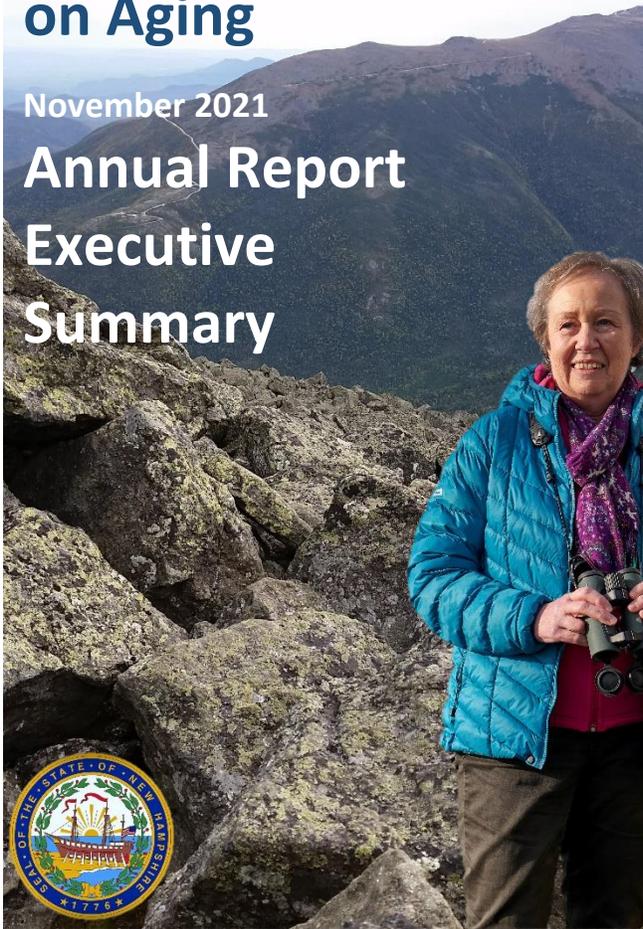


# NH State Commission on Aging

November 2021

## Annual Report Executive Summary



### INTRODUCTION

From civic engagement to caregiving, older Granite Staters both in and out of the workforce continue to find ways to improve our communities. To grow the opportunity for all to contribute, we need to invest across generations, shape public policy to maximize care and consideration of everyone's interests, and improve our systems.

The Commission's recommendations included in the 2021 Annual Report envision a future where older Granite Staters are not only able to meet their basic needs as they age, but are respected and engaged in society for the knowledge, experience, and social connections they bring. Policies and investments for older adults must recognize that not every person ages in the same way. Some of us will need almost no assistance throughout the course of our lives; some of us will need community-based services to meet certain needs, and about a quarter to a third will need more intensive services. Growing older should build value in our lives. Such a future depends on knowing that the resources for living well will be there for all of us as we grow older.

### SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Grow the Direct Care Workforce
- Bolster Skilled Nursing Facility Resiliency
- Increase Community Based Long Term Services and Supports
- Address Housing Instability
- Promote Age Friendly Policies, Systems, and Environments
- Strengthen Community Connections & Protections for Older Adults
- Improve the Behavioral Health System of Care

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Reflecting on the previous year, the New Hampshire State Commission on Aging advises the State Legislature and Office of the Governor to consider the following recommendations for policy changes and related funding. The Commission suggests it should be engaged in budget and other funding decision-making processes in relation to these recommendations. The recommendations below are organized by topic areas:

### GROW THE DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE

Direct care workers assist older adults and people with disabilities with daily tasks, such as dressing, bathing, and eating; some perform basic clinical tasks. Direct care workers include personal care aides, home health aides, licensed nursing assistants, nurses and other caregivers. The decades' long struggle to fill direct care positions and stabilize this essential workforce has been exacerbated to crisis levels with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic the growing number of older adults, increased longevity, untenable low wages, and shrinking number of people in the "working age" cohort made this issue a brewing storm. The pandemic increased work place stress, caused burnout, early retirements, and made some fearful of contracting illness and others fearful of vaccine requirements. This left an inadequate workforce resulting in a large increase in unmet needs and adverse health outcomes among older adults.

Growing the direct care workforce is one of the most critical tasks facing our state. The Commission on Aging recommends the following strategies to make progress:

- Make significant financial investments to grow and retain the direct care work force.
- Provide means for a living wage for the direct care workforce.
- Increase affordable housing options for the direct care workforce.
- Provide means and change policies to create more training programs for Licensed Nursing Assistants (LNA). Policy changes should be made to enable home care organizations to offer training.
- Incentivize more academic partnerships.
- Support culture change initiatives that lift up LNAs as the valued backbone of the care system.
- Engage in more public awareness of LNA training and career ladder opportunities.

