

The Protecting the Health of America's Older Adults Background

The U.S. public health system has successfully contributed to longer life expectancies, including the remarkable achievement that someone reaching age 65 today can expect to live nearly 20 more years.¹ Every day, 10,000 more Americans turn 65.² Although public health has contributed to U.S. longevity, historically, public health has not had the resources to embrace healthy aging. Given the health needs of older adults, public health should expand its roles in helping our growing older adult population remain healthy and independent. The Protecting the Health of Older Adults Act would provide much needed resources and help build the capacity of state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments to address the health challenges of this population.

Eighty percent of Medicare beneficiaries have one chronic condition and nearly 70 percent have two or more (such as diabetes, hearing loss and heart disease).^{3,4} Chronic diseases are costly -- Medicare enrollees with chronic conditions account for 96 percent of Medicare spending.⁵ Isolation and loneliness, financial struggles, and limited access to transportation, healthy food, and affordable housing are challenges many older people face. Social isolation alone increases the risk of heart disease, infections, depression, cognitive decline, and death among older people⁶ and accounts for \$6.7 billion in additional Medicare spending annually.⁷ COVID-19 has had an inordinate burden on older adults, adding to the complexity of the challenges they face.

Examples from the Age-Friendly Public Health System Florida Pilot:

- St. Johns County Health Department targeted the 2020 Census for accuracy to ensure the county has the appropriate level of support and resources for the fast-growing older adult population.
- Escambia County Health Department works with the local Council on Aging to ensure they are addressing older adult health in the community health improvement plan.
- Indian River County Health Department engages with housing non-profits and builders to educate on the benefits of universal design to increase access for older adults.
- Putnam County Health Department connects with the Transportation for the Disadvantaged program, eliciting support from a local hospital to pay for non-emergency medical trips for older adults.
- Okaloosa County Health Department implemented the Lean on Me program, enlisting community volunteers to ensure broad registration of vulnerable older adults for emergency special needs shelters.



Public health interventions can optimize the health and well-being of adults 65 and over, prolong their independence, and reduce their use of expensive healthcare services. Aging services stakeholders recognize the unique roles that public health can fill and have welcomed public health's partnership, particularly to meet the needs of older adults during the pandemic. Statewide programs in Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, and Washington State have demonstrated the value of Age-Friendly Public Health Systems (AFPHS).⁸ Yet there is no program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that supports local and state public health departments to improve older adult health and well-being. AFPHS are necessary to foster multi-sector collaboration and develop effective solutions to improve the lives of older Americans.

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THE PROGRAM

The Protecting Health of Older Adults Act would authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), pending availability of appropriations, to create a Healthy Aging program at CDC to promote the health and well-being of older adults, improve health equity, and reduce healthcare costs. The Healthy Aging program would coordinate efforts across CDC and implement grants and technical assistance to state, local, territorial, and tribal health departments for:

- Improving the coordination of public health interventions that promote the health and well-being of older adults
- Disseminating and implementing evidence-based best practices and programs with respect to promoting the health and well-being of older adults
- Coordinating multisectoral efforts to promote the health and wellbeing of older adults across governmental and nongovernmental health and related agencies
- Improving coordination of interventions to identify gaps and reduce duplication of efforts at federal, local, and state agencies and with other aging services organizations.

The program will be authorized to be appropriated at \$50 million per year for FY 2023 – 2027.

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Citations:

¹Administration for Community Living. 2018 Profile of Older Americans. Washington, DC: US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2018. acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2018OlderAmericansProfile.pdf.

²Heimlich, Russell. *Baby Boomers Retire*. Pew Research Center, 7 Feb. 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2010/12/29/baby-boomers-retire/.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Healthy aging at a glance, 2011: Helping people to live long and productive lives and enjoy a good quality of life*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2011. <http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/22022>.

⁴Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions Charts, 2017. Accessed August 2019 at https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/Chartbook_Charts.html.

⁵Ibid

⁶Flowers, Lynda, and Claire Noel-Miller. Social Isolation: Detrimental to Older Adults' Health and Costly to Medicare. AARP, 17 June 2019, blog.aarp.org/thinking-policy/social-isolation-detrimental-to-older-adults-health-and-cos

⁷Flowers, Lynda, et al. *Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults*. AARP, 2017, *Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults*, www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2017/10/medicare-spends-more-on-socially-isolated-older-adults.pdf.

⁸Trust for America's Health. Age Friendly Public Health. Washington, DC: Trust for America's Health, 2019. <https://www.tfah.org/initiatives/age-friendly-public-health/>