

Supporting Caregivers Through Age-Friendly Public Health Systems

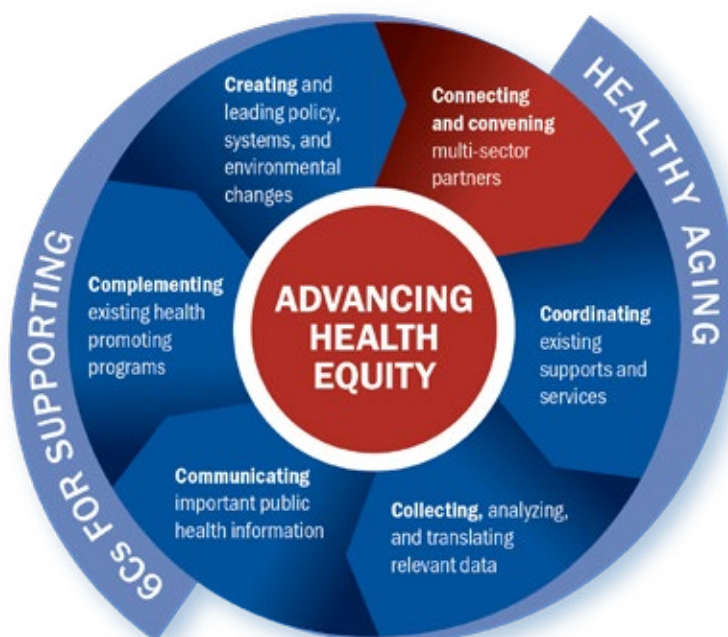
Creating and Leading Systems Change to Support Caregivers: In Practice

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.

Connecting and Convening Partners to Support Caregivers

To better address and support the needs of older adults and their caregivers, public health could leverage cross-sector partnerships to align strategies or expand existing programs across the field and beyond. Connecting and convening partners and stakeholders among different sectors strengthens cross-boundary relationships and allows for more creative, innovative, and collaborative approaches to caregiver support initiatives.

Example 1: The RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council, a part of the Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregivers Act, connects older adults, individuals with disabilities, healthcare providers, state and local officials, and other advocates and experts in caregiving to share information around family caregiving and generate recommendations about caregiving support. This innovative national model for cross-sector collaboration could be implemented at the state or local level to build formal relationships, raise public awareness, and ensure the development of support strategies that reflect all aspects of the caregiving experience.

Example 2: As a part of their initiative to ensure an Age-Friendly Kansas, the Kansas Health Institute built a committee of state and county health departments, academic institutions, AAAs, nonprofit organizations, research centers, healthcare service providers, and other state agencies to develop a statewide, multi-sector plan around healthy-aging programs. The diversity of representation across sectors, geographies, and levels ensures that the initiative has both depth and breadth of experience and expertise when addressing healthy aging and caregiver support.

Example 3: The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) partnered with Montana State University (MSU) to provide meal packages to unpaid family caregivers. The Caregiver Respite Food Program aims to support caregivers in Montana by providing 10 healthy prepared meals for both the caregiver and recipient. By partnering with MSU, in just a three-month timeframe, DPHHS ensured 580 meals reached family caregivers in the state.

Incorporating the 6Cs Framework

Along with connecting and convening partners to support caregivers, 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.