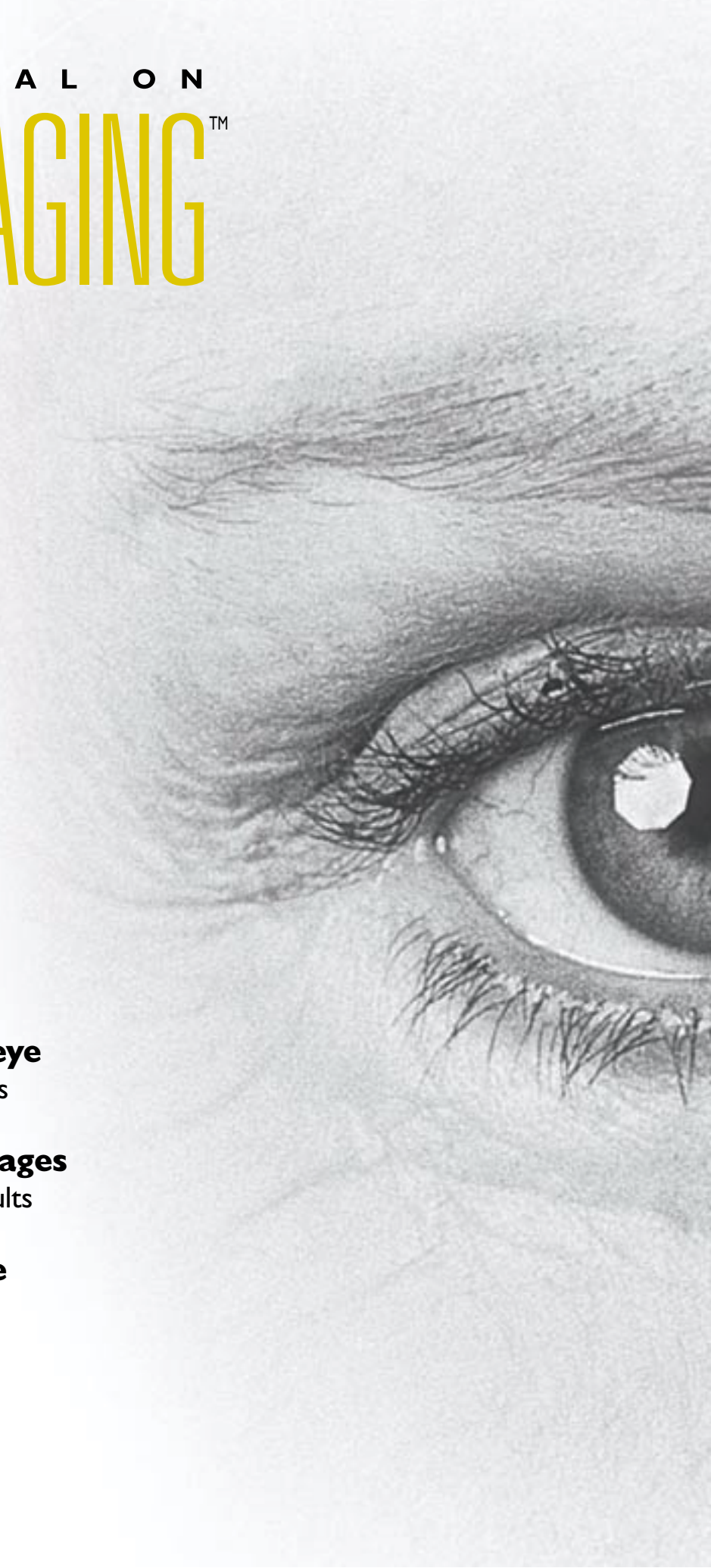
Training clients with vision loss

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Advancing active aging





# A blueprint for change

**In the face of America's epidemic of chronic disease, a "flexible and dynamic" coalition works to boost physical activity among midlife and older adults**

In his introduction to the *Power of Prevention*, a program and policy perspective on the federal government's Steps to a Healthier US program, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson writes, "I am convinced that preventing disease by promoting better health is the only smart policy choice for our future." Further into his introduction, Thompson explains his conviction. "As this document demonstrates, we can no longer sustain the skyrocketing health care costs that over-reliance on treatment has created," he states, "nor can Americans sustain the suffering that preventable diseases cause." Steps to a Healthier US "envision[s] a healthy, strong United States—where diseases are prevented when possible, controlled when necessary, and treated when appropriate."

