

# Commission on Aging Montgomery County, Maryland



## Briefing Book 2023

## Website Information

For more information regarding the Montgomery County Commission on Aging and its work, please visit the Commission's website at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coa](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coa). There you will find the CoA's calendar of events; committee minutes; links to the CoA's cable TV program, *50+ in Montgomery County*; and links to multiple resources including reports, fact sheets, and letters of testimony.

In addition, another website, the Montgomery County Senior Site, provides information on such topics as consumer issues, employment, caregiving, housing, safety, older adult services, calendar of events, and senior center locations. It was established by former County Executive, Isiah Leggett, and is maintained by the County's Public Information Office. That website can be found at <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior>.



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## Executive Summary

The objective of this briefing book is to provide information regarding concerns that significantly impact the health, welfare, safety, and quality of life of older adults in our County. The issues that we discuss are expected to continue to expand as the older adult population grows and require both near-term and long-term plans to address the challenges. The topics described in this book include:

**Affordable Housing** – According to the U.S. Census, 57 percent of the people who are over 65 pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs (compared with 49 percent of the total population) and their numbers are growing.

**Transportation, Driver Safety, and Pedestrian Safety** – Many older adults cannot afford taxis, Uber, Lyft or similar options, or cannot navigate their systems. Also, road design, markings, signage, and targeted safe driver education deserve attention, as well as infrastructure improvements for pedestrians.

**Assisted Living Affordability and Access** – The price for assisted living in Maryland in 2021 averaged \$4,900 a month, or \$161 a day and \$58,800 a year. For the Washington, DC area a private, one bedroom unit averaged \$5,948 a month, \$196 a day, and \$71,370 annually. Almost all assisted living services are paid for by residents/families out of their personal funds. Medicare does not cover assisted living costs.

**Caregiver Support** – In 2021 the estimated economic value of family caregivers' unpaid contributions was approximately \$600 billion, based on about 38 million caregivers providing an average of 18 hours of care per week for a total of 36 billion hours of care, at an average value of \$16.59 per hour.

**Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation** – In Montgomery County, Adult Protective Services' investigations peaked in FY19 to 1,151 investigations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of referrals decreased, but numbered over 1,000 investigations in 2021-2022 and can be attributed to older adults returning to the community.

**Health and Social Services** – Some important issues that must be monitored continuously for the older population include hearing loss, food insecurity, social isolation, oral health, and behavioral health, including suicide prevention.

**Quality of Care in Long-term Care Facilities** – In 2021, Maryland's Office of Health Care Quality ceased the Memorandum of Understanding between the State and Montgomery County that had County staff perform surveys of the County's local skilled nursing facilities. With this move, the State OHCQ absorbed this important function. Since July 2021, there appears to be a diminished occurrence with regard to the State conducting surveys in Montgomery County.

**Social Isolation and Mental Health** – According to a recent advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General the nation's "epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis....The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity."

**Home and Community Based Services: Access and Affordability** – Three factors – the overall increase in the number of older adults with self-care limitations, the strong preference of the majority of older adults wishing to age in place/home, and the reduced availability of unpaid family caregivers – make it imperative that we focus on the accessibility, availability, affordability, and acceptability of long-term home and community supported services.

**Cross Cutting Issues** – It is imperative that our leaders consider our County's diversity, its methods of communications, and the systemic problem of ageism to ensure that the County remains a community for a lifetime.

# About the Commission

## **Vision**

To enable older adults to live quality lives, regardless of their abilities, so that Montgomery County is their community for a lifetime.

## **Mission**

Recognizing Montgomery County's diversity and that older adults are the fastest growing demographic in the County, the CoA will serve as a valued voice for these older adults.

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commitment**

We are committed to being a just, inclusive, anti-racist, anti-agist, and equitable community that values and honors the unique qualities, wisdom and lived experience of all people. We are steadfast in our commitment to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community, where all are able to meaningfully contribute and thrive.

## **Purpose**

The CoA serves as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents. It supports both safety net services for the frail elderly and programs to meet the interests and needs of older adults who want to age in their communities.

