

# Community Agency Preferences for and Perceptions of Disseminating and Implementing a Continence Promotion Program

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study sought to assess the perceived value of in-person and online implementation of a community-based continence promotion program among Wisconsin community agencies serving older adults.

**Methods:** Electronic surveys were administered to representatives of organizations that serve older adults and assessed their preferences and perceptions of disseminating and implementing a continence promotion program to members of their organization.

**Results:** Among 101 participants, most (68%) reported an online program would appeal to their organization, while fewer noted the appeal of an in-person program. Many considered technology a barrier but indicated the online format could improve program reach and provide privacy to women with incontinence.

**Conclusions:** Community organizations perceived incontinence as a prevalent and important issue and see advantages of in-person and online program implementation.

## BACKGROUND

More than 60% of older adult women experience incontinence, but few seek care.<sup>1,2</sup> “Mind Over Matter; Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder” (MOM) is a small-group, evidence-based continence promotion program hosted by community agencies and delivered by trained lay facilitators to prevent or improve urinary or bowel incontinence. Over 3 sessions, women 50 and older build skills

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to perform pelvic floor muscle exercises, avoid bladder irritants, improve toileting habits, optimize fiber and fluid intake, and learn how to seek care with a clinician if symptoms persist.

In 2017, six Wisconsin community agencies recruited members from their organizations to test MOM in a randomized, controlled trial. The participants in the in-person MOM program reported an 8-fold improvement in bladder symptoms and a 3-fold improvement in bowel symptoms compared to controls.<sup>3</sup> While half of the community agencies continued to provide MOM after the trial, demon-

strating the potential for sustainability, most statewide community agencies reported that they did not have the resources or scope of services to offer MOM regularly.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, women with incontinence have reported previously that they would not attend an in-person continence promotion program; however, they would be willing to participate in an online program because of the convenience and privacy.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we thus sought to understand whether community organizations, similar to those offering the in-person MOM program, would be interested in disseminating or implementing an online version.

The objectives of this study were to (1) assess the perceived value of in-person and online continence promotion programs for community agencies that serve older women, (2) gauge willingness to disseminate information about continence promotion programs, (3) understand the perceived advantages and disadvantages of continence promotion, and (4) understand community organization representatives' preferences on program delivery format (in-person vs online).

## METHODS

With input from community organization partners, we assembled a contact list of agency representatives serving older adults in Wisconsin. The list was compiled using a combination of sources, including Aging and Disability Resource Center and Aging Unit websites and email addresses supplied by community partners engaged in developing and pilot-testing the in-person MOM program. The roles of invited agency representatives varied and included specialists, coordinators, managers, and directors. In May 2019, we invited representatives via email to participate in a brief, 16-item electronic survey assembled with guidance from community organization partners. We sent email reminders to nonresponders at 2 and 4 weeks. No incentives were offered for participation.

The survey ascertained representatives' perspectives on a bladder and bowel health promotion program. Representatives could look through the MOM pilot website (<https://www.healthybowelalandbladder.org>) before answering questions. In the survey, representatives provided information regarding their (1) perceived value of an online bladder and bowel health program to their members, (2) interest in providing members with information about such an in-person or online program, (3) perceived value of the in-person or online program to their members, (4) reservations about promoting such an in-person or online program, and (5) preference on program delivery format (online, in-person with partner organization, in-person with own organization).

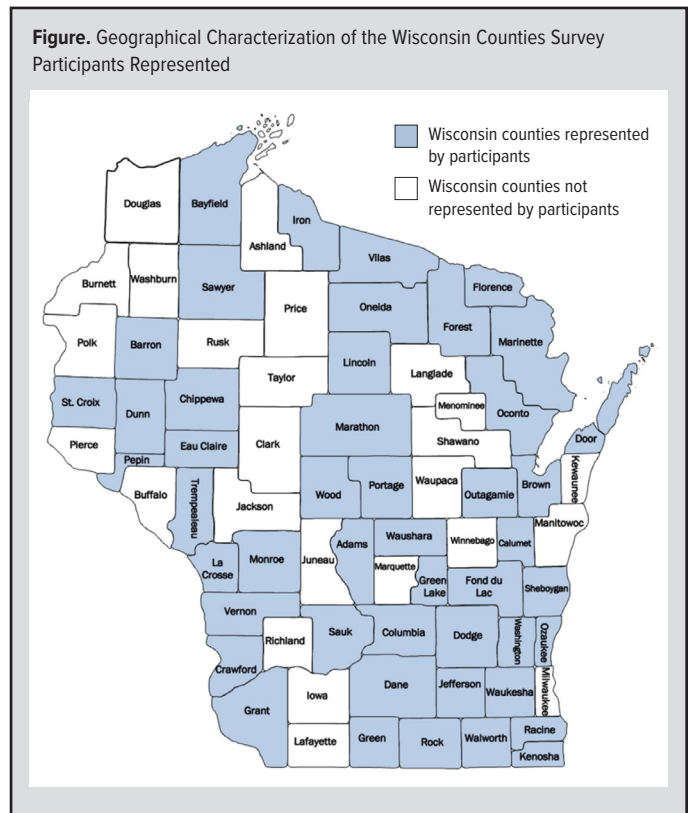
Descriptive statistics characterized representatives' preferences and perceptions of a bladder and bowel health program. Two study team members independently analyzed free-text responses for emerging themes and sorted responses into thematic groups, which 2 additional study team members reviewed. The team refined thematic groupings and resolved discrepancies through iterative discussions.

