

BACKGROUND

Throughout the country an estimated 10,000-11,000 persons are turning 65 each day. Many older adults face multiple challenges that impact their desire to live an active and vital life. Key critical healthy aging issues affecting older adults include:

Falls. One of three older adults in Wisconsin experiences a fall every year. Hospital and emergency department visits cost \$800 million annually, 70% of which is paid for by public funds. Falls-related injuries now exceed car crashes as the leading cause of injury-related death. Forty percent of those admitted to a nursing home had a fall in the 30 days prior to admission.

Chronic Diseases. More than 80% of older adults have at least one chronic condition such as arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease, and 50% have at least two. Ninety-five percent of health care dollars spent on older adults is related to chronic conditions and two of three deaths in the U.S. are attributable to heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.

Diabetes. In Wisconsin, 475,000 adults have diabetes and 1.45 million have pre-diabetes. One in four Medicare beneficiaries has diabetes which is the leading cause of blindness, heart disease, and stroke, as well as lower extremity amputations. It is also very expensive to treat with an annual cost of \$4.07 billion in direct health costs and \$2.7 billion in indirect costs.

Caregiving. Family caregivers are the largest provider of long-term care services in America. As the number of older adults increases, the need for supported family caregivers also increases. Because caregiving is often stressful, family caregivers are at high risk for depression and other stress-related illnesses. These illnesses often cut short the length of time people are able to provide care for a loved one. Family caregivers who develop stress-related illness due to lack of adequate support from others are up to 10 times more likely to suffer their own medical or financial crisis. It is estimated that the economic value of unpaid family caregivers in the U.S. is \$450 billion annually, which is more than the combined Medicare and Medicaid budgets. Providing caregiver supports enable family caregivers to take care of their loved ones at home and saves taxpayers money.

Nutrition. Many older people in Wisconsin go hungry almost every day and because many are isolated and alone, they also hunger for the emotional connections that give their lives meaning and purpose. Seventy-three percent of meal recipients are at high nutritional risk according to the Administration of Community Living. A recent national survey of program participants found that 4 in 10 home-delivered meal recipients reported needing help with one or more activities of daily living (ADLs) such as bathing or dressing; 85% reported needing help with one or more instrumental ADLs such as shopping, housekeeping, or preparing meals (Altshuler and Schimmel, 2010). These indicators are high predictors of nursing home admission which, according to a MetLife-sponsored survey, cost an average of \$214 per day in 2011 compared with the \$7.50 average cost of a home-delivered meal in Wisconsin.

Social isolation or lack of purpose. Research has shown older adults who are lonely and socially isolated experience more chronic conditions and stress, and have fewer friends. Lonely and isolated individuals

are also more likely to suffer from depression, have a weakened immune system and take longer to recover from an injury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. The **Older Americans Act (OAA)** was enacted into law in 1965; since then, thousands of seniors have relied on programs and services provided to maintain their health and economic security.

Reauthorization of the OAA is essential in expanding evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion services, supporting nutrition programs and assisting family caregivers.

1. **Federal funding for community-based self-management programs should support state, county and tribal capacity to deliver programs locally and support statewide core services:** maintaining program licenses; researching, developing, and maintaining the infrastructure for coordination of the programs; supporting local partners in developing and training leaders and recruiting participants; and engaging in data collection and analysis.

Significant public health problems of older adults can be addressed through researched, cost-effective programs delivered in community (non-clinical) settings. For example, participants in the *Stepping On* falls prevention workshop experienced a 31% reduction in falls. Participants in *Stanford's Chronic Disease Self-Management Education Programs* experienced significant reductions in health care utilization (27%), reduction in the average number of emergency department visits (21%), and a reduction in the average number of hospitalizations (22%). The programs have also proven to reduce pain, fatigue and depression, and increase physical activity and confidence in participants' ability to manage their health. Studies have shown a program cost to health care savings ratio of \$4 saved for every \$1 spent. The Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA) manages statewide dissemination for 6 of the 14 evidence-based health promotion programs operating in Wisconsin. Since inception of these programs, WIHA and its partners in the aging network have trained over 900 program leaders, and delivered over 1,600 workshops to over 13,000 participants.

