

MINUTES
New Hampshire State Commission on Aging
Monday, March 15, 2021 10:00 a.m.-noon
Held via Video Teleconference

Present: Carol Stamatakis, Vice Chair; Roberta Berner, Clerk; Rep. James MacKay; Wendi Aultman, DHHS; Richard Lavers, NHES; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Sunny Mulligan Shea, DOJ; Patrick Herlihy, DOT; Lynn Lippitt, NH Housing Finance Authority; Janet Weeks, DOL; Elizabeth Bielecki, Director of DMV, DOS; Appointed by the Governor: Kristi St. Laurent, Rev. Susan Nolan, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Susan Ruka, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek.

Rebecca Sky, Executive Director.

Absent: Sen. Ruth Ward, Harry Viens, John Kennedy, Susan Emerson, Kathy Baldrige, Rep. Charles McMahon.

Guest Presenters: Neil Twitchell, NH-DHHS; Polly Campion; Doug McNutt, AARP; Heather Carroll, Alliance for Healthy Aging.

Guests: 14 members of the public (Cheryl Steinberg, Jon Eriquazzo, Jennifer Rabalais, Elaine Paez, Anne Diefendorf, Marianne Jackson, John Wilson, Joan Marcoux, Sharlene Adams, Karen Ulmer Dorsch, Janice McDermott, Laura Davie, Scott Bogle, Kimberly Blakemore).

I. Welcome, Right to Know Checklist, Roll Call, Approval of Minutes

Polly Campion, who has served as Commission Chair since inception, explained that her continued service on the Commission depends upon gubernatorial appointment. The Commission voted unanimously to submit her name and that of another nominee to the Governor last fall, however their appointments continue to be pending. Vice Chair Carol Stamatakis will be chairing today's meeting.

Vice Chair Stamatakis called the meeting to order at 10 a.m., provided an overview of the agenda, welcomed the Commission and guests and read "A Checklist to Ensure Meetings Are Compliant with The Right-to-Know Law During The State Of Emergency." The State of Emergency has been declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A requirement of such compliance is to take a roll call attendance. When each member answers, he or she also must state whether there is anyone else in the room during the meeting. Clerk Roberta Berner called the roll, also asking that the members of the public and presenters attending the teleconference identify themselves.

Minutes from the February meeting were sent out to Commission members with the agenda for review prior to the March meeting.

Daniel Marcek made a motion, seconded by Susan Buxton, to approve the February minutes. By roll call vote, the following members approved the motion: Rep. James MacKay, Roberta Berner, Wendi Aultman, Richard Lavers, Susan Buxton, Patrick Herlihy, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Janet Weeks, Carol Stamatakis, Elizabeth Bielecki, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Rev. Susan Nolan, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Susan Ruka, and Kristi St. Laurent. The motion to approve the February minutes was approved by 17 members.

II. Vaccine Rollout – Regional Public Health Network Outreach and Homebound Program Overview

Neil Twitchell, with the NH-DHHS Division of Public Health, explained his role, which includes working closely with New Hampshire’s 13 Regional Public Health Networks (RPHNs) and issues related to COVID-19. His presentation focused on the paper, “New Hampshire COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy for Homebound Populations,” posted on the state’s COVID-19 website (www.nh.gov/dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/covid19/documents/covid19-vaccination-homebound.pdf).

The state estimates that up to 60,000 New Hampshire residents could be considered homebound based on illness, disability, or lack of access to transportation to a vaccination site. There are two pathways for the homebound to access vaccinations.

The first pathway is for the homebound person, or their caregiver, or a concerned family member or neighbor to call 211, and when prompted, press #3 to get connected to a specialized call center that will either arrange for a two-person vaccination strike team to provide a vaccination in the person’s home, or arrange an appointment at one of the community clinics simultaneously arranging for transportation to that clinic as well.

The second is for organizations that provide services to homebound individuals to connect with their Regional Public Health Network. DHHS asked the public health networks to work with community partners to reach hard to reach populations including the homebound. In addition to providing clinics in senior living communities, municipal and/or U.S. Housing and Urban Development-supported housing complexes, RPHN’s are connecting to home health care providers, Choices for Independence, social service agencies, places of worship, and municipalities to identify homebound individuals. DHHS is supporting the RPHNs with contracts for vaccinator support such as EMTs and nurses to form the strike teams that do home visits.

While community vaccination clinics often vaccinate hundreds of people a day, meeting the needs of the homebound is much more labor-intensive, often involving significant travel from home to home. The result might be vaccinating as few as 11 individuals in an eight-hour day.

In response to a question from Patrick Herlihy, Neil Twitchell explained that the 2-1-1 call center makes the link to transportation via the Medicaid brokers. Wendi Aultman added that the contract with the Medicaid transportation broker allows for some non-Medicaid transportation provision as well.

Rep. MacKay asked if there had been any thought to having a vaccination clinic for the New Hampshire Legislature as an entity, given that the average age of legislators is in the mid-60s. Twitchell explained that this was a decision that would need to be made at the leadership level, perhaps by the NH-DHHS Commissioner and the Governor. (*Note: Subsequent to this meeting, the state announced a vaccine clinic for March 26 for legislators, their family members, and legislative staff. All must meet the eligibility criteria for groups in 1a, 1b, 2a, or 2b.*)

If anyone wishes to let NH-DHHS know of homebound individuals who need to be vaccinated at home, he or she should call Wendi Aultman, NH-DHHS Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services (BEAS). A phone call is preferred over e-mail to protect individuals' privacy.

