

# Aging Texas Well Issue Brief:

## Physical Health



*This issue brief discusses findings in the 2008 Aging Texas Well (ATW) Indicators Survey and other important research regarding health and chronic disease among aging Texans. The brief draws on state and national data sources to present an expanded perspective of the issues associated with health and the consequences of chronic disease. For more information about the survey, please see last page.*

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*While nearly 70 percent of those responding to the ATW survey rated their health as excellent, very good, or good, 88 percent reported one or more chronic health conditions.*

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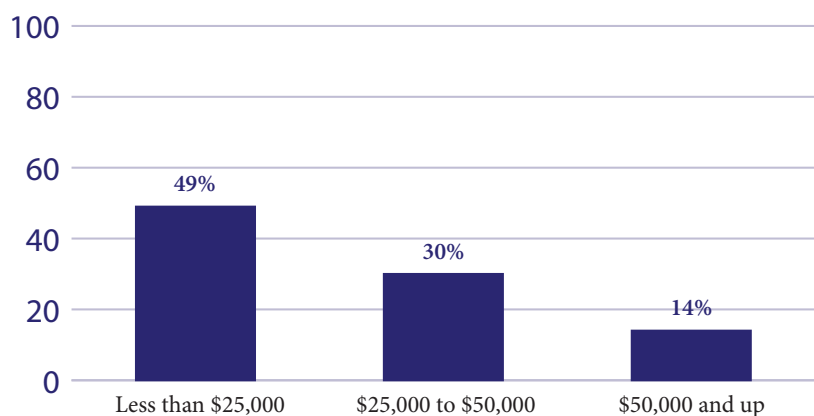
### Findings on Health

Most older Texans have positive attitudes about their health. In the ATW survey, more than 90 percent of respondents considered “taking care of your health” to be very important. Most also felt their lives were generally going well. When asked if they were, overall, aging well, 95 percent of respondents said yes. More than 90 percent also agreed that, “As I look back on my life, I am fairly well satisfied.”

About 70 percent rated their health as **excellent**, **very good**, or **good**, with 17 percent rating it **fair** and 10 percent rating it **poor**.

Self-reported good health is not consistent across the older population. The ATW survey found that women, African Americans, Hispanics and people with lower incomes were more likely to rate their health **fair** or **poor**. A recent Texas-wide report corroborates that lower incomes were associated with poorer health (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, 2009). See figure 1 (below).

**Figure 1: Percent with fair or poor health by income**



Texas Department  
of Aging and  
Disability Services

[www.dads.state.tx.us](http://www.dads.state.tx.us)

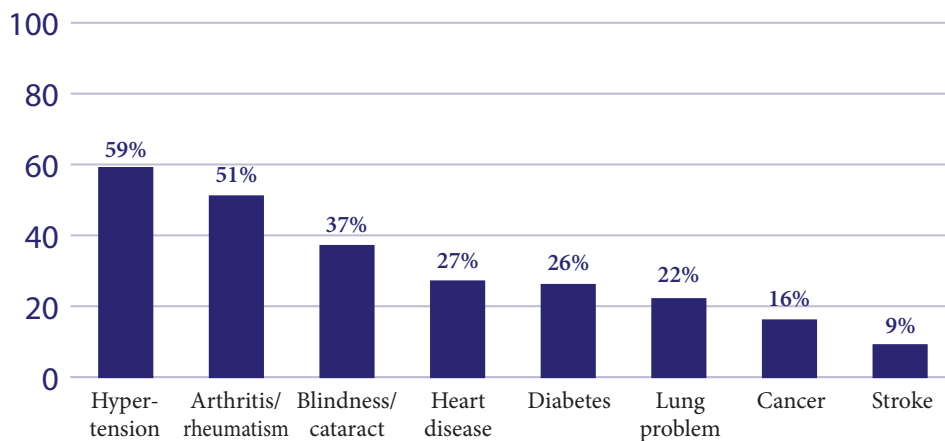
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In spite of their optimism, 88 percent of ATW survey participants report one or more chronic health conditions. While only 27 percent considered their health **fair** or **poor**, 45 percent had two or more chronic health conditions. Figure 2 (below) shows the percentage of occurrences of some of the most common chronic conditions reported by aging Texans on the ATW survey.

**Figure 2: Percent with common chronic conditions**



### Findings on Disability

Disability, defined as a health or physical limitation that keeps one from carrying out routine activities of daily life, was also addressed in the ATW survey. More than 30 percent of older Texans reported that poor physical health kept them from performing their daily activities, work, or recreation for one day or more in the past month. About a quarter reported difficulty performing one or more daily activities (e.g., driving, walking, bathing, eating, dressing, getting around inside home) due to a chronic condition.

