

**Association on Aging in New York**

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Aging Neighborhoods and the Evolution of Senior-Friendly Communities

Assembly Aging Committee Hearing

Assembly Committee on Aging Chair Joan Millman

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Good morning Assemblywoman Millman and distinguished members of the Assembly. I am Laura Cameron, Executive Director of the Association on Aging in New York, formerly known as the New York State Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

Increasingly, local governments and community leaders across the country are adopting the paradigm of livability across a lifespan to ensure that communities are great places to grow up and to grow old.

Multiple age-friendly community initiatives have been evolving in New York State: the Livable Communities Collaborative, the Livable New York Initiative and the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative, Complete Streets, to name a few. In both the public and private sectors, economics underlie the ongoing shift to providing health and long term care at home and in the community rather than institutional environments.

All of the initiatives are bringing together disparate groups to address the needs of an aging population and New York State's 59 mostly county-based Area Agencies on Aging are involved with many of these initiatives.

Why should policy makers at the local and state level support age-friendly communities?

Changing demographics, the population's shift from old to young, is putting even greater emphasis on helping communities become senior-friendly by addressing the needs of older adults across eight dimensions: buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication, community support and health services.

One of the developments in recent years that embraces the concept of livable communities is NY Connects. It is the front door to access a wide range of information and resources for people of all ages seeking long term services and supports. NY Connects is part of the paradigm of

livable communities as it arms people with information to access services to help them stay at home and in the community.

By the numbers:

- Currently, 1 in every 8 individuals in the US is over age 65. The elderly population will more than double between 2000 and 2030. By 2030, 1 in every 4 individuals will be over age 65.
- In New York State, the growth rate of those under 60 years of age will be only 3%, while the rate for those over 60 will be well over 30% in the coming years. The most rapid growth is projected to occur among the oldest and most frail population groups – a rate of 28.2% for those over 85 and 16% for impaired individuals. Almost 60% will need assistance with daily living.
- As many as 40% of those over age 65 will have nutrition-related health problems requiring treatment or management.
- 10% of people over the age of 65 and will develop Alzheimer’s Disease. 50% of those over the age of 85 will develop this disease.

A Snapshot of Age-Friendly Initiatives Around the State:

- The **Steuben County Office for the Aging** was one of the first Area Agencies on Aging to address the need to develop an age-friendly community and they did it by establishing The Steuben Senior Services Fund (SSSF), a public, not-for-profit senior citizen charitable fund to supplement future public funding for aging in place services for the elderly in Steuben County, along the south central border of New York with Pennsylvania. SSSF was established at the recommendation of the Steuben County Office for the Aging volunteer Advisory Council after extensive research regarding the needs of future elderly residents of the county. The Advisory Council recognized the certainty that public funds would not be sufficient to keep pace with the demand for in-home services to the elderly population (indeed, they are insufficient at the present time). The Steuben Senior Services Fund’s age-friendly initiative also established a number of rural aging-in-place groups that educate seniors about what’s available through the office for aging and fills in the gaps with volunteers.

- In October 2013, the **Monroe County Office for the Aging** was one of six aging agencies nationally selected by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging to participate in a Livable Communities Collaborative funded by the MetLife Foundation. This initiative will convene residents, business leaders, local government representatives and issues experts to identify and address ways that communities can ensure that they meet the needs of citizens across their lifespan. The other five agencies are in Bellevue, WA; Larimer County, CO; Miami Gardens, FL; Sedgwick County, KS; and York, PA. Three of the communities in the initiative will collaborate around how to drive cultural change in the way people perceive of aging. The other three will develop individual action plans and advance projects that improve livability of their communities.

- The **Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services** launched its Livable Communities initiative in 2006 in partnership with AARP and the Volunteer Center of United Way. There are nine Livable Community Connection sites within Westchester and multiple “villages” within each of the nine that include neighborhood associations, houses of worship, senior center, congregate housing units, cultural groups, civic and social organizations and organizations that serve the disabled. Some of the programs implemented to advance the main goal of enabling seniors to age at home and in their communities include the following:
 - 1) Caregiver Coaching Program: Volunteers trained by professionals to help family caregivers better care for an older or disabled person.
 - 2) CareCircles: A group of volunteers who assist an individual – likely a very elderly person – with basic needs of daily living that cannot be met because there are not enough family caregivers for the growing number of seniors.
 - 3) Chronic Disease Self-Management: Peer leader volunteers use an evidence-based model program developed by the Division of Family and Community Medicine at Stanford University’s School of Medicine to teach techniques to address their health issues. By taking on more responsibility for managing their health seniors improve their quality of life and lower health care costs.
 - 4) Speakers Bureau: An online list of more than 135 professionals who volunteer their time and expertise to present free programs on more than 15 topics, everything from health care to legal services, safety, education, advocacy and money management.

