

Press Release



Summit attendees seek practical ways to 'build more resilient' older adults

Speaker notes that social isolation, physical inactivity linked to fear of falling

AURORA (May 13, 2019): An aging population brings with it challenges, both in quality of life, and in rising health care costs. There has been no magic pill for either, but one thing is certain – prevention is key.

'Prevention' is a broad concept, one expressed repeatedly by the speakers at last Friday's summit: "Creating High-Quality Physical Activity Opportunities for Older Adults 'Before the Fall.'" The last three words, in particular, were a major interest for the audience of 80 professionals who work with older adults. All were on hand to learn and discuss what could be done, on a practical level, to build a more confident, competent and resilient older adult.

The event was hosted by Activate Aurora and Sport Aurora, at Seneca College King Campus, and began with keynote speaker Dr. John Cairney, Professor at the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at University of Toronto, and Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University.

He noted that our older adult population (aged 65-plus) is rising sharply – from 8 percent in the early 1970s to a projected 20 percent by 2021, adding that "the oldest old within that population are also getting larger."

Fear of falls and social isolation

Cairney explained that with an aging demographic comes a spike in chronic illnesses, along with additional problems like social isolation. And there are several risk factors for the latter, related to health challenges like hearing loss and chronic pain.

"The one I really want to highlight is fear of falling. When the fear of falling is present, a person's social world begins to shrink."

Which is serious in its own right, but affects more than just mental health. Research shows a strong relationship between low levels of social support and mortality. "Social support, on its own, is a significant predictor of how long people live."

All the more reason to address the fear of falling, which is also a barrier to participation in physical activity.

Brandy Tanenbaum, program coordinator for the Centre for Injury Prevention at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, is involved in a project focused on understanding the intersection of physical literacy and physical activity in older adults in a community recreation setting.

"This work matters because falls are a leading cause of injury-related hospital admission in older adulthood, and physical inactivity is a leading risk factor for falls," said Tanenbaum. "If we can learn more about the underlying conditions that facilitate physical activity, perhaps we can reduce the number of fall-related injuries."

'Pay off' in health care dollars saved

Public health nurse Susan Bonomo, Healthy Aging, Public Health, Community & Health adds: "Investments in fall prevention pay off in health care dollars saved," noting that falls cost the Ontario government more than \$2 billion in 2010.



From left: Ron Weese, Brandy Taenbaum, Susan Bonomo, Dr. John Cairney, Drew Mitchell.

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“A 20% reduction in fall-related injuries in older adults would save the Ontario government \$400 million each year. But it takes a village to prevent a fall – everyone has a role to play.”

Several workshops followed the morning presentations, one being the ‘Older Adult Abilities Course.’ This initiative of the Activate Aurora Older Adult network, which aims to build competence and confidence in movement, was all about enhancing locomotion, stability, balance and object manipulation as a critical step in improving the durability, and reducing frailty, in older adults.

All of which helps remove barriers to physical activity and improve health and fitness in later years – leading to the concept of “compressed morbidity.” Dr. Cairney explains this as compressing chronic illness to the fewest possible number of years. “Make that period of illness shorter and shorter, so we can maximize the amount of time that people enjoy quality of life.”

He added that although there’s no shortage of information on these topics, there’s an inertia in terms of their practical application.

“We do not need another research study that shows us the positive impact of physical activity on health. The question isn’t ‘is there a link?’ The problem is getting people to do it – and reap the benefits of what we know.”

Activate Aurora Chair Ron Weese expects the day-long event to generate more than discussion among practitioners and academics. “Our attendees reported in our survey that this Summit would positively impact over 5,000 of their clients over the next year,” he said. “It shows the value of this professional development opportunity, and demonstrates the importance of providing this kind of event to experts in the field in the future.”

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For media enquiries, please contact:
Neil Moore, Director of Communications,
Activate Aurora/Sport Aurora
905.717.7474
communications@activateaurora.com

About Sport Aurora:

Founded in 2005, Sport Aurora is a not-for-profit corporation that supports and develops high-quality sport and recreation opportunities. They advocate on behalf of member organizations to increase participation, build capacity and celebrate excellence. Sport Aurora now represents 42 sport organizations, with a volunteer base of more than 2,500, and a player base of nearly 10,000 from ages of 3 to 80. Sport Aurora has also helped develop the municipal Parks and Recreation Master Plan, continues to provide leadership and guidance, and has become the “voice” of Sport in the Town of Aurora. For more information, visit <http://www.sportaurora.ca/>

About Activate Aurora:

Activate Aurora is on a mission: to make Aurora “Canada’s Most Active Community” through education, activities and awareness. This Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) funded program was designed by Sport Aurora with the guidance of the Canadian Sport for Life Society, and is endorsed – and supported – by the Mayor’s Task Force on Physical Activity. The Activate Aurora team includes representatives from diverse areas of interest: local sports organizations, education, parks & recreation, seniors and health care. For more information, visit <https://activateaurora.com/>