

Success Stories

from the Montana Disability and Health Program



Living Well with a Disability Improves Health and Saves Money

Public Health Issue

People with disabilities compose about 20% of the U.S. population but account for nearly half of all medical expenditures. A combination of medical, rehabilitation, and community advancements have increased the life expectancy of people with disabilities. A challenge for public health is to ensure these added years are quality life years. The *Living Well with a Disability* (*LWD*) evidence-based health promotion program can help meet this challenge by reducing the effects of health problems and associated medical expenses for people with physical disabilities or mobility impairments.

Program Overview

A national study funded by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Disability and Health Program indicated that a state would save approximately \$81,000 to \$240,000 above the cost of the *LWD* program when implemented with 240 participants each year. The Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC:Rural), in partnership with MTDH, provides the organizational and facilitator training and technical assistance to Centers for Independent Living and other community agencies that implement *LWD* workshops. *LWD* teaches skills to manage health, solve problems, communicate with service providers, avoid frustration and depression, increase physical activity and nutrition, and maintain healthy lifestyle practices.

"Living Well with a Disability has been a great experience. The 10-week program allows individuals with disabilities to create a healthy lifestyle plan, unique to their desires and strengths, to overcome everyday and ongoing challenges, and to reach meaningful life goals. Being a person with a disability, I have used the Living Well tools and techniques to improve my life. It is awesome!"

~ Darren Larson
LWD Facilitator



Making a Difference

Since February 1995, RTC:Rural staff trained 876 LWD facilitators in 43 states, who served more than 7,000 adults with disabilities. The vast majority of trained facilitators were located in 14 of the 16 states with CDC Disability and Health programs (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/index.html>).

Since 2002, 564 LWD facilitators in CDC Disability and Health funded states reached over 4,500 workshop participants, whose symptom-free days are estimated at having increased by 53,693 days. The estimated net benefit to healthcare payers is between \$4.2 and \$7.2 million.

Shaping Tomorrow

Contact your state's long-term care programs to discuss LWD as a possible Medicaid reimbursable service through the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver programs. For example, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare approved the following service in two HCBS Waivers in Montana: "Classes on weight loss, smoking cessation, and healthy lifestyles such as "Living Well with a Disability" offered by independent living centers."

Contact: Montana Disability and Health Program

Tracy Boehm, MPH

52 Corbin Hall, Missoula, MT 59812

boehm@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

888-268-2743 or 406-243-5741

406-243-4200 (TTY)

406-243-2349 (Fax)

<http://www.livingandworkingwell.org>

<http://mtdh.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/>

© 2012 RTC:Rural. Opinions expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agency.

Doris was in her mid-seventies and lived alone. Partial paralysis in her left leg and pain in her knees decreased her mobility and limited her ability to leave her apartment. Most of her energy went to necessary excursions outside her home, such as trips to the grocery store or visits to the doctor's office. Increased isolation and lack of exercise led to both weight gain and depression. On a tip from a friend, Doris entered the Living Well with a Disability workshop. The first session encouraged her to a set goals; Doris took a pain management workshop and a nutrition workshop, and she started exercising twice a week at a local fitness center.

"Living Well is indeed a remarkable program...when you combine quality leaders with the input of other disabled group members an improvement in lifestyle is inevitable."

~ Doris, LWD participant

