



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arthritis Is Leading Cause Of Disability In Maryland *'Baby Boomer' generation starts to feel its age*

BALTIMORE, MD (January 26, 2007) – More than half of Maryland residents over the age of 65 are affected by arthritis, a painful disease that includes more than 100 conditions that cause pain, inflammation and stiffness in joints, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). It is the leading cause of disability in Maryland and results in billions of lost wages and medical expenses each year.

In response, in 1999 the department launched the Maryland Arthritis Project, an initiative designed to reduce the physical and financial burden of the chronic disease. Based in DHMH's Office of Health Promotion, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded project offers arthritis self-help classes throughout the state, collects and analyzes data about arthritis in Maryland, distributes arthritis resources to health care providers, and promotes public awareness of the disease.

“Teaching arthritis sufferers how to make lifestyle changes is an effective and non-invasive way to manage this chronic condition,” said Joan Stine, director of the Office of Health Promotion. “We sponsor Arthritis Foundation Self-Help classes to show participants how physical activity can relieve pain and improve energy levels. These classes have been shown to reduce arthritis-related pain by 20 percent and decrease doctor visits by 40 percent.”

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According to figures released in this month's CDC Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report (www.cdc.gov/mmwr), Marylanders incurred nearly \$2.5 billion in medical expenses and lost earnings in 2003. Maryland and the nation have borne escalating costs since 1997, due in part to the aging of the Post World War II population explosion known as the 'Baby Boomer' generation. Increasing rates of obesity and physical inactivity, both known risk factors for the disease, have also contributed to the increase in costs.

People with arthritis include those with osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and other rheumatic conditions, such as lupus erythematosus, gout, bursitis, and carpal tunnel disease.

For more information about the Maryland Arthritis Project, please visit our Web site at www.marylandarthritis.org. Additional information about the self-help course or other questions about arthritis, are available by contacting the Arthritis Foundation Maryland Chapter at 1-800-365-3811.

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