



# Senior Center Needs Assessment Toolkit

## Working Towards Positive Nutrition and Physical Activity Change

Engage. Educate. Empower.



**AGATSTON**  
URBAN NUTRITION  
INITIATIVE



**Netter Center**  
for Community Partnerships  
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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# Introduction

By 2035, one in five Americans will be over the age of 65 and will outnumber children under the age of 18 for the first time in US history. Furthermore, most of these adults are expected to have at least one chronic condition, often arthritis, heart disease, hypertension, or diabetes. Chronic conditions can reduce quality of life but can effectively be addressed through community-based prevention strategies.

Within the Social Cognitive Theory framework, personal, environmental and behavioral factors all contribute to health choices. However, among seniors, environmental and behavioral factors are often most important. Senior centers serve as a community focal point for over one million American seniors through over 10,000 centers. Therefore they are a logical place for health and wellness programming. Many seniors utilize congregate meals as an affordable way to dine as well as socialize. Practices and healthy changes at community and senior centers often focus on reducing social isolation, providing social services, or preventing falls but nutrition and physical activity are also important initiatives.

## About the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to assess the readiness, needs, and strengths of senior centers with regards to nutrition and physical activity programming. It is not designed to compare senior centers or be used as a punitive tool. The results of the needs assessment combined with the information, ideas, and materials in this toolkit can assist centers and their partners to start or further programming. Throughout this toolkit, we will reference “senior centers” but the tools and suggestions can be used at any center that serves adults.

# Getting Started

Whether you are a SNAP-Ed local partner, Senior Center Director, Community Center staff, or other program partner, you can assist center participants to move towards healthier lives. The goal is to make changes to improve the health of senior center participants by improving the policy, systems, and environment in the center. Understanding the current staff thoughts, readiness, initiatives, challenges, and strengths is a great first step. The next needs assessment portion of this toolkit provides a structured way to gather this information.

Keep in mind this needs assessment is a self-evaluation for the senior center. Section 1 and Section 2 should be completed by or with the Senior Center Director or person/people that have a strong understanding of the center. There is no punitive action if there are no current initiatives or if a center is not ready for certain changes. The more reflective of actual practices the better the eventual outcomes and results can be. Section 3 can be completed by either senior center staff or a partner, such as SNAP-Ed, who may be assisting with nutrition and physical activity initiatives. Be realistic about the current situation in the center. The needs assessment does not need to be completed all at one time by one individual. It may be useful to ask a range of staff questions and/or ask participants how they perceive the environment at the center.

Use the comment section to write down any notes, comments, or where you may like partner assistance. This can also be used to generate staff or participant discussion about where they would like to see changes. Also take note of any areas that you see room for improvement or are particularly proud to see initiatives already happening. Reflecting on strengths can be useful to address challenges or transfer best practices.

# Senior Center Nutrition and Physical Activity Needs Assessment:

## Section 1 — Administrative Information

Instructions: Please complete all fields.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person completing survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of person completing survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Senior Center Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Building/Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Community type (check one): Rural \_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_ Urban \_\_\_

Number of patrons served by senior center: \_\_\_\_\_

# Senior Center Nutrition and Physical Activity Needs Assessment:

## Section 2:

Instructions: This section should be completed by or with the Senior Center Director or person/people that have a strong understanding of the center. For each statement, please circle one response indicating whether you strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral/unsure, agree, or strongly agree. Please note that the use of “we” refers to the senior center staff or senior center as a whole. Nutrition and physical activities initiatives/efforts describe things like promoting healthier options in vending machines, adding signs to encourage the use of stairs, or implementing physical activity classes. Health promotion would include activities or interventions designed to assist patrons to make decisions that would benefit their health.