## RESULTS

Of 582 email addresses, 39 bounced back, and 543 were valid. We received responses from 101 (19%) community agency representatives. Participants represented Aging and Disability Resource Centers (42%), senior centers (22%), aging units (14%), and other similar organizations (21%) across 47 (65%) Wisconsin counties (Figure). Among those who could estimate the age distribution of their members, almost all (98%) reported that more than half were 65 years or older. The number of members served varied, ranging from less than 100 to more than 5000.

### Perceived Value of Continence Promotion Programs

Half of the participants reported their organization's members would find an online continence promotion program "very valuable," followed by 44% and 6% endorsing "somewhat valuable" and "not at all valuable," respectively (Table 1). When asked to indicate all continence promotion program formats that would appeal to



their community organization, most participants reported that an online program would be appealing (80%), followed by an in-person program hosted by a partner agency (65%) and an in-person program offered by their organization (38%).

### Willingness to Disseminate Information About Continence Promotion Programs

Most participants (87%) reported that their organization is currently engaged in electronic or online outreach, and almost all participants (95%) were interested in providing their members with information about an online bladder and bowel health program (Table 2). Participants reported they would be most likely to disseminate information about an online program through paper flyers or brochures, announcements in written newsletters, and promotions on their organizations' websites and social media platforms.

A third of the participants reported reservations about promoting an online bladder and bowel health program, including concerns about the lack of computer or Internet access among members, lack of familiarity with the program and its results, and concerns that organization staff could not effectively field questions. A few participants reported perceptions that the program or related messaging would be unpopular, cause embarrassment, increase stigma, or generate complaints.

### Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Community-based Continence Promotion

Table 3 outlines the advantages and disadvantages of commu-

nity-based continence promotion programs as recognized by representatives for their organization and members. The need for education about bladder and bowel health among older adults was a common sentiment, because many participants recognized incontinence as a prevalent health condition among the population served by their organizations. Participants also opined that community-based continence promotion programs may help overcome the stigma surrounding incontinence, as they can aid in initiating the discussion.

Many representatives interested in offering in-person programs noted that health promotion aligned with their organization's mission and scope of services. Others said an in-person program would be well-suited for their members but preferred that the program be offered by a partner organization due to resource limitations. Some participants who said offering health promotion programs did not fall within their organization's scope of services still expressed willingness to promote the program.

### Preferences on Program Delivery Format

Some participants expressed concerns that an online platform could present barriers for older women, as they may not have access to computers or the Internet, while simultaneously recognizing the potential for online resources to reach a broad audience (Table 4). Furthermore, despite the potential advantages of an online program, the perception that many older adults prefer in-person activities persisted. Several comments indicated that in-person activities would appeal to older adults' desire to learn while reducing social isolation.

## DISCUSSION

In this survey of 101 representatives from community agencies serving older adults in Wisconsin, most participants perceived continence promotion as valuable and relevant to their organization and members. Participants were interested in an online program, and most were willing to advertise it to their members. Few were interested in providing an in-person program through their organization, and many who valued it preferred that it be sponsored and organized by a partner organization.

**Table 1.** Perceived Value of and Format Preferences for a Bladder and Bowel Health Program

Perceptions of a Bladder and Bowel Health Program Questions	n	%
Do you believe an online bladder and bowel health program would be valuable to your members? (N=94)		
No, not at all	6	6
Yes, somewhat valuable	41	44
Yes, very valuable	47	50
Which of the following bladder and bowel health program options would appeal to your organization? (N=84) (Select all that apply) <sup>a</sup>		
An in-person program offered by my organization	32	38
An in-person program offered by a partner organization	55	65
An online program that does not require maintenance from my organization	68	80
None of these programs would appeal to my organization	4	5
Which bladder and bowel health program option would be most appealing to your organization? (N=81)		
An in-person program offered by my organization	7	9
An in-person program offered by a partner organization	22	27
An online program that does not require maintenance from my organization	33	41
Both online and in-person programs appeal equally to my organization	19	23

<sup>a</sup>The percentages do not sum to 100%, as community organization representatives were able to select more than 1 response.

