

Health and Wellness Committee Meeting Notes

June 4, 2024, at 9:30 a.m.

Virtually Via Zoom

Attending COA Board Members and Alumni: Linda Bergofsky, Wayne Berman, Virginia Cain, Betsy Carrier, Joyce Dubow, Marcia Pruzan, Barbara Selter, Marsha Weber, Revathi Vikram

Attending County Staff: Tina Purser Langley

Guests: Lynn D.

Meeting called to order at 9:30

Motion for approval of April minutes by Wayne Berman, seconded by Linda Bergofsky

Mental Health Services: The H&W Committee is wrapping up its exploration of mental health services for seniors in Montgomery County. The Committee was pleased to see that there are many services available. Members discussed the need to ensure that the information about services is widely disseminated. One avenue for dissemination is through the CoA Ambassador Program initiated by the Communications Committee. A single slide with accompanying speaker notes seemed to be most appropriate. An existing document from the Behavioral Health Unit can service as a starting point. The Committee also will consider whether a fact sheet with information for older adults would fill an unmet need. Marsha, Marcia, David, Virginia, Barbara, and Tina will meet to work on the communications project.

Updating H&W Fact Sheets: Some of the fact sheets developed by the H&W Committee have become somewhat out of data. The hearing loss fact sheet was developed prior to the availability of over-the-counter hearing aids. Marie Sloan has done a preliminary review of the hearing loss fact sheet. David will do a draft of an updated sheet that addresses issues found by Marie and determine what additional changes are necessary.

The fact sheet on social isolation was developed during the COVID epidemic. While social isolation continues to be a concern for older adults, using the epidemic to frame the issue is no longer as relevant. Linda Bergofsky has done a preliminary review of this fact sheet. The Committee will move on to the social isolation sheet following work on the hearing loss.

Suggestions for additional fact sheets included ones on solo aging and downsizing.

Committee members made several general suggestions regarding the fact sheets, e.g. they should include the date they were created and undergo a review every two years.

Access Hears: Tina presented an update on Access Hears, a program to distribute hearing aids to those in need which was expanded to include Montgomery County. From March 2023 to June 2024, the program distributed 480 hearing aids. The initial \$250,000 budget was increased to \$300,000. The program has run out of funds so currently cannot distribute any more. There is no money budgeted for FY2025. The cost is not just for the devices but for staff to do testing and training on the use of the hearing aids.

There is an apparent high demand for these products and services. Plans for outreach to some of the minority populations in Montgomery County were scrapped as the County ran out of funds for providing the devices. Several ideas were raised to potentially decrease the cost to the individual such as paying for a single hearing aid or just providing testing. It is not clear whether these would be viable solutions. There was a suggestion to look at how funding for the dental program is provided.

The Committee believes that an intense evaluation of the program should be conducted to understand who the program has reached and who it has not. A community needs assessment would provide valuable information.

Virginia reminded the Committee that H & W Committee budget and advocacy priorities would be needed soon. David provided an overview of the process. These priorities need to be developed at the July H&W meeting to present at the July CoA meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:15.