



# Keep Well Program (North Shore Keep Well Society)

<http://www.keepwellsociety.ca/>

## PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

<b>Type of Program</b>	Health and Wellness
<b>Organization</b>	North Shore Keep Well Society
<b>Community Served</b>	North Shore (North and West Vancouver)
<b>Program Goal</b>	Encourages seniors to keep well by leading active and independent lives
<b>Services Provided</b>	Weekly 2 hour drop-in fitness program and wellness activities (blood pressure monitoring and health coaching, massage, weight checks, nutrition and pharmacy consults, and information and referral) at 7 sites across the North Shore
<b>Target Population</b>	Mobile seniors 55+
<b>Staffing</b>	1 part-time coordinator, 1 part-time fitness instructor (staff) and contract fitness instructor
<b>Program Strengths</b>	Offer free fitness programs; Incorporates wellness and social aspects; Multiple sites across the North Shore; Strong support of staff, volunteers, members, and community; Longevity of program

## Program Description

Keep Well combines a fitness program with wellness activities. The first Keep Well Program was established in 1987 at the North Shore Neighbourhood House, as a result of local seniors wanting a program to support them to stay healthy and lead active and independent lives. While only three participants attended the first drop-in session, word spread quickly, and by the following year the program had expanded to three different sites. In 1991, the North Shore Keep Well Society was incorporated, and Keep Well is now in its 29th year.

Currently, Keep Well operates out of an office at Delbrook Community Centre and offers programs at seven sites across the North Shore, mainly at recreation/community facilities and seniors housing complexes. These sites provide space and some supplies for the program free of charge, and some sites also help with promotion and provide other assistance. Each site offers a drop-in Keep Well Program once a week throughout the year (though in the summer the program is run less frequently) that consists of approximately one hour of mild exercise (led by a certified fitness instructor), followed by wellness activities such as blood pressure monitoring, health coaching and massage. Some sites also offer weight checks, nutrition and pharmacy consultations, as well as information and referral services. Guest speakers, social events, and coffee/snacks are offered from time to time depending on the site. The Keep Well Programs are offered free of charge in order to ensure all seniors are able to participate, though many participants will make a small donation each week to support the program. Participants are also encouraged to become members of the North Shore Keep Well Society.

The program is run by 90 volunteers, a volunteer board, and two staff – a part-time coordinator and a part-time fitness instructor, as well as contract fitness instructors. Volunteers, some of whom are retired health professionals, assist with a number of different activities such as check-ins, tracking site statistics, providing

massages, blood pressure monitoring, and pharmacy/nutrition consultations. Each site has a designated site coordinator who is a volunteer and puts in 2 to 4 hours a week to coordinate and keep track of the activities at their site. Keep Well has training manuals and provides specific training for the site coordinators and board members. They also offer optional workshops for volunteers in areas such as massage, CPR, and blood pressure monitoring.

The current budget for the program is approximately \$60,000 and the cost to run the program is estimated at \$260-270 per participant per year. About one quarter of the funding comes from donations from participants, either as small donations that participants make each week when they participate, or as larger donations to the organization. Vancouver Coastal Health provides funding that varies from year to year – this past year they provided approximately \$10,000 to the program. Keep Well also receives support from PARC Retirement Living and from local organizations such as foundations, local service clubs and the three North Shore municipalities. The amount of funding, and where it comes from, varies from year to year.

## Impact

Keep Well provides opportunities for seniors to remain active, engaged, and socially active. Some participants enjoy the program so much that they attend multiple drop-in sites during a week. The program has approximately 510 members total, and about 260 of the members regularly attend the program once a week. The Keep Well Program keeps detailed records of program participation, and over September 2015 to August 2016 there were more than 11,000 participant visits. Over this time, they also conducted 2,219 blood pressure checks, 1,599 shoulder massages, 123 weight/nutrition checks, and 41 guest speakers/discussions.

In 2007, a major evaluation of the Keep Well program was conducted, comprising of interviews with staff (n=2), volunteers (n=15), and participants (n=47).<sup>1</sup> A total of 77% of participants were found to attend the program at least once a week, and 19% attend more than once a week. The median amount of time participants had been involved in the program was 6 years (range of 3 months to 20 years). Participants reported fitness, social activity, awareness of community resources, and relaxation as the top benefits. Participants noted the high demand for the program and they requested more resources (more sessions, more space, more activities, etc.). Keep Well was found to have an important social component, and 78% of participants reported they had made new friends through the program.

*“Keep Well is joy time for me. [The fitness instructor’s] gymnastic leadership for us seniors is fun and the music is chosen for our generation...After our hug with our friends we are often treated to healthy foods, grains and fruits are made into delicious morsels to taste...The nurses with a delightful sense of humor take our blood pressure and we can also weigh ourselves. Quite often we get a speaker with an interesting topic to wind down the Keep Well experience. All these goodies are organized by our volunteer leaders. THANK YOU! I do hope I can go for a long time to Keep Well. It’s my sport!”*

-Letter from Program Participant to  
Keep Well

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<sup>1</sup> See Ames, E. (2007). *The North Shore Keep Well Program*. Evaluation Report Prepared for the North Shore Keep Well Society.

## Strengths and Challenges

Keep Well is a longstanding program that is highly successful in keeping participants engaged and committed. Some participants have been attending the program for over twenty years and participants are encouraged to continue to attend even if their ability to participate in the fitness portion of the program declines. Many participants have aged with the program, and the average age of the participants has increased over time. The central appeals of the program are the free fitness class and the opportunities for socialization. People also really like the main fitness instructor, who has been trained to deliver seniors' fitness programs, and this is one of the reasons why the fitness classes are so popular.

The Keep Well Program is supported by a strong complement of board members, volunteers, and staff who have been instrumental in ensuring the program's sustainability. In the past, Vancouver Coastal Health was the primary funder of the Keep Well programs, providing approximately \$72,000 in funding a year, but in 2009 this funding was cut off. This presented a significant challenge for the program and during this time they had to lay off staff and the President and Board Members had to step in and take over responsibility for many of the day-to-day operations and coordination activities. Due to the leadership and commitment of the Keep Well Society board and volunteers, the program was able to overcome this challenge and new funding was secured. Keep Well was able to recover from a significant funding cut and diversify its sources of funding, but as a result it now relies more heavily on donations and grant funding which is less stable, can be time consuming to apply for, and in the case of grants, often cannot be used to fund administrative operations.

Due to the high level of demand for the Keep Well programs, Keep Well would like to expand to more locations, but they are facing several challenges including finding new recreation facilities where the program can be held, securing available times to run the program and difficulty in recruiting specialized fitness instructors. Keep Well is also in need of more storage space for their equipment and supplies at some sites. Many recreation/community facilities struggle with space themselves for their own programs, which makes it difficult to find new locations or expand at the current locations. This challenge highlights the need for increased investment in recreation and community infrastructure.

The award-winning Keep Well programs is extremely popular with seniors on the North Shore. The programs are attended primarily by women, and Keep Well is looking at ways to encourage more men to participate. Keep Well also wants to diversify their participants, and as such, have translated some of the program materials into Farsi to improve their reach to the large Persian community on the North Shore.