At the Steps to a Healthier US summit in April, Thompson again emphasized the need to "prevent the preventable." Challenging his audience to make a difference, he called on delegates to create strategies to help prevent chronic disease in America.

Thompson's message reaffirms the need for such groups as the National Blueprint coalition, a group of more than 50 national organizations working to increase physical fitness among 50-plus adults. From its embryonic state three years ago, the Blueprint coalition has emerged with a powerful agenda for societal change. Participating organizations have identified strategies to increase physical activity among the 50-plus population and address barriers to participation. Now the coalition is

moving ahead with tactics to implement these strategies.

Work to advance the Blueprint agenda in the areas of home and community programs, public policy, medical systems, marketing and communication, and research will support changes in society's attitudes towards physical activity and aging. In addition, the Blueprint's main goal of facilitating strategic partnerships between organizations will encourage the development of joint active aging projects. Partnerships, findings and opportunities that come out of these joint efforts will have an impact on the active aging field and help fitness/wellness facilities attract and serve the older market better.

Instrumental to the Blueprint's development is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), which has supported the project from the start. A national philanthropy devoted to improving the health and healthcare of all Americans, RWJF currently ranks as the largest U.S. foundation working in this area. Just three years ago, RWJF kicked off the Blueprint process by hosting a working group meeting.

### **Blueprint beginnings**

In April 2000, technical experts from six fields and RWJF met in Nashville to discuss physical activity and the 50-plus population. For two days, the 23 participants reviewed the challenges and complexities of increasing physical activity among midlife and older adults. At the meeting's close, they recommended the development of a national *blueprint* to guide and support groups working in this emerging area.

The Nashville meeting laid the foundation for collaborative action. A steering committee formed and planned a major conference, held in October 2000, which brought together

representatives of 46 national organizations with expertise in health, medicine, social and behavioral sciences, epidemiology, gerontology/geriatrics, clinical science, public policy, marketing, medical systems, community organization and environmental issues. Conference delegates identified barriers to physical activity in the 50-plus population, as well as strategies aimed at overcoming the obstacles. These outcomes provided the basis for a planning document, entitled *National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Age 50 and Older*, released in May 2001.

In October 2002, the National Blueprint Consensus Conference took place in Washington, D.C., with the goal of prioritizing the strategies from the earlier conference. The Consensus Conference summary report outlines "an ambitious agenda of strategies and tactics that will need to be implemented in order to overcome societal barriers to physical activity among the midlife and older adult population" (see "Strategic priorities for increasing physical activity among 50-plus adults" on page 44). Organizations "charged with the task of implementing high priority strategies will use professional networks and established delivery channels and communication systems to translate this plan into action." Fitness/wellness facilities that serve the mature population fit naturally into the Blueprint plan and are well-placed to support its objectives.

### **Blueprint opportunities**

The Blueprint's society-wide call to action encourages "fresh ideas and community innovations to help make physical activity a vital part of our lives," says Dr. J. Michael McGinnis, senior vice president and director of the health group at RWJF. For those in the active aging field, the Blueprint presents an opportunity with great potential to

make a difference to society *and* the bottom line.

