

*Age-Friendly Public Health: The Podcast*

***Episode 1 – A Conversation with Dr. Terry Fulmer, President of The John A. Hartford Foundation***

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[00:00:00] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** When you get it right for older adults, you're likely to get it right for everyone, and you're certainly supporting family caregivers in addressing sometimes very serious illness that's out there in the community.

[00:00:15] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** That's Dr. Terry Fulmer, President of The John A. Hartford Foundation. I'm your host, Nadine Gracia, President and CEO of Trust for America's Health, also known as TFAH.

[00:00:27] Welcome to the first ever episode of *Age-Friendly Public Health: The podcast*, a production of the Age-friendly Public Health Systems Initiative. Since 2017, TFAH has led the age-friendly public health systems movement, elevating public health's role in healthy aging among state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments.

[00:00:47] As this work has expanded, we wanted to highlight some of the outstanding contributors to the field of healthy aging. That's why we're so excited to launch the Age-Friendly Public Health Systems or AFPHS quarterly podcast with our first guest, an incredible leader and partner who has been a champion for changing the landscape of health and aging.

[00:01:07] Dr. Terry Fulmer, President of The John A. Hartford Foundation. Welcome, Terry.

[00:01:13] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Thank you, Nadine. I am so honored to join you today and to help you with this inaugural podcast. It's truly a privilege.

[00:01:21] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** Well, thank you, Terry. You have been personally and professionally engaged in improving the care of older adults for many years, and I applaud your leadership and we are so grateful for your partnership. I'm thrilled to have you as our guest on this inaugural segment of our age-friendly public health podcast.

[00:01:38] So let's get started with our conversation. Tell us about yourself and your passion for how this work began. What has driven your work over the years?

[00:01:47] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Well, thank you, Nadine, and again, it's an honor to be with you today. Your leadership at Trust for America's Health is truly inspiring. Not to mention all of your previous roles that have been so influential for our country.

[00:02:01] My passion for improving care for older adults comes from multiple places. The first is, I knew from when I was very young that I was going to be a nurse. My mother was a nurse. About five of my aunts were nurses, and I saw them love their work and make a difference in the lives of people.

[00:02:24] So I went to college. I went to Skidmore College for Nursing and had a great experience there. And then I began my first job as a nurse at the Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. And as I began, I immediately saw that most of the patients were older. I was on a medical unit and they were frail. And there was this mentality that there were interesting cases if they had a challenging disorder or disease, if they had a very complex arrhythmia or if they had an unusual trajectory with their renal failure.

[00:02:59] But once those things were stabilized, they were no longer interesting to the team and that just broke my heart because remember, the greatest success story of the 20th century is longevity. So, there we were promoting longevity but not promoting caring. And so, I found my place in the sun, if you will, and I have never looked back.

[00:03:22] I just absolutely love this work and I've seen so much progress during my career.

[00:03:28] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** Thank you, Terry, for sharing such a moving story, the compelling family story that you shared, and also the experience that you had joining the nursing profession. Really such a caring profession and seeing an area of need and certainly we are so grateful to have you in this field.

[00:03:43] Now you lead The John A. Hartford Foundation. Tell us about the foundation and its priority areas.

[00:03:49] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Oh, that's exciting for me to do that. Nadine, so The John A. Hartford Foundation was founded in 1929 through the generosity of A&P grocery store heirs John and George Hartford. We are in New York City.

And as I joined the foundation, the trustees decided that they wanted to go upstream and figure out after the years that they have developed these wonderful centers of excellence and the people who really lead geriatrics today, they really wanted to get to the bedside, whether that was in a homeless shelter or an ICU or a nursing home and say, what are we seeing?

[00:04:29] We've got all these models of care. We've got a pretty good base of science now, what can we be doing? And I thought, oh boy, am I in the right place? Because my vision was to create age-friendly health systems because in my heart of hearts, I felt like there were none, and the trustees agreed, and we began moving out on our age-friendly health system movement.

[00:04:49] And I'm so proud of that work. And I'll say a little bit more about it in a minute, but our mission at the foundation is to improve the care of older adults. Some people say to me, well, what about younger people? I said, I love younger people. But we are focused on older adults, and I believe in prevention.

[00:05:07] I believe completely in the prevention agenda, but there are people who reach their seventies, eighties, nineties, and that's our sweet spot. So, we work on creating age-friendly health systems, improving serious illness and end of life care, which should not be conflated. Alzheimer's is a serious disease, but it may not be your end of life.

[00:05:27] And also support for family caregivers. There are 40 million plus family caregivers in our country saying, what do I do now? So, through a variety of ways, we work with state and local governments. We work with other foundations. We work with wonderful organizations like yours to address these issues. And so that's a little bit about our foundation.

[00:05:53] And today, you know, we're just really pleased with our progress.

[00:05:56] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** When we speak about the older adult population, that population is growing, but really understanding how important it is to assuring the health and longevity, as you indicated, of quality of life and care and services. And certainly many lessons learned that we've seen as well, I'm sure, of the importance of focusing on older adults through the lens of even the pandemic and work that your organization had done.