### BOLSTER SKILLED NURSING FACILITY RESILIENCY

Long-term care facilities have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Nursing homes and senior living communities remain in the difficult position of needing to keep residents and staff safe while continuing to provide care and ensure a good quality of life. These facilities are home to some of the most pandemic-vulnerable and isolation-vulnerable people in our State. Federal and State guidance on how to operate shifted as we collectively learned more about various aspects of this balancing act. Increased workforce shortages and care costs in this time of unprecedented need added to the burden. There is an immediate need to re-examine the relationship between the physical environment, infection control, quality of life, and health outcomes. And there is a need to rally behind long term care providers of high quality care to avoid closures and support development of new, high caliber care options. Growing the workforce is critical, but not the only issue. This is an important moment in time to invest in initiatives that improve the lives of residents in long term care and build the resiliency and preparedness of the long term care system against future disease outbreaks.

- Enact legislation to ensure the visitation rights of essential caregivers to provide assistance and support residents of long-term care facilities.
- Invest American Rescue Plan Act one-time funds in a culture change initiative for long-term care facilities out of the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman to build resident, staff, and organizational resilience.

- Establish a statewide Long Term Care Facility Family Council to create an opportunity for a collective voice for residents and families.
- Invest in initiatives that work to retain and attract quality long term care organizations in our state.

### INCREASE COMMUNITY BASED LONG TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Cost of Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) varies greatly depending on where the services are provided. In 2020, the median annual cost of care provided in a nursing facility was \$127,750 and \$60,840 for a home health aide providing 8 hours of care 5 days a week in a home. Median costs for services provided in an adult day setting were \$22,100.<sup>1</sup> Supporting workforce growth, alternative models of delivery, awareness of options, and effective policies are smart options to increase care offered in home and community.

- Support for pilots that test alternative models for delivery of LTSS, including technology options.
- Collaborate with counties to develop solutions enabling LTSS to be increasingly provided in communities.
- Increase awareness of ServiceLink offices and the services they provide.
- Invest in a Medicaid presumptive eligibility pilot to determine impact upon costs and prompt access to appropriate levels of services. Use a portion of the increase to the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage funds made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act for this pilot.



### ADDRESS HOUSING INSTABILITY

According to the Governor’s Council on Housing Stability, New Hampshire has had an inadequate supply of affordable housing for decades. The shortfall has been exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Older adults on fixed incomes and the workers meeting the needs of older adults need affordable housing. New housing should be placed where people can walk around the community and benefit from nearby services. Placing housing near to public transit routes and using universal design principles in construction are both important as people’s needs change over time.

- Increase production of new affordable housing, embedding some with supportive services. Supportive services help people maintain stable housing and gain access to appropriate health and social services.
- Increase efforts to layer supportive services over existing housing. Change how services provided in housing are reimbursed.
- Explore financial incentives for communities to create new affordable housing for older adults.
- Address housing instability by adopting innovative housing policies and pilot programs that increase affordable housing for older adults and members of the workforce, possibly together.
- Develop programs to rehabilitate old housing stock to enable people to stay in their houses longer and to create multigenerational alternative living arrangements.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.genworth.com/aging-and-you/finances/cost-of-care.html>

## PROMOTE AGE FRIENDLY POLICIES, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENTS

Policies, systems and environments supported by state government ideally reflect the community being served. As New Hampshire's population ages, it is time to advance policies and practices that make it possible for all of us to have the opportunity to thrive and be valued while growing older in New Hampshire.

- Encourage and support local and statewide initiatives and investments to develop age-friendly transportation, housing, built and natural environments, community connections, and health services.
- Target one-time American Rescue Plan Act funds for the purpose of creating a mobility/transportation needs assessment of older adults.
- Promote interactions within regions, towns, organizations, and service providers with a goal of moving towards age-friendly communities.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination laws based on age, including discharges from employment based on age.

## STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS & PROTECTIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Action taken collectively and individually to reduce the spread and contraction of COVID-19 have not been without the adverse side effects of increased social isolation, enhanced economic risk, revealed ageism, and more. When our social and emotional needs go unmet, when we are isolated, we can be vulnerable to [poorer health](#), people who wish to prey upon us, and overall poorer wellbeing. Proactive efforts to increase opportunities for connection and protection will enable all of us to have continued autonomy and remain as contributors to our communities as we age.



