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Addressing Barriers to Improve Active Transportation Amongst Seniors in Ridgely, Tennessee

Purpose: The Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD) mission is to bring together and leverage programs, resources, and organizations to protect and ensure the quality of life and independence of older Tennesseans and adults with disabilities. TCAD received a grant from the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) to improve the ability for seniors to access active transportation as a way to visit the Ridgely Senior Center (RSC). This two-year project is carried out in partnership with the Northwest Area Agency on Aging and Disability, RSC, TDH, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Design: To accomplish the primary goal of improving access, the following aims were developed: (1) assess barriers that older adults face when traveling, (2) provide educational programming to increase knowledge of health benefits related to walking and confidence, and to (3) improve the publicly-accessible infrastructure in order to increase walkability and pedestrian friendly streets surrounding the RSC. To ensure that the goal and aims have been reached, all activities focused on “The Five E’s”—Evaluation, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering.

Outcomes: The primary barrier identified was the lack of access to indoor and outdoor exercise areas. Initial programming requests were for increased indoor and outdoor walking activities (e.g. walking clubs) and access to treadmills along with an outside walking track behind the RSC. Ridgely Seniors on the Move participated (N=33) in the Walk Across TN program and totaled 5395.16 miles during an eight-week challenge. The residents intend to participate in this event

yearly. Currently, TCAD is working with the City of Ridgely on funding for infrastructure improvements.

Interpretation: When addressing the healthcare of older adults living in rural areas, it is essential to take an approach with a multifaceted solution. These solutions can be expanded to all areas of healthcare – focusing on “preventative” rather than “reactive” care.