## **Values**

Everything the CoA does is guided by compassion, collaboration, reliability, integrity, and respect.

## **Goals**

The goals of the CoA are to:

- Advocate for the safety net for older adults regardless of budgetary pressures;
- Monitor County government programs to increase responsiveness to the needs of older adults;
- Focus attention on the capacity of older adults to participate fully in community life;
- Advocate for the range of support services for older adults who choose to remain independent in their community and/or their own homes ("Aging in Place").

## Affordable Housing

Housing affordability is a challenge for many older adults in Montgomery County. According to the US Census, 57 percent of the people who are over 65 pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs (compared with 49 percent of the total population) and their numbers are growing.

**Homeownership:** For older adults ages 60-85 homeownership remains at 80 percent but declines to 68 percent for those who are over 85. The challenges homeowners' face include: 1) middle- to low-income homeowners struggle to cover the cost of home maintenance; 2) older homeowners are more vulnerable to price gouging and scams by unscrupulous contractors; and 3) most homes were not built with accessibility in mind and homeowners are either unaware of the need to remodel their homes or do not have the funds to do so. Fortunately, the County has property tax credit programs for homeowners who undertake remodeling to improve accessibility. It also dedicated 1.5 million in its FY24 budget toward grants to help older adults.

**Renters:** Rent burden is significantly higher than homeownership burden, as rents continue to rise while incomes remain fixed. We do not have data on the number of older adults who are on waitlists for subsidized housing but wait times are counted in years.

Current housing stock for older adults in the County:

Independent Living: 49 developments, 3240 units, 404 moderately priced dwelling units

Active adults: 3 development, 5890 units, 12 moderately priced dwelling units

Development in the pipeline: 17 development, 3347 units, 352 moderately priced dwelling units

## Transportation, Driver Safety, and Pedestrian Safety

Transportation enables older adults to maintain independence and quality of life for older adults, but many older residents lack access to convenient affordable transportation, and face obstacles as pedestrians. Older residents who no longer drive, or who never learned to drive, rely on public and other transportation options to get to medical appointments, shopping, and social, educational, religious, and other activities. In some areas of Montgomery County, public transportation is limited or even non-existent. Public options may be difficult for older and disabled residents to access because they are unable to walk from their homes to public transportation locations. Programs such as MetroAccess are helpful but often are perceived as inconvenient or unsafe. Some Montgomery County transportation programs have restrictive eligibility requirements. Many older adults cannot afford taxis, Uber, Lyft or similar options, or cannot navigate their systems. In addition, these ride programs are not always accessible for people with disabilities. Flash Pass, free Ride-On, and other County initiatives are important programs that improve transportation for older adults.

As for driver safety, although the accident rate of older drivers is low compared to those under age 34, road design and markings, especially merge lanes and turn lanes, as well as signage and targeted safe driver education, deserve attention.

In addition, infrastructure improvements for pedestrian safety are needed, particularly for older residents who walk more slowly than the norm and are prone to trip on brick sidewalks, broken

pavement, and uneven steps. Traffic light timing for longer “cross times” where older residents live and congregate, as well as safe landing spaces in medians and at major intersections, are critical. Safe and accessible sidewalk, curb cuts and well-lit and maintained pathways would reduce accidents and encourage more older people to walk in their communities.

## **Assisted Living Affordability and Access**

Assisted living facilities provide care to older adults and individuals with disabilities who are having difficulty living independently, but who do not need the daily skilled nursing services provided in a nursing home. Assisted living, however, is expensive, and with few exceptions, must be paid for from personal funds.

According to Genworth’s Cost of Care Survey Data from the National Senior Living Cost Index, the price for assisted living in Maryland in 2021 averaged \$4,900 a month, or \$161 a day and \$58,800 a year. For the Washington, DC area a private, one bedroom unit averaged \$5,948 a month, \$196 a day, and \$71,370 annually. Almost all assisted living services are paid for by residents (or their families) out of their personal funds. Medicare does not cover assisted living costs.

While the State of Maryland offers several programs that assist low-income, disabled, and some older adult individuals, eligibility guidelines (financial and medical) are strict and waiting lists are long.