With guidance from the National Blueprint planning document, fitness/wellness professionals and organizations can mobilize and collaborate with those in different fields to address the barriers that prevent mature adults from being physically active in their communities. Partnerships to overcome these barriers and promote physical activity among midlife and older adults will help fitness/wellness organizations reach out to the 50-plus market with more support and options for active living. ▼

### **References**

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## Strategic priorities for increasing physical activity among 50-plus adults

*In October 2002, delegates at the National Blueprint Consensus Conference identified high priority and high feasibility strategies that would advance the National Blueprint and could be initiated within the next 12–24 months.*

*Participants divided into five break-out groups: home and community, marketing, medical systems, public policy and research. Each group identified the three highest priority strategies within their area for effectively increasing physical activity in the midlife and older adult population. To the 15 strategies selected by the groups, delegates added three cross-cutting*

*strategies, which were broad-based in scope and applied to more than one break-out theme. National organizations were then identified to take the lead in planning and implementing the 18 strategies.*

*A summary of the strategies appears below, together with the names of the lead organizations and the tactics planned to achieve these priorities.*

### Cross-cutting strategies

The strategies below require broad, comprehensive partnerships, in which a wide variety of organizations collaborate to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

**Strategy 1:** create a national clearinghouse to disseminate effective, tested public education, social marketing materials and public policy information on physical activity and aging. *Lead organization: Active for Life–National Program Office*

#### Tactics

- Survey existing clearinghouses.
- Determine the mission and scope of a Blueprint clearinghouse.
- Identify potential funding sources.
- Promote content parameters that are culturally appropriate and reach diverse audiences.
- Develop an assessment process.

**Strategy 2:** develop a population-segmented mass-marketing campaign to increase knowledge and awareness levels related to physical activity and fitness among the 50-plus population. *Lead organization: AARP*

#### Tactics

- Form a marketing/communication committee to interface with national organizations.
- Assess existing marketing strategies and other research data.
- Disseminate information to Blueprint partner organizations.

- Identify key partners including media and corporations.
- Estimate resources and costs.

**Strategy 3:** develop a national consensus document that recommends training standards for preparing physical activity instructors for working with older adults. *Lead organization: American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)*

#### Tactics

- Establish a national coalition to review existing training standards.
- Organize a meeting of the coalition at the 2003 ACSM national conference.
- Develop a consensus document for wide distribution.
- Provide suggestions for syllabi and curricula based on the consensus standards.

### Home and community strategies

Strategies in the home and community area encompass efforts at the local, regional and national levels to develop effective partnerships among community groups, agencies and services promoting physical activity to serve the needs of the 50-plus population better.

**Strategy 1:** identify professionals in the community who can serve as resources for information and assistance to programs and groups working in the area of aging and physical activity. *Lead organization: American College of Sports Medicine*

#### Tactics

- Survey existing community guides for ideas and strategies.
- Develop a registry of local physical activity specialists, health educators and other professionals.
- Use this information to create a local community *yellow pages* resource guide for consumers. The guide should provide targeted, culturally

appropriate information about choosing and utilizing physical activity programs, accessing physical activity experts, and identifying support systems and other resources.

**Strategy 2:** establish and provide technical assistance to national, regional and local partnerships among health, aging, urban/community planning, transportation, environmental, recreation, social service and private sector organizations. *Lead organization: National Blueprint Office, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

#### Tactics

- Form a committee to expand the existing Blueprint partnerships to include community organizations.
- Develop a plan to assist national organizations in communicating with local partners and coalitions.
- Solicit best practices from groups that have established links to coalitions.
- Provide technical assistance to local coalitions.

**Strategy 3:** provide community organizations with a template for good physical activity programs. *Lead organization: National Council on the Aging*

#### Tactics

- Identify and review existing home-based and group-based physical activity programs and/or templates.
- Identify what a template could look like (e.g. level of complexity, specificity, components, audience segmentation). Develop a template for physical activity programs.
- Develop a plan for disseminating and using the template.
- Assess template effectiveness.

