



Case Study:

West Virginia University

Community outreach program uses Call-Em-All voice messaging to relay health tips to older adults

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— Elaine Bowen,
Extension Specialist,
West Virginia University

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Overview

To address issues of rural health and health-seeking behavior of older adults, West Virginia University Extension Service (WVU-ES) started a community outreach initiative, called “Taking Charge of Your Health & Safety.” Designed to motivate older adults to proactively manage their health on a daily basis, the program hosts educational programs conducted by university Extension Educators and trained community leaders.

Problem

Even though the “Taking Charge” programs were successful in engaging older adults and advocating healthy behaviors, **WVU-ES wanted to further reinforce health habits that seniors learned at each program.**

“One of the main program goals was to make sure that seniors were practicing the health behaviors we were presenting during our workshops,” said Elaine Bowen, Extension Specialist—Health Promotion for West Virginia University. “We used take-home materials, such as magnets, dry erase boards, and stretch bands to keep our messages fresh in the minds of our participating seniors. Even though these things were helpful, **we knew that seniors liked to receive phone calls, because they feel more personal.**”

Solution

Starting in April 2009, WVU-ES began using Call-Em-All’s voice messaging platform to send weekly messages containing health tips and reminders to more than 600 seniors who opted in to receive the calls.

Each call was written and recorded by a WVU-ES Extension educator and consisted of a one-minute message offering tips and advice on everything from staying active and eating healthy to preventing falls. Using the Call-Em-All platform to record calls several months in advance, WVU was able to create a detailed schedule of when each call would be placed.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. **A survey of program participants found that more than 95 percent of seniors listened to the message at least one time. Of those, nearly 88.5 percent tried out the tip contained in the message.**

“The feedback was astounding,” says Bowen. “We had a number of seniors tell us that they now schedule their day in order to hear the messages. They’re even saving them to share with friends and family.”