2. **Support funding for the Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP).** Good nutrition is the foundation for good health. It can prevent most, if not all, of the chronic diseases or slow their progression. People who are well-nourished spend less time in the hospital and daily meals can help avoid placement in costly long-term care facilities. While the health and social benefits of the nutrition program are dramatic, it has also proven to be cost-effective. The ENP can delay nursing home admissions, reduce long-term care costs, and promote a feeling of security and well-being among those older people who engage in them. In fact, the Altshuler and Schimmel survey found that more than 85% of those receiving home-delivered meals reported that they felt the program helped them remain at home. Funding for Wisconsin's Elderly Nutrition Program is money well spent. The Elderly Nutrition Program meals follow the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans and provide at least one-third, and often over one-half, of the daily nutritional needs for an older adult. For many older people, this is their main (and sometimes, only) meal of the day for reasons including lack of access to healthy food or the inability to prepare a healthy meal. Group meals at senior dining centers are coupled with fun activities and companionship for older adults. Home-delivered meals come with a friendly face and a warm greeting from drivers providing interaction and a brief wellness check.
3. **Policy-makers should track the nation's changing demographics and respond with corresponding increases in funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program** which provides much-needed family caregiver supports. Family caregivers are the backbone of our long term care system.

As our older population increases in number and the number of younger working-age adults available to provide in-home care decreases, we are going to be faced with a generation of older adults with their own physical limitations providing care for other older adults unable to care for themselves. Supports to help aging spouses, friends, brothers and sisters, neighbors and their employed adult children is going to be vital to protecting the health and safety of older adults.

B. The **Corporation for National and Community Services administers Senior Corps**. Through three key national programs - **Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)**, Senior Corps provides service opportunities through volunteerism for older people by connecting them with people and organizations that need them most.

1. **Support and funding for volunteer opportunities to combat social isolation and loneliness in older adults. Recognize and support volunteer program management (RSVP) to recruit, screen and coordinate volunteers to meet community needs.** The increasing number of older adults with more time available represent the most well-educated and healthy retirees in our nations' history. If properly mobilized, the talents and skills of these older adults could make a considerable impact in meeting the volunteer needs of communities in Wisconsin. A majority of the workforce for OAA programs is provided by volunteers. One example is RSVP which engages volunteers in a wide variety of activities depending on their local needs, including Meals-on-Wheels, congregate meal sites and transportation programs that are a part of OAA programs. There is also an initiative for RSVP volunteers to become leaders in the evidence-based health programs. About 39% of Wisconsin adults, age 65-74, volunteer an average of 64 hours per year. With increased promotion and awareness, there is an opportunity to increase the number of older adults volunteering and also the annual average hours of volunteering while improving the health of older adults. Research has shown volunteering to be an activity that provides many health benefits for older adults, such as:

- Report living longer and report less disability. Purpose in later life translates to greater satisfaction with life.
- Volunteering may be particularly helpful for undergoing a life stress or for those at-risk of being isolated.
- Evidence that the health benefits of volunteering are strongest among rural retirees, and those who do not drive or are limited drivers.
- Experience better health in later years, enjoying greater levels of well-being, lower rates of depression, and increased strength and energy.

Rita Johnson, an evidence-based health promotion leader states, "My life is better because of volunteering. I've met a lot of nice people and being a leader of the program has given me more self-confidence and I feel more comfortable talking to people. I benefit more than the people. When you reach out to other people, you not only make friends, you feel important."

2. **Support and increase funding for existing Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs.** Both programs engage older adults over 55 with low income qualifications for a minimum of 15 hours a week. The impact is seen in the relationships that occurs with the 15 hour a week time commitment; for children and for homebound older adults. The children achieve more from one-on-one tutoring and mentoring. Senior Companions make a difference by keeping older folks in their homes and out of expensive long term care. The dual impact for the volunteer and for those served is a win-win combination.