



## Project Healthy Bones 2023 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 PHB program is continually seeking expansion in new locations, more volunteer peer leaders, and additional participants. This past year, the PHB Program Coordinator and peer leaders persevered in their compassionate commitment to extend this life-changing program to as many participants of the senior community as possible.

In 2023, in-person classes were offered at **4 locations** for a total of **5 class meeting times**. The class sizes **averaged 17 attendees** at the following locations:

- City of Trenton (2 locations; 1 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 2023:

- Provided bone strengthening classes to **150 participants** – an **increase of 55%** from the previous year
- Operated with **14 active volunteers**
- Provided **820 volunteer hours** to the community
- Coordinated **2,439 units of service**

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

- In 2023: virtual classes averaged **9 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
- 81% reported having better balance
- 96% reported being more aware of their posture
- 62% are able to be more active/exercise more
- 100% reported recommending PHB to a friend or family member

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

- *“My stamina and energy levels have improved.”*
- *“I look forward to the Healthy Bones class every week!”*
- *“My osteoporosis has improved!”*
- *“I have a newfound overall physical confidence in my daily living and exercise programs.”*
- *“Increased mobility and improved balance make me less fearful of falling.”*