### Marketing and communication strategies

The need exists for marketing and communication strategies to share information about best practices and

model programs in the area of physical activity, plus disseminate targeted messages to specific segments of the 50-plus population.

**Strategy 1:** establish a comprehensive physical activity trade association to provide support to businesses and corporations that share an interest in increasing physical activity levels among the older adult population. *Lead organization: International Council on Active Aging*

#### Tactics

- Create or partner with a national clearinghouse to disseminate effective and tested public education, social marketing materials, and examples of successful private sector programs and products on physical activity and aging.
- Share information about marketing programs and products related to physical activity.
- Develop an ongoing communications plan.
- Build a brand/identity for the physical activity trade association to increase its recognition and value to members.

**Strategy 2:** develop a national program that would provide incentives for communities to increase physical activity levels among the age 50-plus population. *Lead organizations: President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

#### Tactics

- Develop program planning committee.
- Develop a process to identify physical activity-friendly communities.
- Examine the impact of environmental factors on communities.
- Identify meaningful incentives to entice communities to become involved.
- Share best practices and support materials to help organizations replicate successful programs at the community level

**Strategy 3:** support efforts to develop physical activity programs and messages that are targeted to specific segments of the age 50-plus population. *Lead organization: AARP*

#### Tactics

- Identify and synthesize existing consumer market research related to physical activity.
- Share research outcomes and data among partners.
- Encourage and support Blueprint partners to segment their audiences and to create messages for each segment.
- Create/identify/share basic messages/programs that target population segments, have a call to action and promote meaningful consumer benefits.

### Medical systems strategies

In this area, strategies are needed to develop partnerships between medical professionals and local community resources, as well as to provide healthcare professionals with physical activity guidelines and best practices to help them educate patients and provide physical activity prescriptions.

**Strategy 1:** disseminate information on physical activity guidelines and best practices to the medical community. *Lead organizations: American College of Sports Medicine and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

#### Tactics

- Convene a committee to develop a database of guidelines and best practices.
- Coordinate with Blueprint partners to disseminate information to the medical community.
- Create an advisory group to disseminate the information and develop physical activity materials for the medical community and consumers.

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- Pilot test focus groups on the developed materials.

**Strategy 2:** develop partnerships between medical professionals and the community to facilitate patient referrals to local physical activity resources. *Lead organization: American College of Sports Medicine*

## Tactics

- Collect case study examples of communities that have built effective partnerships.
- Develop a community-planning toolkit on how to build effective partnerships.
- Obtain local funding from the private sector and foundations.
- Encourage communities to develop resource guides that facilitate matching lifestyle, preferences and functional status/illness to community physical activity resources.
- Evaluate the project.

**Strategy 3:** develop resources for clinicians to use in making personalized physical activity recommendations/prescriptions for their patients. *Lead organization: American Geriatrics Society*

## Tactics

- Compile appropriate physical activity guidelines.
- Complete a needs assessment for clinicians.
- Review and collect published literature to identify patients' needs.
- Review existing toolkits and prepare a new resource that addresses the needs of providers and patients in diverse populations.
- Identify a healthcare group to pilot toolkit materials and evaluate usefulness.
- Identify a lead organization to sustain the toolkit and update it over time.

## Public policy strategies

Strategies in this area will strive to develop a unified consensus statement regarding public policy strategies and to keep this issue at the forefront of the nation's agenda. Policy and advocacy strategies are necessary at local, state and national levels.

**Strategy 1:** develop a coalition to conduct public policy analysis and to identify unified public policy strategies in the area of physical activity and aging. *Lead organizations: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Administration on Aging*

## Tactics

- Conduct a survey to identify key public policy issues and strategies.
- Develop a unified consensus statement regarding public policy strategies.
- Convene a meeting of policy experts to guide the policy research agenda.
- Make existing research appropriate for older adults and identify gaps in research knowledge.
- Provide tools to conduct a policy analysis.