Having a disability was found to be more common in particular segments of the aging population. For instance, females reported having a disability more frequently than males. Disability was reported less frequently by the Hispanic group than other ethnic groups, despite their higher incidence of poor health and some chronic diseases. Those with the highest incomes were the least likely to have a disability, and those with the lowest incomes were the most likely. Disability is more common among African Americans than other groups (Holmes, Powell-Griner, Lethbridge-Cejku, and Heyman, 2009). Lower levels of education were associated with higher rates of disability (Holmes, et al., 2009).

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*Lower incomes are associated with poorer health, as reported by both the Aging Texas Well survey and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey in 2009.*

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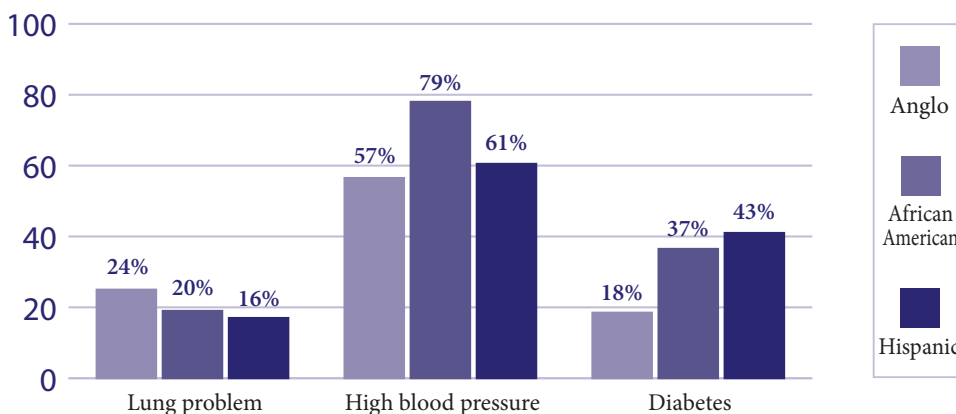
In Schoenborn and Heyman, respondents were asked about specific tasks such as walking a quarter mile, carrying 10 pounds, climbing 10 steps, standing or sitting for two hours, stooping, bending or reaching. Among the group 85 and older, a majority were unable to complete, or had serious difficulty completing, such tasks as walking a quarter mile, standing for two hours, and stooping or bending.

### Physical Health Issue Analysis

Common chronic conditions are major causes of disability and death among people over 65. The two leading causes of disability are arthritis or other musculoskeletal diseases, and heart or other circulatory problems. The six leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, and diabetes (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2006).

Health conditions that can cost older Texans their lives and independence are fairly widespread. Similar to the finding in the area of disability, the ATW survey shows that chronic conditions are not equally distributed across all population groups. Striking differences exist in the prevalence of some chronic conditions among different ethnic groups. As shown in Figure 3 (below), African Americans have the highest prevalence of high blood pressure, Hispanics have the highest prevalence of diabetes, and Anglos have the highest prevalence of lung problems.

**Figure 3: Percent with certain chronic conditions by ethnicity**



The most common lung problem is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, also called chronic lower respiratory disease. This condition includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, and is most common among Anglos.

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Several of the chronic conditions that are common in older Texans, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis, can be monitored and improved by consistent disease management practices by the patient and his or her physician. From the patient's perspective, this may mean changing diet, becoming more active physically, and complying with medication and self-management regimes. Because particular chronic conditions appear more often in minority communities, language and cultural differences between patient and health-care providers can contribute to challenges in disease management.

### Current Initiatives

Texas initiatives include programs to address the prevention of illness, promotion of healthy lifestyles and the self-management of chronic diseases. These include initiatives focused on exercise and physical activity, which research has demonstrated to be important in the management and promotion of good health, and other programs aimed at specific diseases. Three current initiatives underway in Texas to promote health, manage chronic disease and prevent illness are Texercise, Texas Healthy Lifestyles, and A Matter of Balance.

**Texercise** – a statewide health promotion program designed to educate and involve people and communities in physical activity and proper nutrition. The Texercise program promotes policies and activities that support fitness in all areas of life, including individual activities, community events, environmental changes and worksite wellness initiatives. To help people and communities create positive lifestyle changes, the Texercise program provides educational, motivational and recognition tools and resources at no charge. For more information call 1-800-889-8595 or visit [www.texercise.com](http://www.texercise.com).

