



# Checklist for Managing Your CCRC Fitness Center Liability

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Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) have protocols in place to reduce the risk of falls in the community in common areas, hallways, residences, outdoor spaces, etc. They also have protocols in place for responding to medical, weather, and fire-related emergencies in all of these areas. Oftentimes, CCRCs feel these protocols established for the community as a whole will be enough to manage their liability in operating a fitness center as well. However, a fitness center within a CCRC should not be viewed as simply another common area for residents as it presents its own unique liability standards to the community.

Many companies don't recognize the need to manage their organizational liability associated with their fitness center until it is too late. As CCRCs evaluate and broaden their fitness offerings to residents, they should also review their risk-management protocols for the community fitness center. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) is the governing body over fitness center management standards. Many of the same policies, procedures, and guidelines that are applicable to commercial fitness centers are also applicable to CCRC fitness programs. The ACSM publishes comprehensive resource to help establish and manage these guidelines, called ACSM's Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines. Read on to discover whether your community could benefit from reviewing this resource from the ACSM and learn what other steps your community can take to improve your fitness program's quality standards.

Begin by evaluating the current status of your program:

- What steps, if any, are currently being taken to manage our organizational liability in the fitness center, the pool, and the group exercise classes?
- What gaps are there in the management of our liability? Who is in charge of operations in the fitness center and is that person equipped to identify those gaps?
- If that experience is there, does that individual have the time and resources available to routinely control the liability of our program? Is that within his or her job description with the community?
- If we are managing our liability well, are we maximizing the marketing potential that these professional standards bring to our community?

Many communities may not know where to begin in this evaluation process. For more details about the major components of managing your organizational liability, see the abbreviated checklist below. Utilize this checklist to evaluate the current practices within your fitness program and identify any areas of improvement your community can begin working on to establish new standards for the program.

### **Membership Paperwork Standards**

Are all participants completing a thorough health history questionnaire that is being evaluated by a qualified fitness professional?

- Are all participants signing a comprehensive waiver and release of liability?
- Are all participants receiving a medical release from their physician before engaging in physical activity in the community?

### **Orientation Standards**

Are all participants completing a new member orientation appointment to the fitness program and receiving education on the available services, safety procedures, and facility guidelines?

- Are all participants being educated on general exercise for an older adult population?

#### **Follow-up Appointments**

- Are all members receiving an individualized exercise prescription based on their health history and medical release?
- Is this exercise prescription being reevaluated at appropriate intervals to ensure the resident's safety and timely progression?

#### **Qualified Personnel**

- Do group fitness instructors hold the appropriate certifications and are they teaching within their scope of practice?
- Do exercise specialists and personal trainers hold the appropriate certifications and are they providing service(s) within their scope of practice?

#### **Equipment Maintenance**

- Is the equipment routinely cleaned and serviced to ensure optimal and safe performance for resident use?
- Is the equipment arranged and spaced appropriately for safe access by residents?
- Are the steps taken to ensure equipment and facility maintenance properly documented?

#### **Facility Audits**

- Are the emergency procedures in place in the facility routinely inspected, rehearsed, and documented by the staff?

#### **Safeguarding Procedures**

- Are policies in place to ensure proper communication and storage of personal health information of residents?

The development and management of a comprehensive quality assurance program can be a daunting task—particularly if your fitness program is not structured to support it. Commonly, a community will hire group fitness instructors and personal trainers to offer services to their residents. However, their scope of practice and qualifications often do not lend much more to the community than their group fitness instruction and personal training skills. This can leave the community in the position in which the need for managing a thorough quality assurance has been identified, but there is no one to delegate it to. A qualified and degreed fitness manager overseeing the

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community's fitness program can oversee everything involved in a thorough quality-assurance program in addition to instruction of group exercise classes, pool programming, individual appointments, senior fitness testing, incentive and wellness programming, and much more under one seamless umbrella.

Perhaps your community has a fitness program manager, but the community had not considered the need for a quality assurance program for the fitness program. How do you best utilize your current resources and fitness manager's time to establish and implement these new standards? Following are three options your community can consider:

1. Task your fitness program manager with establishing these new program standards utilizing resources such as the ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines manual.
  - a. **Pros:** Cost-effective approach utilizing someone who has a thorough knowledge of your community's culture and current practices.
  - b. **Cons:** Competent and qualified fitness staff may not have experience in developing a risk management initiative. While an incomplete approach may be better than no approach, you may not arrive at the robust solution you desire.
2. Consult with a fitness management organization like NIFS—to establish a quality assurance program.
  - a. **Pros:** Utilize the expertise of a fitness management organization with years of experience creating quality assurance/risk reduction protocols for their clients. When NIFS provides this service, we offer concrete instructions for building a thorough quality-assurance program as well as successful strategies for educating residents when implementing these new procedures and guidelines.
  - b. **Cons:** Consulting costs money. Additionally, a consulting organization is unlikely to fully do the work for your organization. You will still be tasked with creating the protocols that fit your community.
3. Contract your fitness staffing through an outsourcing partner organization, like NIFS, that can manage the community's liability as part of its service.
  - a. **Pros:** The fitness management organization will have an existing quality assurance program that can be tailored and implemented into your community. It can bring updates and new developments in fitness program standards to the community in a timely manner, keeping the quality assurance program current. Also, all documentation and oversight of the program will be managed by the organization.
  - b. **Cons:** While this is your most expensive solution, you should expect that outsourcing the staffing of your community's fitness center program will provide a rich return to the community through improved member safety, decreased community liability, and multidimensional healthy programming for your residents.

In addition to managing the community's liability, a fitness program with a robust quality assurance program can lend more benefits in addition to safer participation for residents. The quality assurance program can be the backbone upon which the rest of your fitness program evolves. As a result, the community will be able to market the professional standards established in your program,



including fitness and balance assessments, individually prescribed exercise programs, and tailored programming to address resident needs in balance training, brain fitness, and wellness while utilizing a variety of engagement strategies. Your residents and potential residents will appreciate the community's dedication to enhancing their safety while exercising, while also addressing the special physical activity and wellness-based lifestyle interests of active older adults. Educate your marketing personnel on these professional standards so they can share this key information while meeting with prospective residents and their families.

Whether you have a comprehensive quality assurance program in place or you were able to identify various areas of improvement in your current practices, all CCRCs should be able to identify the multiple layers involved in managing their community fitness program's liability. In the instances where areas of improvement have been identified, communities should consider their next steps in building a comprehensive program and how they will implement these new standards. For communities with a thorough program intact, further exploration may be warranted to ensure the marketing department is maximizing the potential of the professional standards established in the community fitness program.

**For more information about NIFS's expertise in senior fitness management, contact Emily Davenport, 317.274.3432. Visit [nifs.org](https://nifs.org).**