**Organizational Thoughts:** Please circle SA, A, N, D, or SD for each following statement

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is important that our center promote the physical activity of the patrons.	SA	A	N	D	SD
It is important that our center promote the nutrition of the patrons.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Nutrition and physical activity efforts/initiatives would help meet the needs of our patrons.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our patrons would enjoy nutrition and physical activity efforts/initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our center would benefit from nutrition and physical activity efforts/initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our center leadership generally cares about community wellness.	SA	A	N	D	SD

## Organizational Thoughts Continued

Statement Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our center staff generally cares about community wellness.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our leadership would want to implement nutrition/physical activity efforts/initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our staff would want to implement nutrition/physical activity efforts/initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our leadership has a clear understanding of what is important to promote nutrition/physical activity.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our staff has a clear understanding of what is important to promote nutrition/physical activity.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our leadership has a clear understanding of how to move forward to implement nutrition/physical activity initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Our staff has a clear understanding of how to move forward to implement nutrition/physical activity initiatives.	SA	A	N	D	SD

**Continue to the next page for Section 2 Administrative Supports**

**Administrative Support:** Please circle Yes, No, or N/A. N/A would be used if a certain program would not apply to your center. If you are unsure of an answer, please leave it blank or ask another staff member who may know. If you circle No, but would like assistance implementing the activity or initiative, please indicate that in the comments.

Statement	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
We have a staff member with job duties related to health promotion.	Y	N	N/A	
We have a staff member in charge of food services. (If you do not serve food, please leave this blank)	Y	N	N/A	
We have a staff member in charge of physical activity programming.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center has a wellness committee whose efforts focus on enhancing physical activity and nutrition efforts/initiatives.	Y	N	N/A	
If yes, does the wellness committee include patrons/participants?	Y	N	N/A	
Our center offers prizes, awards, and/or recognition to people who participate in physical activity and/or nutrition initiatives.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center offers an onsite farmers market where fresh fruits and vegetables are sold.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center offers an onsite food pantry.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center offers a Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) or "senior boxes".	Y	N	N/A	



## ***Administrative Support Continued***

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Our center distributes Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) vouchers.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center offers physical activity classes or programming.	Y	N	N/A	
If yes: does the center offer "high impact" activities such as cardio or dance?	Y	N	N/A	
If yes: does the center offer "low impact" activities such as stretching or yoga?	Y	N	N/A	
Our center promotes nutrition and physical activity programming through a newsletter (online or in print)	Y	N	N/A	
Our center promotes nutrition and physical activity programming through social media.	Y	N	N/A	
Our center has a written policy related to:				
Nutrition standards for food served and/or offering healthy food options.	Y	N	N/A	
Nutrition standards for beverages served and/or offering healthy beverage options.	Y	N	N/A	
Using healthy food preparation techniques such as baking or grilling rather than deep frying.	Y	N	N/A	

# Senior Center Nutrition and Physical Activity Needs Assessment:

## Section 3:

This section will ask about various initiatives or efforts already taking place. Questions will assess both the availability of nutrition and physical activity as well as the promotion of both topics. This may be filled out by an outside program or partner or could be filled out by Senior Center staff. Use the comment sections for any additional information.

**Physical Activity:** Please circle Yes, No, or N/A. N/A would be used if a certain program would not apply to your center. If you are unsure of an answer, please leave it blank or ask another staff member who may know.

Statement	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Are the stairwells easy to find, attractive safe, clean, and accessible (eg light, color, and safe surfaces)?	Y	N	N/A	
Are the use of stairs as an alternative to elevators promoted for those able to use them (eg signage)?	Y	N	N/A	
Is there a dedicated space and equipment for exercise rooms or classes?	Y	N	N/A	
Is there a designated walking path on, near, or in the center property? This may be a inside or outside.	Y	N	N/A	
Are there visible materials advertising physical activity efforts or initiatives happening at the enter?	Y	N	N/A	
Are there physical activity education materials visible on the bulletin boards or the walls?	Y	N	N/A	

**Nutrition:** Please circle Yes, No, or N/A. N/A would be used if a certain program would not apply to your center. If you are unsure of an answer, please leave it blank or ask another staff member who may know.

