

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.

Communicating Important Information to Support Caregivers and Older Adults

Intentional and effective communication is important when sharing public health information to promote and support older adult health and wellbeing. Strong communication must be culturally appropriate for a diverse caregiving community and highlight the value of caregivers in society, the challenges they face, and the support they need. Public health should also increase awareness of evidence-based programs and services that assist caregivers through thoughtful communication. Improving communication about caregiver support can lead to engagement with cross-sector partners to curate and consolidate existing resources to improve accessibility.

An important aspect of public health communications is to ensure not only that communications are culturally sensitive, but that there is a positive aging message as well. Communications that include the value of growing older as well as the important contributions that caregivers make

to society will help to elevate these crucial services with policy makers and funders, as well as help to grow the field of caregiving.

Example: The state of Michigan has strategically used communication campaigns to uplift their caregiver community. The Voices of Michigan Caregivers campaign was created by AARP Michigan to highlight the stories of the diverse caregiver population in the state and support the society and economic contributions of Michigan's family caregivers. Additionally, the Southeast Michigan Senior Regional Collaborative created a coalition to amplify caregivers' perspectives on policy issues, programs, and funding. The coalition centers the diversity of the unpaid caregiver workforce in Michigan when informing education, social support, and health services resources.

Incorporating the 6Cs Framework

Along with communicating information that supports older adults and their 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.