



Project Healthy Bones 2022 Fact Sheet

Interfaith Caregivers of Greater Mercer County (ICGMC) provides free services for local elderly and adults with disabilities through innovative programming aimed to enable individuals to remain in their homes and maintain a safe, independent, high quality of life. Our comprehensive approach to meeting the unique needs of seniors and homebound residents includes offering the ***Project Healthy Bones (PHB)*** program. This program is designed to assist seniors with fall and injury prevention, a key piece to maintaining independence and longevity. The program's regular physical exercise and social interaction provide the building blocks for maintaining healthy lifestyles.

Launched by our agency in 2012, PHB is a state-recognized program that combines strategic exercises with lessons about a range of lifestyle factors that impact bone health. The research-based curriculum is designed to improve the balance, strength, and endurance of senior citizens. In addition to exercise, participants receive information about senior nutritional needs, fall prevention, personal safety, and other lifestyle factors as they relate to osteoporosis. In all, PHB hopes to empower senior citizens to actively improve their health and well-being.

Osteoporosis is a serious, but preventable, condition in which bones become thin, brittle, and easily broken, and is devastating our senior citizens. One out of every two women over the age of 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis. Commonly mistaken as impacting only women, one in four men over the age of 50 will experience an osteoporotic fracture in his lifetime (Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation, 2021). This chronic disease has often devastating outcomes for those who experience fractures, particularly hip fractures. According to American Bone Health (2018), up to 24% of those aged 60 and older who experience a hip fracture will die within the first year and 40% will be unable to walk independently again, often needing long-term nursing home care.

Thankfully, osteoporotic bone changes have been shown to be responsive to programs such as PHB. With appropriate, consistent treatment, individuals can experience up to a 70% reduction in the risk of fracture.

All PHB activities and the manner in which they are presented are based on findings of published research on bone density and senior citizen wellness. As such, PHB participants can expect to experience: the regular opportunity for physical activity targeting muscle strength and bone quality; improvement in posture, balance, strength, and flexibility; reduced fear of falling, number of falls, and fall-related injuries; improved nutrition through knowledge of bone-healthy foods; strategies for dialogue with healthcare providers regarding osteoporosis prevention, diagnosis, and treatment; improved understanding of osteoporosis treatment and pharmaceutical intervention; and the opportunity for making positive personal connections and socializing.

The challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact PHB class locations, participants, and volunteers. The PHB Program Coordinator and Peer Leaders persevered in their compassionate commitment. Gradually, as public health restrictions of the pandemic eased, PHB classes could carefully resume meeting in person, restoring a much-missed interaction element.

In 2022, still practicing social distancing and mask mandates, class sizes **averaged 25 attendees** at the following locations:

- City of Trenton (bi-lingual class offering)
- Lawrenceville Senior Center
- Hamilton Public Library (2 classes)

As PHB continued to fully return to in-person classes, though facing residual effects of pandemic limitations among its participants, in 2022:

- Provided bone strengthening classes to **97 participants** – an **increase of 23%** from the previous year
- Operated with **11 active volunteers**
- Provided **832.5 volunteer hours** to the community
- Coordinated **2,107 units of service**

ICGMC continued to offer a virtual class format weekly, as it is now a permanent addition to the schedule.

- In 2022: virtual classes averaged **12 attendees**

PHB participants are monitored regularly on their progress. Our most recent participant health surveys contained the following feedback:

- 100% responded that they feel their overall health has improved as a result of this program
- 94% reported having better balance
- 94% reported being more aware of their posture
- 81 % reported an increase in strength
- 75% reported an increase in flexibility, stamina, or energy

When presented with the opportunity for additional comments, recent surveys provided the following feedback from participants:

- *“This is an excellent program. My bone density has improved since my last DEXA scan two years ago!”*
- *“I adore this program and our program leaders! Any doctor that I have requested to fill out the medical clearance form has been eager to learn more about what PHB is and encouraged more participation from their other patients.”*
- *“When I was first told I had osteoporosis, it changed my life. I was afraid to do things. Project Healthy Bones changed my life.”*
- *“It’s made a difference in my life because I am aware of the importance of exercise not only from a physical standpoint but a mental one as well.”*
- *“I am 90 years old and I can keep up with household activities and maintain a healthy lifestyle because of this class.”*
- *“I am more flexible and have more stamina. I enjoy my life better.”*