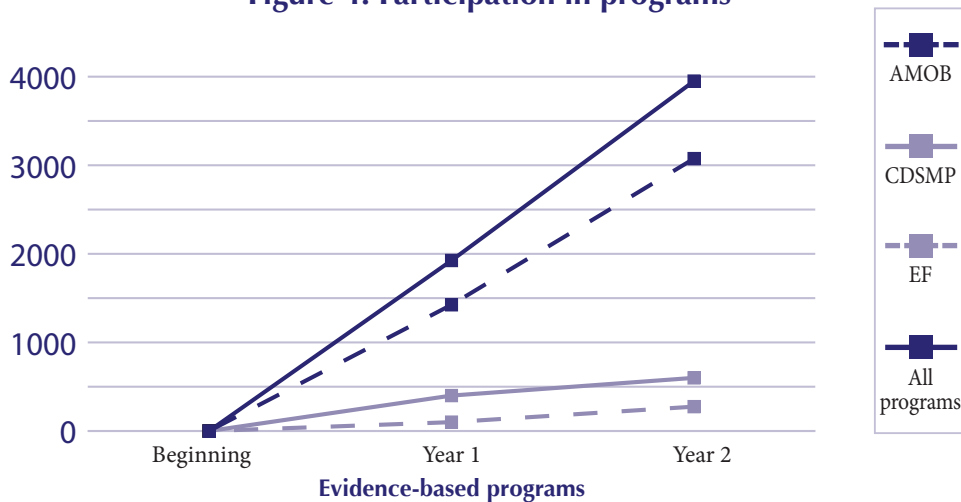
**Texas Healthy Lifestyles** – a collaboration including the Texas Department of State Health Services, DADS, the Bexar County and Brazos Valley AAAs, Neighborhood Centers, Inc. in Houston, and the evaluation team from the Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health. The project's purpose is to extend evidence-based health promotion to seniors across Texas and reduce the burden of chronic illness by incorporating a more comprehensive approach to chronic disease management. The evidence-based programs offered are Chronic Disease Self-Management Program; A Matter of Balance; EnhanceFitness; Healthy IDEAS; and Medication Management. For more information go to [www.dads.state.tx.us/services/agingtexaswell/ebased/index.cfm](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/agingtexaswell/ebased/index.cfm)

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Figure 4 (below) shows the number of participants in the three largest programs in Texas Healthy Lifestyles as of October 2009.

**Figure 4: Participation in programs**



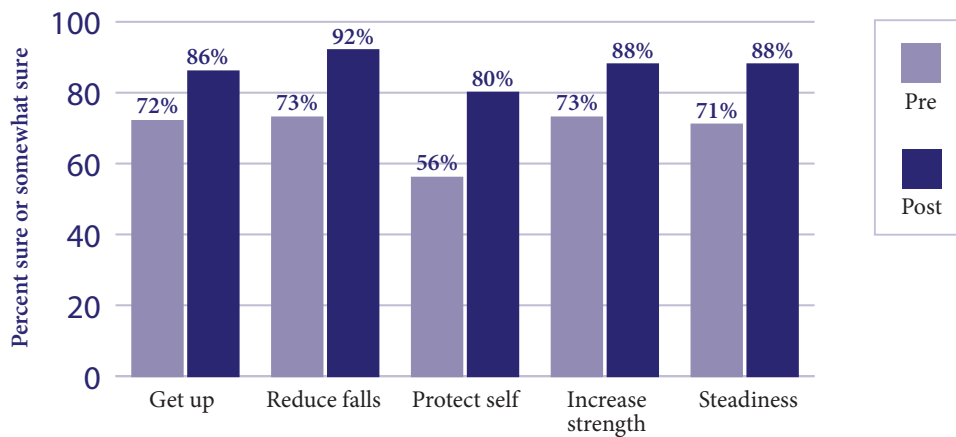
**A Matter of Balance** – an evidence-based physical health program that emphasizes practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity. Participants in small groups with trained leaders learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, change their environment to reduce fall risk factors, and exercise to increase strength and balance. DADS provides major funding for the program, which is implemented through the Texas Association of Area Agencies on Aging and has expanded to counties throughout Texas. For more information go to [www.dads.state.tx.us/qualitymatters/qcp/fall/fallpreventionbrochure.pdf](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/qualitymatters/qcp/fall/fallpreventionbrochure.pdf)

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In the Texas Matter of Balance program, preliminary data (Fig. 5, below) show an increase in the ability of participants to engage in key activities (Ory, 2009 unpublished).

**Figure 5: Participants confident of abilities**



As the growth of the older population accelerates, it will be increasingly important to prevent, diagnose, and manage the chronic conditions that can affect quality of life. New initiatives, evidence-based practices, and health promotion goals are increasingly able to reach out to older Texans so that they take greater roles in participation and self-management of their own physical health.

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## The Aging Texas Well Indicators Survey

In 2004 and 2008, Texas conducted the Aging Texas Well Indicators Survey. This survey seeks to objectively measure the status of Texans over 60 in 16 major life areas. The 2008 survey, conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of North Texas, included more than 1,000 Texans 60 and older. Only statistically significant findings are reported in these issue briefs. The full 2008 survey report is available online at [www.dads.state.tx.us/news\\_info/publications/studies/ATWIndicators2009.pdf](http://www.dads.state.tx.us/news_info/publications/studies/ATWIndicators2009.pdf)

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