- Invest one-time American Rescue Plan funds to provide resources to community senior centers and organizations offering older adult programming. They are one of the most widely used services among NH's older adults, and they have needed to recreate themselves in the face of the pandemic.
  - Support the development of a statewide vision for investment in high speed broadband infrastructure. The vision should address increasing availability, affordability, need for in-home hardware support and general education on use.
- Amend RSA 91-A to allow authorizing public bodies to hold virtual meetings while maintaining compliance with Right-to-Know statutes to improve engagement of older adults in the political process.
  - Amend RSA 631:8 Criminal Neglect of Elderly, Disabled, or Impaired Adults to add a separate felony offense for a finding of "bodily injury". This would add another category of harm beyond the "Serious bodily injury" that currently exists.
  - Increase funding for staff within the NH AG's Exploitation Unit to enable more work on prosecution and prevention, and to develop more forensic accounting capacity.
    - Increase media coverage regarding the growing number and variety of scams.
    - Increase distribution of educational flyers via senior centers, libraries, home delivered meals.

## IMPROVE THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM OF CARE

During this pandemic, care providers witnessed a tremendous growth in older adults' mental health needs while access to care was challenged. Increased social isolation resulted in increased cognitive decline, dementia, anxiety and depression. Dementia, anxiety, and depression are often found to be

concurrent issues, yet access to appropriately coordinated services is confounded by our payment structures, system organization, and limited workforce.

- Increase funding for the Referral, Education, Assistance and Prevention (REAP) program to meet growth in demand for services. One-time American Rescue Plan funds could provide direct relief until the next budget cycle.
- Require and incentivize collaboration across disciplines and settings (e.g., in relation to dementia care, guardianship, CFI applications), with education more widely available across the board.
- Support establishment of community-based services that are not necessarily labeled as ‘mental health,’ but that are proactive, preventive, and wellness oriented. Increase group homes and supported family care.
- Increase awareness, education and support for care partners as well as for the client with mental health issues and dementia.

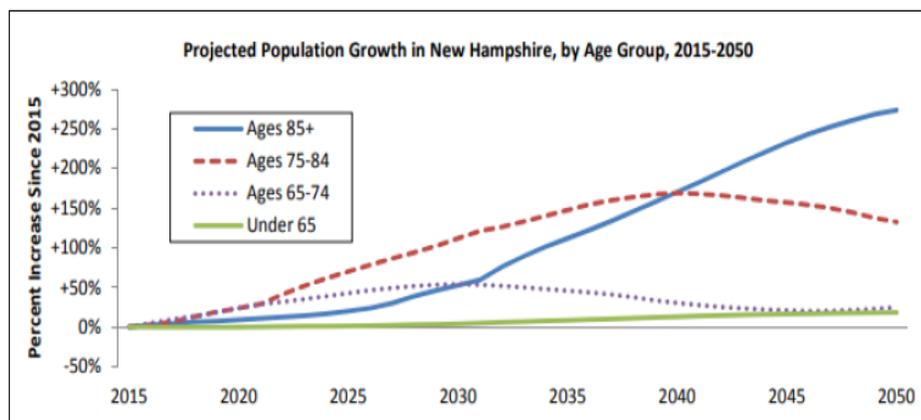
## BACKGROUND

The Commission on Aging was established in 2019 through a legislative process to advise the Governor and the General Court on policy and planning related to aging. The Commission seeks to advance forward thinking public policy and initiatives that ensure we can all thrive and be valued as we age.

The Commission completed a strategic planning process over the summer of 2020 developing a three year plan that outlines four strategic priorities as avenues for investigation for the Commission. In the fall of 2020 four task forces were formed in alignment with the strategic priorities:

- Develop and advance strategies to improve people’s ability to age in the communities of their choice
- Catalyze New Hampshire towards being an age-friendly state
- Engage leaders regarding the emerging needs of older adults during the COVID-19 epidemic
- Develop Commission infrastructure to support operational success

The full report captures the observations and learning that occurred during this past year’s Commission and Task Force meetings, bringing forward recommendations for the Governor and Legislature to consider. These were approved by the membership of the Commission at the October 2021 meeting of the Commission.



[Graph from AARP Across the States 2018: Profile of Long-Term Services and Supports in NH](#) Currently in New Hampshire, one out of every five of us is over the age of 60. There is much work to be done to prepare our state to flourish during the demographic shift we are experiencing.

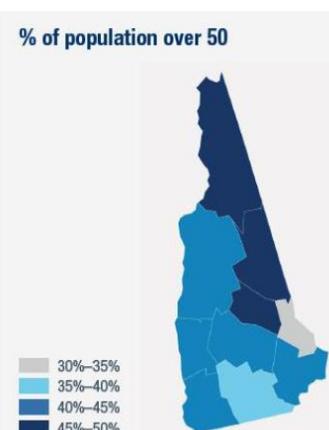


Image from AARP Longevity Economy Report: NH. Population by age by county is from the Census Bureau population estimates for 2015.