[00:06:20] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** That was a powerful lens. Nadine. Really wrenching actually, and we all felt the same. I saw your organization go into warp speed to really address the needs. Your regular communications were a guidelight for all of us, so thank you for that.

[00:06:36] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** Now this work, and you actually started to share that this work really began with age-friendly health systems. How did that then lead to what we're talking about now, the development of the age-friendly public health systems?

[00:06:50] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** So, when I say age-friendly health systems, I mean every point of care by every person who provides care. That's your public health system, your AAAs, your communities, your nursing homes. And it was interesting to see how hard it

was to move the needle on people understanding that health system to them means a medical center and that's not what we need. My enthusiasm was instantaneous to reach out to TFAH and your leadership. And to say, can you help us make that connection between people who perhaps are being discharged from the hospital but will go to the community and there your public health system will be the welcoming arms for those people.

[00:07:32] What I noticed at that time was that we have a system in this country called the Area Agencies on Aging, the Triple As, out of the Administration for Community Living, and I saw that there was not what I call rich connectivity between the area agencies on aging, that whole group and the public health system.

[00:07:54] I also saw an immediate willingness from both sides to try to say, what might this look like? And the rest has been history. Everybody immediately gets it. It's so logical. To just say, well, you know, what are we all doing in a community that overlaps? Where are the gaps? How can we support each other? And I have been so proud of this work, and it's just a really, really momentous time, particularly at this time when all of us know that the public health system has been gutted for the last 30 years.

[00:08:27] And there's a growing awareness and a growing body of dollars that are really there to support our most vital source in this country for well-being, the public health system. So, I cannot tell you how much it has meant to me to get to know all of you and to watch this work evolve.

[00:08:46] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** You mentioned having a great deal of pride in seeing this advance and move forward. Can you share an example of what has made you most proud and seeing that evolution from the work in health systems to now public health?

[00:08:59] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** So, as your team has expertly taught us, we need to follow the principles of public health. Just like health systems use a four Ms - What matters? mentation, medication, mobility - framework.

[00:09:12] Age-friendly public health uses its own framework. The six Cs. Now, I was not aware of that, but I love them. That's creating and leading policy and system change, connecting and convening stakeholders, coordinating existing services, collecting and using data, communicating public health information. and complementing existing health promoting programs - all focused on older adults.

[00:09:38] So that framework has been really centered on equity and your organization has just been expert ensuring that we pay special attention to the populations that have been marginalized and left behind by healthcare and public health. So, I think that, looking at

your success, I'll always remember a meeting we went to in Florida as our first test site, and we convened our public health departments in the aging services.

[00:10:04] To me it was a real 'aha' moment because in the room, think about a rectangular table where on one side is aging and on the other side is public health. For the majority of the day, people said to one another, I have no idea you did that. I have no idea you did that. They actually were kind of amused and energized by what was possible.

[00:10:27] And so now with your help and the wonderful work of TFAH, what we've seen with Megan Wolfe and Koran Phillips and your other staff, you've established a recognition program for public health departments and practitioners. You're offering free monthly trainings on public health and aging topics. You've established a very successful partnership with the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion for your regional trainings and you've helped states beyond Florida, like Washington, New York, California, now Mississippi, adopt the age-friendly public health system, work at the highest level. It's so exciting. I just got my Mississippi T-shirt in the mail and I'm wearing it. It's pretty great.

[00:11:11] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** That is wonderful Terry. Well, certainly we have done this in partnership with The John A. Hartford Foundation, and that's the importance of this work is that this is not public health alone, as you just described. It's really bringing different sectors together to help assure the health and well-being of older adults.

[00:11:27] And that brings us to this next question around, there's this concept of this age-friendly ecosystem. Tell us what is an age-friendly ecosystem and how do you see the components working together?

[00:11:39] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Thanks for that, Nadine. We've written a fair amount about this and there's material on our website for people after this podcast, but we know that an older person transcends locations, geographies, structures, and that all of us need to be working in harmony in order to make sure that as they move from system to system, maybe the hospital, the public health system, maybe their community-based services and age-friendly university, a dementia friendly setting, that it helps our public if they think and know that we're coordinating, that we're using a shared language, that we understand one another's organization and that we don't revert to old habits, such as asking people the same question over and over again as they come to each of us. It was really the World Health Organization earlier in the two thousands, and then AARP, who took on creating age-friendly cities and communities.

[00:12:41] Those communities take actions like making sure that there's enough benches for older adults to sit on. Stoplights are long enough for older people to cross the street.

These are not trivial matters. So, they've implemented policies and programs designed to keep older adults engaged and healthy.

[00:12:58] So, as I began this work, I talked to colleagues, my colleague David Blumenthal at the Commonwealth Fund, and I told him about this and he said, well, you know, Terry, Public Health doesn't work on older people. They only work on women and children. I said, well, why is that true and what can we do? Because every element of our care force, we try not to say workforce.