One way to delay the need for older adults to enter assisted living and nursing care is to support them at home and in their independent living environments, doing things such as 1) providing assistance in managing medications, 2) helping vulnerable older adults with daily living strategies, and 3) providing older adults with caregivers.

## **Caregiver Support**

Informal caregivers providing unpaid physical and emotional support for older or disabled family members, friends, or neighbors can themselves experience significant financial, emotional, and physical consequences as a result of their caregiving responsibilities.

According to the AARP Public Policy Institute’s March 2023 publication, “Valuing the Invaluable 2023 Update: Strengthening Supports for Family Caregivers,” in 2021, the estimated economic value of family caregivers’ unpaid contributions was approximately \$600 billion, based on about 38 million caregivers providing an average of 18 hours of care per week for a total of 36 billion hours of care, at an average value of \$16.59 per hour.

- This \$600 billion estimate for 2021 is up from \$470 billion in 2017 and continues a 25-year trend of increasing economic value. It also corresponds to studies that have found that the value of unpaid family care vastly exceeds the value of paid home care.
- Maryland has 760,000 caregivers.
- 12.3 percent of Maryland residents are family caregivers.
- 11 to 12.9 percent of Maryland residents are unpaid caregivers.



Unpaid caregivers of older, frail, or disabled individuals include spouses, adult children, other family members, friends, and neighbors. They help with physical activities including bathing and dressing, preparing meals, paying bills, shopping, housework, transportation, medication compliance, and often more complex health-related tasks.

As Baby Boomers age, the number of individuals needing care is expected to far outnumber the number of caregivers; more individuals will need care and there will be fewer family members and friends available to provide that everyday help. In addition, caregivers' savings are eroding; family caregivers face a financial burden by caring for a loved one and payment for their services needs to be further explored.

## **Elder Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation**

Elder abuse is a national issue that is left to local governments to police and protect their most vulnerable residents. According to the National Council on Aging, elder abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, and abandonment. Perpetrators include children, other family members, and spouses – as well as staff at nursing homes, assisted living, and other facilities.

Reliable numbers on the prevalence of elder abuse are hard to come by and different studies have reported inconsistent findings. The National Council on Aging states that at least approximately 1-in-10 Americans aged 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse. Some estimates range as high as five million older adults who are abused each year. One study estimated that only one in 24 cases of abuse are reported to authorities. Abusers are both women and men. In almost 60 percent of elder abuse and neglect incidents, the perpetrator is a family member. Two-thirds of perpetrators are adult children or spouses.

Social isolation and mental impairment (such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease) are two factors that make older adults vulnerable to abuse. Recent studies show that nearly half of those with dementia experienced abuse or neglect. Interpersonal violence also occurs at disproportionately higher rates among adults with disabilities.

In Montgomery County, Adult Protective Services' investigations peaked in FY19 to 1,151 investigations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of referrals decreased, but numbered over 1,000 investigations in 2021-2022 and can be attributed to older adults returning to the community.

## **Health and Social Services**

Montgomery County provides older residents with a wide range of health, recreational, and social services, either directly or through coordination with non-profit and other organizations, and at senior centers, clinics, and other locations. With our increasing older population, however, and the growth in the number of low-income, immigrant, and culturally diverse older adults, the need for these services is growing.

Some important issues that must be continuously monitored for the older population include:

- Hearing loss
- Food insecurity
- Social isolation
- Oral health
- Behavioral health, including suicide prevention

In addition, the County should continue to investigate and implement “Wrap-Around Services” – coordinated, highly individualized and community-based services that support the basic needs of older adults. These services help keep older adults active and healthy as they “age in place.”

## Quality of Care in Long-term Care Facilities

Often, residents of long-term care facilities in Montgomery County do not all receive the care they need and deserve. State resources for investigating complaints are inadequate, and the County’s long-term care ombudsman program, which advocates on behalf of residents, lacks sufficient resources.

A 2014 report by the Maryland-based advocacy organization *Voices for Quality Care* gave several Montgomery County nursing homes a D+ quality rating for three years in a row. In 2017 the Maryland Health Care Commission’s Nursing Home Compare website identified approximately one-third of Montgomery County nursing homes as falling “below” or “much below” the national average in overall quality measures. In addition, by the beginning of March 2021 about 23.5 percent of Montgomery County’s COVID deaths occurred in nursing homes.

