

Supporting Caregivers Through Age-Friendly Public Health Systems

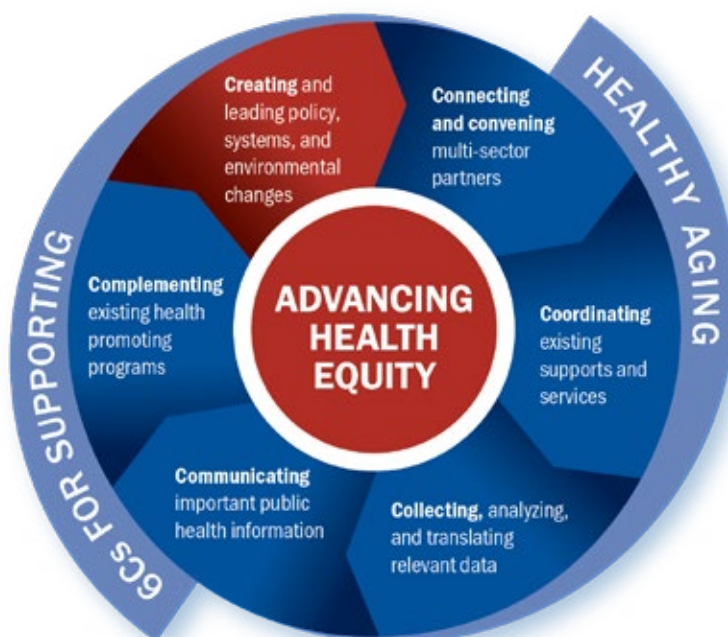
Creating and Leading Systems Change to Support Caregivers: In Practice

As the population of older adults continues to grow, the informal and formal caregivers supporting them will need resources and support. By 2034, Americans age 65 and older will outnumber those under 18, and by 2060, approximately one in four Americans will be over the age of 65. This demographic shift means that millions more people will take on caregiving roles—often while managing their own health, employment, financial, and family responsibilities. Caregiving is a public health issue because of the many health consequences related to caregiving and caregivers who neglect their own health. According to one recent report, the percentage of caregivers who reported being in fair or poor health (as opposed to good or excellent) increased by seven points from 2015 to 2020. One in four caregivers found it difficult to take care of their personal health and reported that caregiving had a negative impact on their health. To support the health and well-being of the growing number of older adults and their caregivers, the public health sector can adopt strategies to support caregivers.

The Age-Friendly Public Health System 6Cs Framework for Supporting Healthy Aging

Trust for America's Health (TFAH), in partnership with The John A. Hartford Foundation, developed the 6Cs Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Public Health Systems (AFPHS). This framework offers six areas for age-friendly public health practice: Creating and Leading Change, Connecting and Convening Partners,

Coordinating Programs, Collecting Data, Communicating Information, and Complementing Programs. Many state and local public health departments have successfully applied the 6Cs Framework, significantly expanding the number of people benefiting from these practices.



Age-Friendly Public Health Systems are Best Positioned to Support Caregivers

Adopting the 6Cs Framework enables public health systems to help strengthen community health for people of all ages, including caregivers. The 6Cs Framework outlines roles that public health can play to better support communities through coordinated, equitable, and age-friendly approaches, and acts as a roadmap that state and local public health departments can use to better support caregivers in their communities.

By empowering public health professionals to think beyond clinical settings and influence the policies, systems, and environments that directly impact the ability of caregivers to provide care while maintaining their own health and financial stability, the 6Cs Framework provides many opportunities for public health departments to operationalize the 6Cs to better support caregivers in their communities.

Creating and Leading Systems Change to Support Caregivers

Public health departments can create and lead systems change in many ways, depending on their readiness level. A first step that public health departments can take to adopt the 6Cs Framework is to ensure that there is at least one person on staff who is committed to ensuring that the health and well-being of older adults is prioritized by becoming an AFPHS Champion, building expertise in healthy aging strategies and committing to a more systematic approach to supporting older adults and caregivers.

Example 1: Expanding Workplace Leave Policies Public health's role in protecting the well-being of communities includes protecting the ability to care for one's family or friends. The public health sector can improve employment security for caregivers by partnering with other entities to support caregiver-friendly changes to workplace protections and employee leave policies. Public health agencies and organizations can also create hubs of information to disseminate policies and programs in pursuit of workplaces that make caregiving easier.

States and localities that expanded existing workplace protections and flexibilities (e.g., FMLA) have become leaders

in empowering caregivers to remain in the workforce. Public health practitioners can collaborate with organizations engaged in advocacy efforts to support expanded family and medical leave protections and flexibilities. Employees managing illness, disability, or caregiving responsibilities should have the opportunity to do so without fear of employer retribution.

Example 2: Adopting Policies to Boost Financial Security

Public health agencies and organizations have also focused on bolstering caregivers' financial security. The Maine Public Health Institute partnered with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Aging and Disability Services and Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging to develop the "Respite for ME" grant program, part of the 2021 Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan legislation and funded by the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The grant program provides up to \$5,171 to eligible caregivers for respite care, self-care, and legal consultation. By working across the aging, health services, and public health sectors, public health leaders were able to create a resource that can provide caregivers with financial, emotional, and legal support.

Incorporating the 6Cs Framework

Along with creating and leading systems change, public health practitioners can share the 6Cs Framework with peers, and, as referenced earlier, participate in AFPHS Recognition Program, which recognizes public health departments and individuals that have taken steps to make healthy aging a core function. By proactively addressing the needs of caregivers of older adults, public health departments will be better prepared to support individuals at all stages of life.

See Other Publications in This Series

This is one in a series of six mini briefs exploring how each component of the 6Cs Framework can be adopted by state and local public health departments to support the development of public health policies, programs, and services that better support older adults and caregivers. Visit afphs.org to explore additional mini briefs in this series.

About Trust for America's Health (TFAH): TFAH is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization that promotes optimal health for every person and community and makes the prevention of illness and injury a national priority. Our goal is a modernized public health system that advances health equity for all and is prepared to respond to a wide variety of health threats with policies and programs that are inclusive, community appropriate, and evidence-based. Learn more at www.tfah.org.

About The John A. Hartford Foundation: TFAH's Age-Friendly Public Health Systems initiative is proudly supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation, a private, nonpartisan, national philanthropy dedicated to improving the care of older adults. The leader in aging and health, the Foundation has three priority areas: creating age-friendly health systems, supporting family caregivers, and improving serious illness and end-of-life care. Learn more at www.JohnAHartford.org.