[00:13:20] We say care force is an opportunity for older adults to flourish under the care and concern of each of our parts of the systems. So, I really have always said that you can't have an age-friendly community unless you have an age-friendly health system in it. That's true for an age-friendly public health system.

[00:13:41] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** That's, you know, really excellent to hear, Terry, to your point of bringing these different sectors together so that we're not each asking the same questions, and as you noted, this is not here only in the United States, but globally and how we can have even greater impact when we work together.

[00:13:58] You've started to share. Some of the, the learnings from this, what guidance do you have for health systems and the Aging Services Network and others to partner with the public health sector to really advance age-friendly public health systems?

[00:14:12] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Oh, that's a great question, Nadine. And really, I think the first thing that comes to mind is my advice for health systems, and now we're thinking about maybe Providence Health or any of those systems is the Aging Services Network and others need to be bold and actively seek out your public health colleagues to focus on the older adult in your communities. When you get it right for older adults, you're likely to get it right for everyone, and you're certainly supporting family caregivers in addressing sometimes very serious illness that's out there in the community. That takes collaboration and coordination.

[00:14:49] And I'm really pleased that Trust for America's Health has launched a new map. It helps people see where our age-friendly ecosystem is at the state level and across the country. It's a great map. The idea that we can come together with some common language and measures is really important as well, and you can find that on our website, *john a hartford.org/age-friendly*.

[00:15:13] So, I think that collaboration and coordination is essential, and I believe that COVID really cemented our passion for coordination and collaboration. All of us found ourselves caught short. We can only remember with true, horror is the word that comes to

mind, about how we had community health workers and nursing homes with no PPE, no equipment and no personnel.

[00:15:42] Everything got triaged to acute care, which people thought was the right thing at the time, and that was really devastating. So, this notion of collaborating, coordinating pays off in big ways, and it's really remarkable to see how communities can identify gaps that can be met with existing services if the partners come together.

[00:16:02] And we saw that brilliantly in Florida and the states we mentioned. I'd say that data is power, and you've shown us that through the work that you generate so regularly and using that data, public health has always done that. The data on older adults and communities, the dashboards that Trust for America's Health can help create, really drive collaboration.

[00:16:24] I think about rural communities. I grew up in a rural community, upstate New York, in Herkimer County, and we have family up there, and some of my family, if they need emergency services and call 911, they're going to get the firemen and the EMTs who are excellent at what they do. But the closest hospital is an hour and 15 minutes away, and so understanding your community, your public health system is vital to the way in which you'll react in emergencies.

[00:16:58] Further, Nadine, you and I both know that when electric grids go down, when floods take out heating, think about Katrina, the horror of Hurricane Katrina and what happened to older people. We saw pictures in the newspapers that I don't even want to bring back to mind because they were so devastating. That's because we need to invest in our public health infrastructure to benefit all of us, because an ICU is not going to do the trick.

[00:17:30] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** You know, you started out in the beginning saying you are committed to prevention. So, recognizing the importance of the public health system. And yet the chronic underfunding of that system from the standpoint of the workforce to the infrastructure and the importance of data, all of these areas. And so why it's even more critical for the sectors to work together, you know, and really advancing this type of work through the age-friendly ecosystem to leverage the capacities and resources that we have, even in the in limited environments.

[00:17:59] And then tailoring that to the communities that are being served. That's also how we center equity, as you also described. Well, Terry, let's have one final question. Any final thoughts you'd like to share with our listeners today?

[00:18:13] **Dr. Terry Fulmer:** Well, I want to thank the CDC and the Administration for Community Living for the way they have worked with all of us shoulder to shoulder to

advance the well-being of all people, but older people in particular from our foundation standpoint.

[00:18:29] And I want to thank you, Nadine, for your amazing leadership. I love working with you. We get so much done because we're so passionate and love what we do, and that's really a powerful way to get up every morning, isn't it? So, now's the time for all society to become age-friendly. Ask yourself, are you receiving age-friendly care?

[00:18:47] Do you live in an age-friendly community? Can you support and participate in advance age-friendly notions. When you do that, it benefits everybody and I just want to make sure that the audience helps us make that happen. And at The John A. Hartford Foundation, and I know at TFAH, we both stand ready to be there for any potential assistance we might bring to this work.

[00:19:11] So thank you Nadine and thank you to TFAH.

[00:19:14] **Dr. Nadine Gracia:** Well, thank you for giving that call to action to our listeners with regards to advancing this age-friendly movement. It's been such a pleasure speaking with you, Dr. Fulmer. Thank you. From making the first episode of the Age-Friendly Public Health Podcast, such an informative and engaging one for our listeners, please share this segment with your colleagues and on your social media channels and look out for an announcement about our next segment to be released this fall.

[00:19:39] If you're listening on Apple or Spotify, make sure to follow the podcast. That way you'll get every episode when it becomes available. You can also learn more about the Age-friendly Public Health Systems Initiative on our website@afphs.org. That's AFPHS.org. This is Nadine Gracia from Trust for America's Health.

[00:19:59] Thank you for listening.