In 2021 the State’s Office of Health Care Quality ceased the Memorandum of Understanding between the State and Montgomery County that allowed ten County staff to perform surveys of the County’s local skilled nursing facilities. With this move, the State OHCQ absorbed the function of performing the needed surveys for the entire County. Although four additional State nursing home surveyors were hired, since July 2021 there appears to be a diminished occurrence with regard to the State conducting surveys in Montgomery County.

Another program that the County uses to ensure quality care in long-term care facilities is the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program. It is mandated under the *Older Americans Act* and uses staff and volunteers who are trained and certified to advocate for high quality care and protection for nursing home and assisted living residents. The program receives some Federal and State funding, but it is inadequate to meet the need; additional County support is essential.

## Social Isolation and Mental Health

For an older person, social isolation can have devastating consequences for physical and mental health. In addition, social isolation increases older adult vulnerability to elder abuse and or fraud.

According to a recent advisory from U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy the nation’s “epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis....The

mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity.”

According to the Surgeon General’s May 3, 2023 report, “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” six health risks that individual who are chronically lonely or isolated face include:

1. Premature death
2. Heart disease and stroke
3. Diabetes
4. Infections
5. Cognitive decline and dementia
6. Depression and anxiety

*The Pandemic Effect: A Social Isolation Report*, published in October 2020 by the AARP Foundation and the United Health Foundation, found that for adults age 50 and older who have experienced social isolation during the pandemic, half report feeling less motivated, more than four in 10 (41 percent) report feeling more anxious than usual and more than a third (37 percent) have felt depressed. While social engagement generally is declining across the generations, individuals in the 55-64 age group have weaker ties to family, friends, and neighbors, and are less likely to engage in church/community activities than their counterparts 20 years ago.

A variety of factors can contribute to isolation of older adults, including living alone, mobility limitations, a lack of transportation options, frailty, and lack of opportunity. Especially concerning is the impact of isolation due to language or cultural barriers.

## **Home- and Community-Based Services: Access and Affordability**

The health status of older Americans has improved over the past several decades. As individuals age, however, the percentage reporting excellent or very good health decreases. Although current research indicates a continued decrease in the disability rate among older adults, the overall dramatic growth in the number of older Americans means that there will still be an increase in the number of older adults with disabilities.

The increase in the overall number of older adults with self-care limitations needs to be considered in the context of the fact that the vast majority of older adults want to age in their own homes, or at least in the same community. Another factor that makes the focus on the accessibility, availability, affordability, and acceptability of home and community-based support services imperative is the critical role and diminishing availability of informal caregivers. Family and other informal caregivers are the largest source of long-term care in the United States; however, decreased fertility patterns, increased labor force participation, increased labor force mobility, and family geographic dispersion have raised concerns about the availability of family caregivers.

These three factors – the overall increase in the number of older adults with self-care limitations (despite the projected decrease in the disability rate), the strong preference of the majority of older adults wishing to “age in place/home,” and the reduced availability of unpaid family caregivers – make it imperative that we focus on the accessibility, availability, affordability and acceptability of long-term home and community support services.

## Cross Cutting Issues

***Diversity:*** Montgomery County is a minority-majority County; it is important to work with the diverse communities that make up our County. Ways that older adults in these communities could use County assistance and benefit from partnerships with nonprofit organizations that are serving these populations, include: (1) better communications, in language-accessible, print-based material of County programs and services and also County information on radio stations/cable TV programs whose listeners/viewers are from culturally diverse communities; (2) County transportation services that partner with diverse communities' older adult service providers to identify translation needs of the users of the transportation services; and (3) County senior center offerings that are sensitive to diverse cultural dietary needs and cultural programming, to help reduce older adult social isolation.

***Communications:*** Within Montgomery County, there is a wealth of information for older adults but there is not a strong strategy to distribute it consistently. Information about County services, supports, and resources must be easy for older adults and their families to access; the lack of easily available information is consistently cited as an issue by older adults and their families. Making information easier to access could include improvements to the 311 non-emergency phone system, County website navigation, and availability of materials in venues that older adults frequent such as libraries and recreation centers.