Statement	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Are there healthy beverages offered with meals? (eg water, 100% fruit or vegetable juice)	Y	N	N/A	
Is there drinkable water available at all times?	Y	N	N/A	
Are the following healthy food options available during meal times:				
Vegetables and fruit	Y	N	N/A	
Whole-grains	Y	N	N/A	
Low-fat dairy	Y	N	N/A	
Lean protein	Y	N	N/A	
Low-sodium items	Y	N	N/A	
Items containing little or no sugar	Y	N	N/A	
Are high-fat sauces, salad dressings, gravies, or condiments served on the side or was a reduced-fat version available?	Y	N	N/A	
Are healthy food preparation techniques, such as baking or grilling, used in the cafeteria?	Y	N	N/A	
Are there vending machines that have low-fat/low- salt/low-sugar products available?	Y	N	N/A	

## ***Nutrition Continued***

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Are there specific labeling or promotion to identify/advertise healthier foods in the vending machine?	Y	N	N/A	
Are there nutrition education materials visible on bulletin boards or the walls?	Y	N	N/A	
Are there visible materials advertising nutrition efforts or initiatives happening at the center?	Y	N	N/A	

**Thank you for completing the Senior Center Needs Assessment! Please review the results with staff and partners.**

**The remainder of the toolkit provides next steps to move forward with nutrition and physical activity initiatives.**



# Next Steps for Success

After the needs assessment is completed, consider the readiness of the center to make changes. Section 2, Organizational Thoughts, provides a readiness assessment. If many of the statements were answered with "disagree" or "strongly disagree", think about what needs to change so that staff, leadership, and participants are ready for nutrition and physical activity initiatives. It can be difficult to implement positive changes with and for people who are simply not ready. Improving readiness may include training, discussions about desired changes, or discussions about misconceptions about nutrition and physical activity changes. If there are staffing shortages, funding issues, or other immediate concerns, consider re-doing the needs assessment in a few months time before continuing.

If the center is ready for changes, it is time to decide where to start. Begin by looking through all sections of the needs assessment to determine any trends. The center may have current initiatives clustered within nutrition or physical activity, comments may indicate strong participant interest for a certain type of activity, or the center may have an easy change they want to try first.

Start by constructing an action plan with the top three items or initiatives to start with. Make certain the action plan contains SMART goals so there is a way to measure and celebrate success. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

Logic models can also be helpful to consider how to get started on making changes towards the goal. Logic models present statements of activities and how they will bring about the desired change. They can be used to analyze what contributes to a successful program and what is needed to start and sustain a change. Logic models could be used for a specific goal or for the action plan as a whole. A template for SMART goals and logic models are on the following pages.

# Smart Goal Action Plan

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Specific

What exact item do you want to accomplish?

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Measurable

How will you know when the goal is accomplished?  
How many or how much of the change do you want to see?

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Achievable

Can the goal be accomplished or is it too lofty?

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Relevant

Does this goal make sense at this time in this setting?  
Why should you work to achieve this goal?

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Timely

When do you want to achieve the goal?  
How long will it take to achieve the goal?

Goal # 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal #3: \_\_\_\_\_

# LOGIC MODEL WORKSHEET

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

PURPOSE: \_\_\_\_\_



<b>Input/Resources</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Effects/Results</b>
Materials used by the program to reach the goal(s)	What the program does with the resources to make changes	Evidence of having done the activity or made the change	Impacts of having taken action. Include short and long term

# Evaluation

The needs assessment can also be used as an evaluation tool. A senior center can choose to designate intervals to redo the assessment, such as every year or every other year. When completing the assessment as an evaluation, consider using the comment section to indicate in-process items and which items are part of the action plan.

The needs assessment tool only measures nutrition and physical activity initiatives. It is not meant to replace other tools that may measure social isolation, safety, or other things important to senior centers. Use the tool in conjunction with others for a more complete picture and evaluation of the center as a whole.

Compare the second needs assessment with the first to note any changes or newly completed items. Look back at the action plan and smart goals to see what was accomplished. The results can assist to make new goals. Along with the evaluation assessment, also review participant feedback about the changes, senior participation in new initiatives, staff comments, and new partnerships. Remember to celebrate successes!



# References

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