



Poster Board 3:

Improving Digital and Health Inequalities Faced by Ethnocultural Minorities Through Hybrid Delivery of a Health and Wellness Program for Seniors

Presenters:

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Description:

Since January 2023, The South Riverdale Community Health Center, the Alzheimer Society of Toronto, the Eastview Neighborhood Community Center, and other community partners have been working collaboratively to deliver health and wellness workshops for seniors from ethnocultural minorities, predominately Chinese-speaking seniors. This hybrid programming combines in-person and virtual programming, with co-facilitators working simultaneously to ensure participants receive the best support. The program aims to promote physical, mental, social, and emotional health while reducing digital and health inequalities.

Poster Board objectives and learning outcomes:

- To gain a better understanding of the digital health program barriers faced by ethnocultural minorities based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To learn about the strategies and methods for promoting equity and inclusivity in digital health initiatives.
- To understand the challenges and opportunities of adopting hybrid programming in preparation for future health promotion programs.



Full description:

Challenge:

"Digital access and the skills to use digital and virtual tools must be accepted as determinants of health."¹ The COVID-19 pandemic led to many community health programs pivoting to virtual programming quickly, which enabled them to continue providing health and wellness programs to seniors and keep them connected. Virtual programming has been a great alternative for people to participate in various activities during the pandemic. However, it has also created a new barrier for individuals who lack access to technology (hardware and/or connection) and do not have digital literacy, as well as those with hearing, visual, or language impairments, resulting in health and digital inequalities. As communities began to reopen, some clients preferred to attend in-person events, while others chose to participate virtually for personal or health reasons. To address these challenges and minimize barriers caused by virtual programming, the South Riverdale Community Health Center, the Alzheimer Society of Toronto, the Eastview Neighborhood Community Centers, and other community partners worked collaboratively to test a hybrid programming model which combines in-person and virtual programming, with co-facilitators working simultaneously.

Action:

In January 2023, in collaboration with our community partners, the first hybrid health workshop was launched in the meeting room of a senior apartment in the Toronto East area. Our partner agency, Eastview Neighborhood Community Center, collaborated with the senior building's



supervisor to set up the meeting room with a big screen projector, speaker, microphone, and internet connection. Participants had an option to attend the workshop either in person or virtually. For virtual participants, we used the Zoom videoconferencing platform. All in-person attendees gathered in the meeting room to participate in the workshop. One facilitator is on-site, while the other facilitator/guest speaker joins virtually. The workshop is 90 minutes long and includes ice-breaker/brain-training games, chair exercises, health and wellness topics, life experience sharing, and interactive activities to keep participants engaged. The program is available in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin to cater to the senior population's demographic. We collect pre and post-tests, as well as client feedback, to evaluate the program's effectiveness. The workshops were well received and in high demand. Currently, an average of two health and wellness workshops are delivered monthly in three senior apartment buildings located in Toronto's East End. We have delivered twenty hybrid health and wellness workshops between January 2023 and December 2023.

Impact:

Hybrid programming provides numerous benefits, allowing individuals to participate in health and wellness workshops without concerns regarding technological accessibility or digital literacy. Individuals who couldn't attend in-person workshops due to weather or other reasons could join virtual workshops without geographical limitations. Many participants have attended our program for a decade. Our new hybrid program option allowed participants to attend workshops and maintain long-term friendships even after moving to suburban communities. The attendance rate has increased to 52% with the implementation of our hybrid program, compared to when only in-person workshops were offered. Additionally, when co-facilitators are used in a hybrid program, the knowledge gain improves from 55% to 82.5%, and participant engagement increases from



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70% to 87.5%. While one facilitator is delivering health and wellness content, the other facilitator who is onsite could monitor any questions from the participants to ensure those questions are adequately addressed. Furthermore, the onsite facilitator can encourage the participants to stay engaged in the program and avoid distractions. In summary, 81% of participants rate the program as "excellent" and will recommend it to others.

Trajectory:

The hybrid health and wellness programming model effectively promotes health and addresses digital equity. Although it may present challenges and learning curves for health promoters, it can be successful with careful planning and collaborative community efforts.

References: 1. Alliance for Healthier Communities. Digital Equity. Toronto, ON: Canada (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2024, from <https://www.allianceon.org/Digital-Equity>