***Ageism:*** Ageism is stereotyping of, and discrimination against, individuals or groups because of their age. This may be casual or systematic. It is a bias against older adults that diminishes their contributions to our community and fails to recognize the many contributions they currently make and will make in the future.

## Commission on Aging Organization and Core Activities

Commission activities include monthly meetings of the full Commission, the Executive Committee, and each of the four standing committees: Aging in Community, Health and Wellness, Communications, and Public Policy. In addition, task forces are convened to deal with specific issues. Committees explore topics and issues within their scope and identify challenges and gaps in services and supports. These issues may include such things as budget requests for programs for older adults or advocating at the County- or State-level for laws, services, or programs. The committees often present their research to the full Commission for consideration for further action. The CoA also engages in concentrated studies of other age-relevant issues, which in recent years have included affordable housing, hearing loss issues, and the need for financial assistance to help cover the high cost of assisted living. Focus or Task Groups are created as needed to examine discrete issues such as ageism; employment discrimination; and racial equity, dementia services and policing. The CoA also co-produces the monthly County Cable Montgomery program, *50+ in Montgomery County* (formerly *Seniors Today*), which informs the community about issues, programs, and activities for older adults. Commissioner Katie Smith, hosts the program, which is broadcast several times each month and available for on-line viewing.

All CoA meetings are open to the public. In addition, to help inform the Commission's priorities and advocacy, full Commission and committee meetings frequently include invited guests who share their expertise on important topics. Meetings are also attended by representatives from other Montgomery County commissions, boards, committees, departments, agencies, and interested stakeholders. Several Commissioners serve as liaisons to other relevant organizations and groups.

With the exception of its co-sponsorship of the *50+ in Montgomery County* cable television program and discrete community outreach and education efforts, the Commission does not administer or operate programs, or adopt or enact regulations or legislation.

Commissioners are in frequent contact with the County Executive, County Council members, department directors and staff, State and Federal legislators, members of the public, and others to advance programs, services, and policies on behalf of County older adults. At the County level, the CoA provides oral and written testimony on legislative, budget, and program issues and priorities pending before the County Council. In addition, CoA members meet with the County Executive, members of the Council, and executive branch directors; have ongoing communication with department staff; and collaborate with other County boards, committees, commissions, and stakeholders on issues of mutual interest. CoA members also engage with non-profit partners, private sector groups, and other stakeholders to identify challenges and develop solutions.

At the State level, the CoA responds to proposed legislation in the General Assembly and communicates with relevant State agencies and members of the Montgomery County delegation on issues of concern to older adults in the County. Members also testify at County and State hearings.

At the Federal level, the CoA writes letters on priority issues to appropriate Congressional representatives. Members also support Congressional and Executive Branch outreach conducted by national organizations that represent the older adult population on issues affecting Montgomery County residents.

## Current Commission Members

Linda Bergofsky, Wayne Berman, Virginia Cain, Elizabeth Carrier, Jean Dinwiddie, Joyce Dubow, Rena Eichler, David Engel, Nkiru Ezeani, Arunima Ghosh, Norman Goldstein, Mona Grieser, Anna Maria Izquierdo-Porrera, Morris Klein, Bob Levey, Kendell Matthews, Kathleen McGuinness, Yvette Monroe, Sibon Ncube, Laurie Pross, Richard Ricciardi, Beverly Rollins, Barbara Selter, Marie Sloan, Katie Smith, Kathryn Stein, Mary Sweeney, Marsha Weber, T. Ryan Wilson, Arthur Williams, Janice Zalen

## Enabling Legislation

The Commission on Aging was established by Montgomery County in 1974 pursuant to a requirement of the Federal *Older Americans Act of 1965*, that there be an Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging. (42 U.S.C. Sec. 3001 et. Seq.; MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34.)

