

# **Encouraging the elderly to be active. Prolonging their autonomy and their quality of life**

## **Summary report of the MeetMove project, Brussels, October 2016**

Several findings led to the development of the the MeetMove project. It is the outcome of a joint effort by two not-for-profit associations, namely GymSana and 1toit2âges<sup>1</sup> with the support of Innoviris “Labs innovative Brussels Care” and *Proeftuin Zorginnovatieruimte Vlaanderen* (Actief Zorgzame Buurt platform):

- the sedentarisation of our society, with the resulting explosion of the risks of chronic disease (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, depression and so on), having a significant impact on public health and government budgets. Faced with this problem, it is obvious that promoting regular physical activity is vital;
- an ageing population, meaning one of the most important challenges our society faces is the continued wellbeing and health of the elderly;
- a proven link between the health<sup>2</sup> of the elderly and their participation in society (social, cultural, physical activities and so on).

Increased autonomy, better self-esteem, a reduction of depression and limiting the decline of the cognitive and motor skills of the elderly: the MeetMove<sup>3</sup> study proves what many have already surmised namely that “if the many benefits of exercise could be condensed in one single pill, it would be the most prescribed pill in the world<sup>4</sup>”.

So how can we transpose the conclusion of this scientific study to daily life? In the absence of this magic pill, we can rely on a leveraging tool with a multiplier effect, namely collective courses of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) for the elderly and the chronically ill.

We worked in five stages: 1) evaluation of the impact of APA on the health of elderly persons; 2) analysis of the obstacles and motivations that prevent or encourage the participation of elderly persons in activities; 3) the development of APA standards and a training course for future APA trainers; 4) research and development of innovative APAs for the elderly; 5) information and raising the awareness of public and private stakeholders about the public health benefits of APAs.

### **1) Evaluation of the impact of regular and collective exercise on the elderly**

Under the supervision of Professors Stéphane Baudry and Malgorzata Klass (ULB), the MeetMove evaluation protocol monitored 70 elderly subjects over an 18-month period<sup>5</sup>, publishing its results in September 2016. The study demonstrated that regular and collective

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gymsana.be](http://www.gymsana.be), [www.1toit2ages.be](http://www.1toit2ages.be)

<sup>2</sup> *La santé de l'homme – les déterminants socio-environnementaux de la santé des aînés, Revue de l'Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour la santé n°411, France 2011*

<sup>3</sup> *MeetMove study, Stéphane Baudry, Ph.D, Laboratory of Applied Biology, and Malgorzata Klass, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Faculty of Motor Science, Université Libre de Bruxelles, September 2016.*

<sup>4</sup> Sallis, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Longitudinal study of two groups of elderly people (training group and control group) with different motor skills: without dementia and without trouble walking; without dementia and with trouble walking; with dementia.*

exercise helps **increase the motor autonomy of the elderly** as well as **reducing feelings of depression, thereby limiting the decline of their cognitive and motor skills**. It highlights the relevance of physical activity consisting of a combination of exercises designed **to improve balance, build muscle strength, and correct and refine body mapping**.

## 2) Analysing the social participation of the elderly, obstacles and motivation

We also analysed **how the elderly participate in social activities** in the Brussels-Capital Region. The sociologist Luc Van Campenhoudt<sup>6</sup> wrote a preface to this study, which focused more specifically on the **obstacles and motivation of the elderly for participating in an activity outside the home**. The analysis had three stages: a qualitative study of a group of 31 elderly persons; an audit of professionals in health care, social assistance and assistance to the elderly and a non-exhaustive study of the scientific literature.

We found that in Belgium and in Brussels the elderly are **among the most vulnerable segment of the population when it comes to access to physical activity**. Causes mainly include problems in terms of mobility, isolation, financial precariousness, a lack of motivation and information or even society's views on "ageism". Some of the primary factors that motivate the elderly to exercise include **social contact, fun, well-being and health** and the importance of feeling like you really are part of society, in particular due to co-creation.

## 3) Developing Adapted Physical Activity programmes

The MeetMove study and the integration of other scientific studies<sup>7</sup> helped **improve, professionalise and standardise<sup>8</sup> collective APA courses**, including fall prevention, seated gym or Alzheimer gym workshops. Other initiatives, in line with the needs and expectations of the chronically ill (diabetes, Parkinson, etc.) will soon follow. **Innovative activities** (game of the goose, Dalcroze eurhythmics, geocaching or PASS/Health and Exercise course for the elderly) will also allow this target group "to exercise while having fun".

***Never has a society been so sedentary as ours. The elderly especially are confronted with specific obstacles when it comes to increased social participation and activities outside the home. If we tackle certain defining factors, of a behavioural or environmental nature, it is possible to bring about significant change. The MeetMove study will allow us to do this.***

***In light of our ageing society and the expected explosion of chronic illness, the promotion and organisation of APAs could prolong our quality of life and life expectancy as well as avoid an excessive increase of public health expenditure. The MeetMove study offers professionals in healthcare, social action and assistance to the elderly, a series of solutions and actions that can be taken in the field, namely collective courses of Adapted Physical Activity (APA). This tool is at their disposal.***

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Emeritus, Université Saint-Louis (Brussels) and Université catholique de Louvain.

<sup>7</sup> Review of scientific literature available on request from GymSana.

<sup>8</sup> The courses summaries, training course, course programmes and proposals for programmes of innovative APAs are available on request from Gymsana.