Mobilising the fitness industry to assist with practical implementation of falls prevention strategies

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About the fitness industry in Australia:

• 2,000 businesses, nationally and growing fast
• 17,000 registered professional workforce (? Unregistered)
• Business types:
  • Large, multi-site and franchise models
  • Registered club and council/government facilities
  • Large and small Independents
  • Personal training studios
  • Outdoor PT
  • Community based fitness
  • Emergence of weight-loss franchises with fitness equipment
About the fitness industry in Australia:
Where is it heading? / trends in the industry

• Women only – well established
• Men only
• Age-related, over 50’s
• Emergence of niche markets – catering to older adults, families etc
• Weight loss centres, counselling, ‘lifestyle’ facilities
• Strong growth in personal training
• Emergence of ‘medical model’ – onsite health professionals, clinics, exercise specialists, physiotherapy, dieticians etc.
Benefits of exercise for prevention of falls:

- Benefits of exercise for falls prevention are well established
- Strength (resistance training) and balance training particularly effective

Why engage with the fitness industry?

- Access to a qualified workforce (the ‘army’ of fitness professionals)
- Structured programs – individual assessment, goal setting, motivate, monitor, evaluate and manage
- Controlled environment
- Huge investment in facilities, equipment, technology and workforce skills
Why engage with the fitness industry?

New Research from the Diabetes Institute:

• “Researchers monitored the health of 57 overweight men and women for more than a year”.

• “The research, funded by VicHealth, was designed to determine whether a home-based strength training program was as beneficial for them as a supervised program in a fitness centre.”

• “All the men and women were aged between 40-80 years and had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Participants who regularly trained under supervision in a fitness centre were found to have modestly improved their blood glucose levels. Those who conducted their strength training at home did not show any such improvement”.

• “We found that if people maintain a regular, supervised strength training program, they improve blood glucose control which could reduce their risk of diabetes complications such as cardio-vascular disease…”

Photo courtesy of International Diabetes Institute
Why engage with the fitness industry?

New Research from the Diabetes Institute:

• Success due to:
  • Sense of ‘community’
  • Working with a like-group
  • Structured and monitored program
  • Assistance and guidance from qualified staff
  • Motivation to attend and reach goals

There is no reason why this success cannot be translated across to falls prevention strategies.
The fitness industry today:

• Services/marketing generally targeted at 18-35 year old demographic
• Fairly ‘fragmented’ industry, highly competitive in the ‘traditional’ market
• Still has an ‘image’ problem – only for the fit & healthy, body image etc.
• Things are changing for the better, but slowly!

Strength / resistance training

• Intimidating for many people – lots of equipment, heavy weights, body-builder image, only for strong, young men etc.
Barriers for older adults participation with the fitness industry (real or perceived):

• Intimidating environment
• Lot’s of equipment, heavy weights and complicated machines
• Full of young, healthy fit people with great bodies
• Culture and environment issues – music, mirrors, lack of private space
• Young trainers more interested in people at peak physical levels
• Membership rather than program based
• Marketing and images – young, fit people, muscular, names such as Hotbodz etc
• Strength training makes you muscle bound and is not something that women do
• Expensive
Things are changing – 4 examples:

• The 70 year old personal trainer, Sydney Uni Sports and Aquatic Centre

• Aquafit Fitness & Leisure, Campbelltown, Living Longer Living Stronger program

• Fernwood Women's Fitness and “Lift for Life” program

• Falls prevention programs on the Central Coast

Training focus

• Older adults specialisation at Certificate III and CIV level in the VET package

• A range of suitable continuing education programs now available for registered instructors and trainers

Health focus v image focus
Hastening the change:

Fitness Australia working in partnership with NSW Health, Falls Prevention Policy Unit

1. Expanding the workforce, particularly @ community level
2. Industry education campaign
3. Development of database of accredited providers

Followed by:
Consumer education campaign – NSW Health
1. Expanding the workforce

- Development of new, short training course to become a *Community Exercise Leader*
- Development of a new, Fitness Australia registration category to accredit leaders and provide access to appropriate insurance
- Limited scope, training focus on strength and balance, delivery limited to low intensity group exercise and basic strength training in a community setting
- Can go onto full CIII qualification as a fitness instructor
- Supported by network of Area Health Services in NSW, primarily delivered by volunteer workforce
1. Expanding the workforce - outcomes

- More people, exercising more often, in more areas across NSW
- Safe and effective training program, tailored to older adult needs
- More fitness leaders available to run more classes
2. Industry education campaign

- To encourage and hasten the rate of acceptance by the fitness industry of the need to adjust to the older adult market
  - Industry research / perceptions
  - Understand motivators and barriers for older adults
  - Develop campaign and support materials for industry
  - Communications strategy, industry education and PR
  - Training and capacity building of fitness industry professionals
  - Evaluation
2. Industry education campaign - outcomes

- Industry understands the opportunities available to attract new customer base
- Industry gains access to case studies and business models that demonstrate commercial viability of older adult programs
- Industry is provided with a practical resource kit to assist with implementation of programs
- Marketing tools and templates are provided
- Links to professional resources and key organisations
- Regular updates, education seminars, information and assistance
- Links to appropriate training programs
- Capacity building amongst industry personnel
3. Database of accredited providers

- Development of a comprehensive database of accredited providers of exercise programs and other physical activity and/or sporting programs that may assist with falls prevention amongst older adults
- Recognition of fitness facilities and registered fitness professionals who have undertaken specific training and/or who are running recognised and approved programs
- Registered *Community Exercise Leaders*
- Information will be made available to GPs and other health professionals, AHS personnel, general public etc
3. Database of accredited providers - outcomes

- Information on providers in one place and readily accessible
- Reliable source of adequately skilled and accredited providers
About Fitness Australia:

- The national peak industry body for the fitness industry in Australia
- Not-for-profit, membership based association
- Sets standards, supports and represents the fitness industry
- Administers the national registration scheme for fitness professionals
Strategic Framework

- Working for a Fitter, Healthier Australia
- Setting Standards of Excellence for the industry
- Building scale and focus on member services
- Increasing profile, influence & reputation
- Smart Technologies and online presence
- Organisational Development
- Financial strength & partnerships
- A strong, unified, nationally integrated organisation
Fitness Australia is committed to supporting the process of hastening change within the fitness industry to assist with practical implementation of falls prevention strategies

www.fitness.org.au

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Thank You