

## **Aging Stronger In Rural Oklahoma**

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Preventable health conditions among Oklahomans are among the worst in the United States. For instance, compared to ~34% nationally, ~40% of Oklahoman adults are obese and Oklahoma ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> for worst physical activity habits and fruit and vegetable consumption. These strongly drive Oklahoman's heart disease prevalence, which leads the nation and is costly. As such, Oklahomans battle many health disparities, and our rapidly aging population is among the most affected. For instance, Oklahoma ranks among the five worst states to age in, and nearly 30% of Oklahomans aged >65 years experienced a fall in 2020. Furthermore, the risk for falls and loss of independence is greater in rural Oklahoma communities than in metro areas; however, effective interventions to combat age-related declines in rural Oklahoma are lacking.

The Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (SSSH) program is an evidence-based, resistance training intervention tailored for community-dwelling older adults to combat age-related declines. It has a history of being highly accessible for aging adults living in both urban and rural communities across the US and is backed by substantial scientific evidence demonstrating it improves factors associated with fall risk, such as lower body strength, balance, and flexibility in just eight weeks. This project will use a community-centered participatory research model to first, conduct focus groups and interviews with aging adults and key county stakeholders. These activities will allow the citizens to express their priorities, barriers, and facilitators to engaging in programs like SSSH. Data from these interviews and focus groups will be used to identify significant roadblocks and allow for community-driven solutions to enable SSSH offerings. Next, we will provide and evaluate SSSH programming in Greer, Harmon, Jackson, and Tillman counties. This will include pre/post assessments of fall risk and functional health, post-SSSH focus groups, and interviews to create community-sourced solutions for ensuring that future programs can be offered sustainably. This proposal will create a lasting community-academic partnership that spans aging adults, community stakeholders, Extension Educators, researchers, and OSU students. Together, we will gain an understanding of the unique challenges these rural counties face while jointly creating solutions for improved rural Oklahomans' health.