Including Older Adults in Research: Challenges and Strategies for Recruitment
Who are considered “older adults”?

• Individuals aged 65 and older are considered “older adults”
  • This group of individuals can range from 65 to over 100 years old

• “Older adults” is one of the fastest growing age groups
  • There are an estimated 47.8 million Americans ages 65 and older, that is 14.9% of the total population
  • This age group grew by 1.6 million people from the year before
  • It is estimated this number will be 72 million by 2030 and 98.2 million by 2060
  • People in this age group will comprise nearly 1 in 4 U.S. residents

• As our population ages, it becomes increasingly important to include the older age ranges in research, especially those 80 to 100+ years old

*U.S. Census Bureau (2016). "The Older Population in the U.S."
Why is it important to include older adults?

• Our bodies react differently as we age. To fully understand how drugs, medical devices, therapies, surgical procedures, and tests work, it is important to include all age groups.

• Many diseases are common in older people, yet little research has been done in older ages.

• Many diseases are distinctly different in older adults, yet haven’t been studied in these age groups.

• Clinicians caring for older adults, particularly those from diverse populations, have little evidence to guide their care.
What are some challenges to including older adults?

• Study inclusion and exclusion criteria:
  • Limited age range (ex. “Individuals aged 18-55 years old”)
  • Comorbidities excluded
  • Certain mobility level required

• Recruitment and retention methods

• Transportation concerns

• Need for study adaptability
So, how do we overcome these challenges?

Evaluate and redesign the study protocol if needed or able to
• Is the inclusion age range reflective of the disease demographics?
• Can certain study procedures be adapted to match participant’s diverse ability levels?
• Are measurement tools structured in a way that are readable (ex. font type or size in surveys)?
• Is there any part of the study that would exclude older adults and not for ethical or scientific reasons?

Plan for appropriate resources
• Think about the time, staff, resources and finances you will need to recruit older adults into your study
• Include these items in your study budget, planning and timelines

Use multiple recruitment methods
• Email campaigns
• Postings on social media
• Community newsletters
• Electronic Health Records (EHR)
• Printed materials (ex. flyers) in healthcare spaces (ex. waiting rooms)
• Physician referrals
• Disease associations (ex. American Cancer Society, Alzheimer’s Association)
• Community outreach – engage with local gyms, community centers, coffee shops/meal sites, places of worship, independent living and retirement communities
• Be visible in the community - trust matters! Attend local festivals, health fairs, give talks at senior centers
• Partner with community agencies like Area Agencies on Aging
Put retention methods in place

- Reminder phone call or postcard about upcoming study visits
- Consent family member/caregiver (proxy) so can include them in study communication and so that the participant can remain in the study if they lose capacity during it
- Send regular newsletters, share study results, send greeting cards, to keep subjects informed and engaged

Overcome transportation issues

- Consider using car services, vouchers for rideshares or taxis, or having home visits to meet transportation needs
- New services, like Uber Health and Lyft Concierge, have been launched to expedite patient transportation
- According to the FDA, “reimbursement for travel expenses (airfare, parking, lodging, etc) not considered ‘undue influence’ and ‘generally accepted’”
Tip #1: Allow plenty of time—recruiting older adults can be a slow process.

Tip #2: Adapt recruitment materials to the right font color, type, size, etc. to make it reader friendly.

Tip #3: When creating the study budget, don’t forget to include transportation costs and other extra study needs.

Tip #4: Engage experts to assist in study design.
Where can I find more information on including older adults in research?

National Institute on Aging (NIA)  
https://www.nia.nih.gov/

Recruiting Older Adults into Research (ROAR) Toolkit  
https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/recruiting-older-adults-research-roar-toolkit

CDC Healthy Aging Program  
https://www.cdc.gov/aging/about/index.htm

Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)  
https://www.pcori.org/research-in-action/bringing-older-adults-voices-research

OHSU C. Rex and Ruth H. Layton Aging & Alzheimer’s Disease Center  
https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/health/services/brain/getting-treatment/diagnosis/alzheimers-aging-dementia/research/index.cfm

OHSU Healthy Aging Alliance  
https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/healthy-aging-alliance/

Oregon Center for Aging & Technology (ORCATECH)  
https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/centers-institutes/orcatech/
For more information, additional resources, and to request a recruitment consultation, please visit our website at https://www.ohsu.edu/octri or email us at octrirecruitment@ohsu.edu