**Table 2.** Willingness to Disseminate Information About Bladder and Bowel Health Programs

Bladder and Bowel Health Program Outreach Questions	n	%
Does your organization currently offer any electronic outreach? (N=76)		
Yes	66	87
No	9	12
Not sure	1	1
Would your organization be interested in providing your members with information about an online bladder and bowel health program? (N=89)		
No, not at all interested	5	6
Yes, somewhat interested	30	34
Yes, definitely interested	54	61
Which would your organization use to share information about an online bladder and bowel health program with your members? <sup>a</sup> (N=95)		
Paper flyers or brochures	65	68
Announcements in our meetings	30	32
Announcements in distributed community bulletins or schedules	37	39
Announcement in our written newsletter	56	59
Announcement in our electronic newsletter	36	38
Promotion on our website	49	52
Promotion on social media	53	56
Other platforms	14	15
We would not promote this program	5	5

<sup>a</sup>The percentages do not sum to 100%, as community organization representatives were able to select more than 1 response.

Our results suggest that community agencies serving older adults would be willing to balance the benefits and drawbacks of online continence promotion programs. Participants perceived that technology may present a challenging learning curve for their organizations' members; however, they were still willing to offer the program as it could improve reach and access. More recently, due to COVID-19, several studies found that older adults have increased their use of technology to meet their health needs.<sup>6-8</sup> Sixsmith et al administered the same technology use questionnaire in 2019 and 2020. They found older adults were signifi-

**Table 3.** Community Agency Representatives' Perceptions of Community-based Continence Promotion

Domain	Theme	Description	Exemplars
Need for education about bladder and bowel health	Information equals power	Education is a way to empower older adults to take active roles in improving their health.	"Any way we can help older women help themselves to have a better quality of life is of interest to our senior center."
	Prevalence	Representatives recognized incontinence as a common health issue among aging populations.	"I think this is an issue that affects many women, and it is beneficial for them to know that others are going through the same thing."
	Fills unmet needs	Despite its prevalence, incontinence is an under-addressed issue that many women have no venue to discuss.	"Many women suffer silently with this and isolate themselves. If they can start to learn how to prevent and live with this issue it will only improve their lives moving forward."
Stigma	Initiating the discussion (stigma)	Many women feel embarrassed, do not seek care, and do not discuss their incontinence with clinicians.	"Some women may be uncomfortable speaking with their health care professional but might access a website for information."
Organizational fit	Scope of services	Representatives noted health promotion was (or was not) within their organization's scope of services.	"Our organization is not directly responsible for health promotion."
	Alignment with mission	Representatives commented on program alignment (or lack thereof) with their organization's mission.	"That is what we are here for – to provide information and resources to enhance the lives of older adults."
	Lack of resources	Many representatives reported that resource or staffing limitations would make it difficult for their organization to offer a program independently.	"I am a single employee and cannot do it all and do it all well."

**Table 4.** Community Agency Representatives' Preferences for Delivery Format

Domain	Theme	Description	Exemplars
Stigma	Privacy	The online platform would allow people to engage confidentially and keep health information private.	"For a potentially embarrassing issue such as incontinence, one may not want to meet in a group. Many seniors are tech-savvy now and could learn from the online version."
Technology	Technological literacy	Some older adults have limited technological literacy, while a younger group of older adults is more interested in and connected to the Internet.	"Lots of incontinence out there but not as much computer literacy as one might like." "The younger generation of seniors (Baby Boomers) would definitely benefit from the online program."
	Access to electronic resources	Many older adults lack access to Internet services and Internet-connected devices. At the same time, the online platform has the potential to reach a broader audience compared to in-person activities.	"It's great information but many older women do not use the Internet or web-based products. So, many women who may find this useful will be missed." "Some of the women in our community are unable to take the Mind Over Matter seminar but will be able to do the online program. For those who work, do caregiving, do not have transportation, and cannot attend a workshop or are just simply uncomfortable in a group setting."
Member preferences	In-person preference	Many older adults prefer in-person activities and benefit from social contact.	"[Older adults] also prefer to have a face-to-face presentation so they are able to ask questions."

cantly more likely to use computers and smartphones to communicate online. Furthermore, most older adults stated they would continue to utilize technology after COVID-19 social distancing restrictions were lifted.<sup>6</sup>

Using a convenience sample limits this study as it may not represent all community organizations or their employees, and those most likely to support an online continence promotion program are more likely to have responded to this survey. Those who did participate offered their perceptions of what would be valuable and relevant to their members. The global pandemic beginning in 2020 has almost certainly changed the landscape for older adults and the organizations serving them; however, these results provide a roadmap for future health promotion programming delivery.

## CONCLUSIONS

Most community agency representatives perceived that a continence promotion program would be valuable to their members and reported that they would be willing to promote such a program. Although most representatives preferred to implement an online program that did not require maintenance from their organization, many identified both advantages and disadvantages of an online program for their members. The advantages of an online program included the unmet need for bladder and bowel health education, accessibility, and privacy. Representatives noted several disadvantages to an online program for their members, including a lack of access to electronic resources, reduced social interaction, and challenges with technological literacy. Although the continence promotion program initially was developed as an in-person

program, community organizations would prefer an online delivery, aligning with the preferences of women with incontinence. Future research should focus on developing an online continence promotion program and exploring other in-person health promotion programs to determine if an online format would be more optimal.

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