- The **Chemung County Department of Aging and Long Term Care** completed a year-long planning initiative funded by the New York State Office for the Aging called Community Empowerment to identify and pursue activities that promote successful aging and improve quality of life for all ages. A one-year planning effort funded by the New York State Office for the Aging and involving over 500 residents resulted in the development of over 180 action plans to improve quality of life in the areas of civic engagement, health care and human services, economic development, housing and transportation. The Chemung County Community Empowerment initiative has completed its third Action Plan update. The following were part of the senior-friendly portion of the plan that included every age group.
 - 1) A coalition of community health and human service providers developed and initiated a community health assessment project. This project assists hospitals, the health department, and other providers of health and human services with identification of gaps and challenges in providing services that improve health outcomes, and will work to address health disparities of minority populations.
 - 2) The Community Partnership Program, a workgroup of local healthcare facility representatives who strive to improve coordination among healthcare facilities, has implemented tools to identify patients at high risk for hospital readmission that are being incorporated in hospital discharge planning and homecare case management. Improved communication between hospital and homecare has resulted from implementation of a shared list of patients and communication between providers regarding hospitalizations, transfers, discharges, frequent emergency room visits, and Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST) forms. Collaborative efforts between all service providers continue to address medication reconciliation, patient education, fall prevention, safety for older adults, and health literacy.
 - 3) Arnot Ogden Medical Center is on the annual Health & Hospital Network 2012 Most Wired list for the third time and, as of July, has been a part of the Rochester Regional Health Information Organization, a secure electronic health information exchange serving authorized medical providers and consenting patients that makes medical care data more easily accessible to a patient's complete medical team. A Congestive Health Failure and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease tele-health monitoring program has also been initiated.

More recently Chemung County joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly communities in affiliation with the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Initiative, which is an opportunity to continue the work of Community Empowerment. Chemung County's Department of Aging and Long Term Care Advisory Council, which also serves as the Age-friendly Community Citizens Advisory Committee has two years to update, revise and refocus the Chemung County Community empowerment Action Plan into a robust and concrete age-friendly community plan of action that will be implemented, assessed and revised on an ongoing basis.

- The **Onondaga County Department for Aging and Youth**, Onondaga's Area Agency on Aging, has been involved in a community-wide "age-friendly" initiative for three years. The initiative is called "Step Up to Stop Falls" and its goal is to effectuate personal and professional-practice changes, around the issue of fall prevention. This is currently being accomplished through a variety of program components.

Onondaga County is reported to have the highest incidence of falls-related deaths among seniors in comparison to several upstate counties, including Monroe and Erie. Area Agency on Aging leadership believes that concentrated efforts to reduce the fear of falling, and serious injury and death from falls, will help to promote an "age-friendly" environment that focuses on aging well.

The coalition of agencies, led by Onondaga's Area Agency on Aging is comprised of several non-profit, for profit, government and health care organizations. Together, the dedicated Coalition planned, implemented and now offers fall prevention programs throughout the county. The programs are open to adults 60+ (targeting those at highest social and economic risk) as well as health care professionals. The programs include:

Personal Practice Change:

- a. Strength and Balance Exercise Classes at senior centers and other senior sites
- b. In-Home Safety Assessments conducted by professional staff of the AAA
- c. Medication Management Education to at-risk seniors
- d. Public Education

Professional Practice Change:

- a. Physician office outreach for falls prevention screening and resulting referrals
- b. Pharmacy outreach to include falls prevention information at prescription fills

All programs are offered at no cost to seniors, caregivers and professionals in the community. The Step Up To Stop Falls-Onondaga County Coalition is supported through a grant provided by the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York.

Five Things Lawmakers Can Do

Area Agencies on Aging support a wide range of age-friendly initiatives, however, at the same time, these agencies are buckling under the weight of a growing 60-plus community. Today, 7,000 older New York State residents are on lists waiting for programs and services provided by the Area Agencies on Aging.

There are at least five things lawmakers at the state and local level can do to help right now:

- Number one: One of the most important ways to make New York age-friendly is to support cost-effective services that help seniors remain in their homes and communities. Our Association believes that an investment of \$26 million in the Community Services for the Elderly program will help shrink current waiting lists for aging services. Addressing waiting lists for aging services is supported by several aging organizations, including our Association, the Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City, Lifespan, AARP, and the New York State Coalition for the Aging.
- Number two: Make sure representatives of New York's aging services network have a place at the planning table for transportation, housing, nutrition, disaster preparedness and health care.
- Number three: Provide tax credits for any new or redeveloped housing unit that provides easy access, wider doorways, and entry-level restrooms.
- Number four: Support Safe Streets, Complete Streets, NYSOFA's Livable New York and other similar initiatives across the state to support sustainable communities, expand travel options and improve pedestrian safety for people of all ages.
- Number five: Looking forward - develop a long range plan to bolster and sustain aging services through New York's 59 Area Agencies on Aging to help them continue to provide cost-effective community based service for an ever-expanding aging population.

Waiting lists and current initiatives are only part of the picture. The aging population continues to increase and so will the need for elder care services. The services provided by Area Agencies on Aging, providers and community partners are essential to enable older New Yorkers to remain at home and in their communities. These factors point to the need to develop a long range plan to sustain and improve these programs to help all areas of the State become more age friendly.

Thank you to Assembly Aging Committee Chair Joan Millman for focusing attention on the need to support and enhance age-friendly communities.