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Mississippi State University Extension Service

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The Need

- 52% of older Mississippians live in rural areas; over 80% live in their own family dwellings.
- Since 1970 the state’s 60+ population has grown by 40%.
- The challenge: finding ways to maintain and improve the health of our seniors while allowing them the freedom to reside in their own homes.
Project Objectives

- Identify community resources and deficits relative to supporting health and health care needs of seniors
- Engage communities in grassroots efforts to improve health and health care access
- Initiate health promotional activities targeting rural aging populations

4 Counties – Oktibbeha, Clay, Copiah and Lincoln
Project Elements

- First Impressions
- Senior Health and Health Care Resource Directories
- Forums on Healthy Aging
- Lay health educator volunteer program
- Message of the month
Forums

- What are the programs, services, and resources that encourage and support healthy aging in your county?
- What are the main challenges to supporting the goal of healthy aging?
- If you had 3 wishes, which programs or services currently lacking are worth pursuing?
What’s Working?

- **General health and fitness**
  - Diabetic Boot Camp
  - Wellness Center, Sanderson Center
  - Hospital and walk-in clinics
  - Health fairs
  - Hospital Lunch and Learn programs
  - MSU Extension Service health and nutrition programs
  - Seniors exercise and Keenager programs, Presbyterian church
  - Line dancing, First Methodist
  - No smoking ordinance

- PACE class
- Walking trails
- Ramped sidewalks
- Downtown benches
- Media health and medical segments
- Wal-Mart $4 prescriptions
- Hospital physical therapy
- Department of Health
## What’s Working?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social interaction and support</th>
<th>Social services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Newcomers Club</td>
<td>- Meals on Wheels</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Association of Retired Faculty</td>
<td>- Home health</td>
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<td>- AARP</td>
<td>- Hospice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Parks and Recreation – crafts and quilting</td>
<td>- Homemaker and respite care services</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Red Hat Society</td>
<td>- Angel Food program</td>
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<td>- Alzheimer’s Support Group</td>
<td>- Prairie Opportunity</td>
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<td>- Diabetes Support Group</td>
<td>- Helping Hands ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Continuing education programs at MSU</td>
<td>- Community Counseling Services</td>
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<td>- Emerson Family Center programs</td>
<td>- Sheriff’s Department Daily Reassurance Program</td>
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<td>- Relay for Life</td>
<td>- Life Line service</td>
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<td>- Welcome Wagon</td>
<td>- Watchful Eye Care services</td>
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<td>- Churches</td>
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<td>- Libraries</td>
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3 Wishes – Multiplied by Many!

- Caregiver assistance
- Programs to help seniors with medications, a medical planner
- More walk-in and urgent care facilities
- More general practice physicians and a gerontologist
- People to help seniors and their caregivers better understand health situation and access internet information
- Educate clergy and medical personnel on senior services
- Communitywide health and fitness campaign
- A Senior Citizen Center (education, recreation, and information)
- Programs to help fight boredom and isolation – social visiting
- Hearing, vision, and oral care programs
- More living facilities appropriate for independent senior living
- More affordable assisted living facilities
- Program to prevent senior abuse
- Assistance for those without family
3 Wishes – Multiplied by Many!

- Transportation (including evening hours and throughout county)
- Home accident prevention programs
- Afternoon programs for seniors
- College students as “live-ins” for seniors
- Combine children’s daycare and senior programs
- Awareness days – Sleep Apnea, Healthy Eating
- A rural health agency to bring all services together
- Medicare education program
- Affordable wellness programs and services
- Transportation to or accessibility of programs for rural county residents
- Adult daycare center
- Guide to Senior community services
- Volunteer opportunities for Seniors
- Mentally challenging recreation – move beyond the stereotype of bingo
Challenges and Obstacles

- Seniors without a sense of purpose
  - Not having the will or desire for healthy aging
- Communication
  - Not knowing what is available
  - Senior literacy issues
- Cultural issues – fried and greasy is the norm
- Perception of aging – stereotyping the elderly
- Lack of cooperation among some churches in providing services
  - Fear of infringement; competition between churches
  - Racial issues between churches
- Some programs seen as more available for whites than for African-Americans
Challenges and Obstacles

- Lack of funds and resources
- Transportation problems
- Agencies failure to work together to better serve Seniors
- Lack of public education
- Lack of sufficient legislation to support healthy aging
Community Priorities

Nine Community Action Groups have been formed

- Four senior center groups
- Navigation/Information System
- Transportation
- Volunteer help for seniors
- Programs for independent living
- Education of clergy and medical personnel
It can happen...
And, it can happen again...
Other successes

- **25 Healthy Futures Volunteers** trained; health messages delivered to 168 seniors
- **8,000 “Messages of the Month”** distributed on “Know Your Numbers”, Depression, Preventing Falls, and Osteoporosis
- **5,500 Senior Health and Health Care Resource directories** distributed
“Aging is not ‘lost youth’ but a new stage of opportunity and strength.”

-Betty Friedan
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