**Strategy 2:** educate policymakers about the importance of physical activity for the older population. Include information that provides examples of effective policy in this arena. *Lead organization: National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity*

## Tactics

- Develop a clear legislative agenda at federal, state and local levels.
- Create model legislation and regulation language.
- Create a policy consortium to develop consensus messages.
- Create fact sheets and briefing books based on public policy analysis.
- Meet regularly with policymakers.
- Develop position papers and press releases for different audiences.

**Strategy 3:** generate information on the cost-effectiveness of increasing regular physical activity among the older population to help support public policy, program development and reimbursement efforts. *Lead organization: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

## Tactics

- Conduct a survey to identify key public policy issues and strategies.
- Convene an advisory panel to design or identify the research questions.
- Fund additional research to address gaps in the knowledge base.
- Develop a unified consensus statement.

## Research strategies

New research projects are needed to increase our understanding of the complex interactions between health, physical activity and the aging process. Guidelines for the types and amounts of physical activity needed to enhance health and functional outcomes are also necessary. And care must be taken to translate research findings in such a way as to maximize their implementation in community-based programs.

**Strategy 1:** identify valid and reliable measures of physical activity and physical function that are appropriate for different segments of the age 50-plus population. *Lead organizations: American College of Sports Medicine and National Institute on Aging*

## Tactics

- Develop a steering committee of Blueprint partner organizations.
- Commission reports on currently available field-based assessments of both physical activity and physical function.
- Organize an international consensus building conference on measurement and assessment.





- Convene separate groups of experts on physical activity and physical function to evaluate the use and effectiveness of different measurement tools.
- Identify the research gaps and plan a strategic research agenda to fill those gaps.

**Strategy 2:** develop evidence-based guidelines on the types and amounts of physical activity needed to enhance health and functional outcomes in the age 50-plus population with a special emphasis on chronic illness and disabilities. *Lead organization: American Geriatrics Society*

#### Tactics

- Develop a steering committee of Blueprint partner organizations to refine strategy, commit resources and assign tasks.
- Develop an action plan to specify approaches needed to identify appropriate type and amount of activity for subgroups within the 50-plus population for specific health and functional benefits.
- Access and synthesize reports on currently available knowledge.
- Convene separate groups of experts on areas of physical activity to evaluate the use and effectiveness of different programs.
- Identify the research gaps and plan a strategic research agenda to fill those gaps.

**Strategy 3:** conduct research to better understand what motivates individuals to participate and remain involved in community, home-based and worksite programs, and/or self-directed activities. *Lead organization: National Institute on Aging*

#### Tactics

- Develop a steering committee of Blueprint partner organizations.
- Access reports on currently available research on physical activity participation for different segments of the at-risk population.
- Convene groups of experts to recommend the most effective intervention strategies for addressing identified barriers.
- Identify the research gaps and plan a strategic research agenda to fill those gaps. ▼

#### Sources

Sheppard, L.; Senior, J.; Park, C.H.; Mockenhaupt, R.; Chodzko-Zajko, W. 2003. *Strategic Priorities for Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Age 50 and Older: The National Blueprint Consensus Conference Summary Report*

American College of Sports Medicine—Blueprint Partner Support Website. “Strategic Priorities for Increasing Physical Activity.” [www.agingblueprint.org/StrategicPriorities.cfm](http://www.agingblueprint.org/StrategicPriorities.cfm), accessed April 15, 2003

## The National Blueprint: spotlight on the ICAA’s role

The International Council on Active Aging (ICAA) has taken the lead in the planning and implementing of a National Blueprint strategic priority (turn to page 45 for more details). The ICAA is working to initiate the Blueprint’s Marketing and Communication Strategy 1: “establish a comprehensive physical activity trade association to provide support to businesses and corporations that share an interest in increasing physical activity levels among the older adult population.” Lead organizations for the Blueprint’s strategic priorities have committed to using professional networks and existing delivery channels to implement the strategies.