Among the powers granted to the Commission are the following:

- (f) To study and investigate by means of public or private meetings, conferences and public hearings, conditions which may result in unmet needs or in discrimination or prejudice because of age.*
- (g) To advise and counsel the residents of the County, the County council, the County executive and the various departments of County, State and Federal governments on matters involving the needs of the aging, and to recommend such procedures, programs or legislation as it may deem necessary and proper to promote and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all persons, regardless of their age.*
- (h) To work to remove the unmet needs or discrimination or prejudice on the basis of age in such areas as housing, recreation, employment, education, community services and related matters. (MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34)*

## Commission on Aging Budget Priorities

The CoA develops annual budget priorities that take into consideration the mission set forth in the enabling legislation and information and data from County agencies, elected officials, and outside experts.

## FY24 Budget Priorities

- Hire 1 full-time equivalent position within Aging and Disability Services to serve as a Coordinator for older adult communications and outreach to improve awareness of County programs for older adults.
- Increase funding for In-Home Aide Services (IHAS) for both DHHS staff and contract budgets.

The CoA identified other items for which it advocated during the budget cycle:

- Monitor progress of the Access HEARS pilot and provide funds if needed. (\$250,000 over 2 years, providing 300- 400 devices and staff to fit/monitor use).
- Support villages' efforts to improve cost efficiency and equity and decrease the administrative burdens associated with running a village through development of a "hub and spoke" model.
- Plan and conduct a Telecare/Telehealth demonstration project to improve access to healthcare and support services for older adults (\$250,000).
- Increase funding for mental health outreach for older adults (Senior Outreach Team) to eliminate waiting lists.
- Provide funding and assign staff to plan a Summit on Aging in 2023 to help the County plan for a growing older adult population.

- Provide funds to conduct the nationally recognized “Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity” certification training to Montgomery County drivers of taxicabs and wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Provide gap-filling transportation services to older adults and residents with disabilities to prevent missed medical and other vital appointments (\$120,000).

### **FY25 Budget Priorities**

- Hire a permanent marketing and outreach staff person in the Department of Aging Disability Services to promote the many County programs available to older adults, including coordinating the CoA’s volunteer Ambassador and Library Liaison Programs.
- Hire one full-time employee at a pay grade sufficient to carry out the duties of Implementation Manager for the Home and Community-based Services Work Force Task Force.
- Allot \$250,00 for program formulation and pilot design for the Smarter Care Technology Project.
- Implement a subsidy hub and a spokes model for the County Villages.
- Provide adequate funding for the senior nutrition program.
- Provide at least \$120,000 to expand the Early-Stage Memory Loss Program.
- Advocate for a better plan to address service delays with the Home and Community-based service programs (Community Personal Assistance Services, Community First Choice, and Community Options Waiver).
- Provide \$10,000 to fund the Commission on Aging’s annual public forum that brings together noted experts with members of the public to discuss issues important to older adults.
- Increase funding to support respite coordination.
- Provide funding for the translation of printed materials specific to older adults. Continue funding for important older adult publications such as ads for *The Beacon* and production of the public access TV program, *50+ in Montgomery County*.
- Fund at least \$120,000 per year for gap-filling (last-minute) transportation services to older adults and residents with disabilities.
- Continue advocacy to improve State inspection practices, and potentially reinstate Memorandums of Understanding between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Health Care Quality.
- Provide \$190,000 to establish a safety, accessibility, and customer service training program for all Montgomery County taxicab drivers.
- Coordinate efforts with Montgomery County Public Schools, the Department of Children, the Department of Youth and Family Services, and Housing and Community Affairs to enhance intergenerational programming and activities.
- Request funding for a congregate meals site at the new Silver Spring recreation and aquatic center.

