

Tennessee

Partnerships that Make a Difference in Communities Across the State

The Tennessee Department of Health's (TDOH) Arthritis Program has a long and successful history of addressing the burden of arthritis across the state. Beginning in October 1999, with a capacity-building grant from CDC, the Tennessee (TN) Arthritis Program partnered with the local Arthritis Foundation (AF) chapter to lay the groundwork for reducing the burden of arthritis in the state. Through the creation of the nationally recognized Tennessee Arthritis Action Plan, the TDOH and the AF Chapter sought help from the University of Tennessee Extension Family & Consumer Sciences division (UT Extension) to deliver evidence-based intervention programming to all 95 counties within the state. By following the original Tennessee Arthritis Action Plan, the Department of Health and its partners report reaching over 30,000 individuals in past years. The partnership between the TDOH, the AF Chapter, and UT Extension is the cornerstone of the Tennessee Arthritis Program. Through support from CDC's Arthritis Program, existing partners continue to expand the capacity to deliver evidence-based intervention on a statewide scale.

New partners are building on this success, including the Middle Tennessee YMCA, St. Thomas Health Services, and the Tennessee Radio Network. The YMCA has embedded the Arthritis Foundation Exercise class in all 30 centers in Middle Tennessee and will be expanded into the East Tennessee YMCA in 2009. St. Thomas Health Services has implemented a physician referral network in support of evidence-based intervention programming throughout Middle Tennessee. Using their Physician Relations Team, St. Thomas is interfacing with over 1,000 physicians to educate and promote the use of the Arthritis Foundation Exercise and Self Help programs. Customized Arthritis Program prescription pads have been distributed to St. Thomas Health Services primary care physicians so that the physicians can "prescribe" the use of the Arthritis Foundation Exercise and Arthritis Foundation Self Help programs as they compliment their established treatment regimens. Through the partnership with St. Thomas Health Services, the Arthritis Program gained access to over 1000 primary care physicians offering opportunities to educate through annual updates, meetings, conferences, and direct mail campaigns. St. Thomas Health Services has also produced a series of continuing medical education webinars to promote use of evidence-based interventions as a complimentary therapy. The Tennessee Radio Network is conducting a statewide media campaign, featuring the CDC's arthritis awareness campaign, "Physical Activity. The Arthritis Pain Reliever."

The Tennessee Arthritis Program has demonstrated that partnering with organizations that have similar goals and objectives and target similar populations can exponentially expand reach. Embedding arthritis interventions into these systems establishes overlapping goals with those of the Tennessee Arthritis Program, expanding the reach of the interventions and improving the lives of thousands of Tennesseans living with this debilitating disease.