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## 2022 Commission on Aging Accomplishments

- On May 5, 2022 the Commission held a hybrid public forum entitled “In-Home Care: We Can Do Better.” The event was convened to consider how in-home care needs of the County’s growing older adult population are now being met and to explore approaches to better meet them.
- In November the Commission hosted a virtual Legislative Breakfast to meet with members of the Montgomery County delegation to the Maryland General Assembly.
- The Commission lobbied the County Executive and County Councilmembers for resources to be contained in the County budget including: expansion of in-home care to more older adults in the County, including residents without Medicaid; increasing funding to help market/promote services available for older adults; funding an Access Hears program to help supply hearing aids and support to lower income residents; restoring cuts to the Jewish Council for the Aging Escorted Transportation Program; and continuing to expand funding for the Housing Initiative Fund to produce and preserve affordable rental housing, including older adult housing projects. Commissioners met individually with County Council members and testified twice before the County Council, resulting in all of these priorities being funded by the County Council.
- The Commission worked with staff from Johns Hopkins Medicine to create a proposal for a hearing program to assist low-income older adults to obtain hearing devices and navigate the process for selecting hearing aids. This Access Hears pilot proposal for Montgomery County has been funded through use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The Commission also wrote a letter to the Food and Drug Administration to support the release of the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Ruling.
- The Commission worked with Montgomery County’s Aging and Disability Services staff to identify a list of priorities to receive enhanced ARPA funding.
- The Commission sent ten letters to State and local legislators in support of laws, programs, and services affecting older adults. It lobbied extensively for information about the transfer of the Nursing Home Surveying capability from Montgomery County to the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) and sent letters to the State delegation to obtain increased transparency from OHCQ.
- The County Executive established a Task Force to identify issues associated with a scarcity of workers to provide in-home care and make recommendations on how to increase the supply of these workers in Maryland. Several Commissioners served on this Task Force.
- Commission members worked with University of Maryland students to identify technologies useful in helping older adults to age in place. They assisted students in developing scenarios of technology usage with maximum impact on older adults.
- The Commission prioritized and lobbied for budget items for FY24 including: increasing funding for the In-Home Aide Services program for both the County’s Health and Human Services staff and also contract budgets to eliminate waiting lists; restoring cuts to the escorted transportation program; expanding funding for the Housing Initiative Fund; fully funding the Licensure and Regulatory Nursing Home Inspections Program; and funding for a full time facilitator for Age-Friendly Montgomery.
- The Commission suggested and lobbied for the County to host another Senior Summit which was subsequently scheduled for October 2023.

### Age-Friendly Montgomery

In 2014, the CoA learned about a World Health Organization initiative called Age-Friendly Cities. To learn more about it, the commission conducted a summer study in 2015, and, upon completing its research, recommended that the County enroll in the Initiative. Supported by the County Executive and County Council, the County enrolled in the program via the AARP Age-Friendly Network of Communities that is affiliated with the World Health Organization. This took place at the County’s 2015 Summit on Aging.

As a highly collaborative program, Age-Friendly Montgomery plans, implements, and conducts those programs and services that support older residents so that they can live and thrive in Montgomery County throughout their lives. It operates under the framework of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities which is designed to help localities in the US and across the globe (through the World Health Organization) prepare for and support the needs of the rapidly growing older population. Several Age-Friendly Montgomery efforts are initiated and undertaken with advocacy by the Commission on Aging.

The Age-Friendly structure has proven to be a highly successful model for cross-government and outside organization work. It shares common interests with the commission and its committees and task forces. The Age-Friendly Senior Fellow, the commission chair, and many commission members regularly participate in the work of these groups.

**Difference Between the CoA and Age-Friendly Montgomery.** The CoA is an advisory-only body established under the *Older Americans Act*. It does not develop or conduct any programming or services itself. The CoA belongs only to Montgomery County and was 1) in place decades before there was an Age-Friendly movement, and 2) was the driving force behind the County joining the AARP Age-Friendly network.

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The Age-Friendly program is part of a national and global network. Montgomery County’s participation in Age-Friendly is a public/private partnership between government and the community.

The Commission on Aging was established by Montgomery County in 1974 pursuant to a requirement of the Federal *Older Americans Act of 1965* that there be an Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging. (42 U.S.C. Sec. 3001 et. seq.; MC Code Article III, Sec. 27-34.)

The CoA is composed of volunteers who are passionate about issues of importance to older adults. CoA members have years of experience working on concerns relevant to older adults and include pharmacists, physicians, lawyers, college professors, former Congressional staff, and executives with the Federal, State, and County governments, as well as advocacy organizations such as AARP and GROWS.

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coa](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coa)