Carol Stamatakis asked if Sue Buxton, as chair of the Commission's COVID-19 Emerging Issues Task Force, would like to comment. Sue Buxton asked if Neil Twitchell had seen the Task Force's draft issue brief on the vaccination roll-out in New Hampshire. He said that he had. He suggested that the Commission could help by disseminating information about the DHHS strategy for vaccinating the homebound. Sue Buxton said that the development of a simpler document, possibly in a "Frequently Asked Questions" format, might be helpful for communicating to the general public. She shared that this idea was one generated in the Emerging Issues Task Force as a simple flyer could be disseminated in many places such as through senior center networks, Meals on Wheels providers, and posted in public spaces like libraries.

III. Task Force Updates

A. Aging in Community of Choice: Lynn Lippitt and Kristi St. Laurent

Reporting for the Task Force, Kristi St. Laurent gave a brief report about meetings over the past several months:

- In March, the group reviewed the SASH model (Support and Services at Home), developed in Vermont and now being applied elsewhere in the country.
- In February, the Task Force reviewed previous months' programs and decided on issues for focus in upcoming months.
- In January, the focus was on inclusion of aging issues in public health planning from the state and regional perspectives (Health Improvement Plans).
- In December, guest presenters discussed the 2-1-1 system, the ServiceLink Aging and Disability Resource Center network and AARP.

Gaps identified through the presentations were transportation, access to the internet, assistance with chores and household maintenance, and dental care. Isolation is a significant concern, especially in considering aging in place. Kristi St. Laurent said that one observation that Doug McNutt from AARP had made was that Choices for Independence, the Medicaid long-term care waiver program for older adults, is medically oriented while the waiver program for adults with developmental disabilities is more "whole-person" oriented. She said that this especially resonated for her.

Lynn Lippitt added that she has been mulling over whether the Task Force should be focusing on how older adults connect with services or on systems change. Wendi Aultman responded that she thought both approaches were important and emphasized the importance of ServiceLink as a means to connect older adults with services.

B. Age-Friendly State: Sunny Mulligan Shea & Dan Marcek

Dan Marcek reported for the Task Force. He said that the group's last speaker was Marianne Jackson from the Mount Washington Valley Age-Friendly Community

initiative. The region has taken the AARP model with its eight areas of concentration and decided to focus on five, including outdoor spaces, health, housing, transportation, and community connections.

The Task Force had previously decided to look at age-friendly models around the state and at what state agencies were doing to address the needs of older adults. It has now decided to look more closely at a possible state model for New Hampshire with development of a “road map” for towns to follow as they develop age-friendly communities.

He noted that there seemed to be a great deal of overlap in the work of this Task Force with the Aging in Community of Choice Task Force.

C. Operational Infrastructure: Polly Champion

Vice Chair Stamatakis recognized Polly Champion, who has been chairing this Task Force over the past several months.

- Polly Champion directed Commission members to the updated framework for advising the legislature and the governor, revised based on suggestions and questions during the February Commission meeting. The document was attached to March meeting materials circulated before today’s meeting. Revisions include more specific guidance regarding speaking in public as a Commission member.

Roberta Berner made a motion to approve the revised document, and Suzanne Demers seconded the motion. By roll call vote, the following members approved the motion: Rep. James MacKay, Roberta Berner, Wendi Aultman, Richard Lavers, Susan Buxton, Patrick Herlihy, Sunny Mulligan Shea, Lynn Lippitt, Janet Weeks, Carol Stamatakis, Elizabeth Bielecki, Susan Denopoulos Abrami, Rev. Susan Nolan, Suzanne Demers, Daniel Marcek, Susan Ruka, and Kristi St. Laurent. The motion to approve the guidance for advising the legislature and the governor was approved by 17 members.

- Executive Director Rebecca Sky updated the Commission about the Older Adult Volunteer Awards. Several counties have not yet put forth nominees for the award (Coos, Carroll, Belknap, Grafton, Cheshire, Strafford). The award ceremony will be virtual this year, and Rebecca asked for volunteers to help plan the event. Wendi Aultman volunteered. Rebecca Sky would welcome another volunteer to join them, too.
- Carol Stamatakis noted that EngAgingNH has discontinued its newsletter after 14 years and would very much like it to be produced again after a hiatus. She asked if anyone would like to help the Commission and EngAgingNH think through ways to continue this valuable resource.

Wendi Aultman added that BEAS no longer published the quarterly newspaper *Aging Issues* since the retirement of its long-time editor. She said that she has heard that many feel a loss with the cessation of these unbiased and informative publications.

Wendi Aultman thought she might have staff who would be interested in working on a new publication. Suzanne Demers asked if VolunteerNH might have access to volunteers with an interest in producing a publication focused on older adults, and she added that Belknap-Merrimack CAP also might have staff with an interest in helping out. Kristi St. Laurent said that she would like to be part of the conversation as well.

Carol Stamatakis will pass along information about today's discussion to the EngAgingNH Board of Directors and will set up a meeting to continue the discussion with EngAgingNH..

IV. AARP & AHA Legislative Priorities

Doug McNutt from AARP-NH addressed the legislative issues his organization has prioritized. He said that AARP-NH's primary interest is to advance improvements in home and community-based care, especially in the Choices for Independence (CFI) program. AARP-NH is taking part in litigation regarding CFI but is also working to improve the state budget for home and community-based programs that serve older adults. While the organization is pleased to see increases in a few areas, it would prefer to see more resources across the whole arena of programs.

AARP-NH had supported a house bill that would have addressed abuse and financial exploitation of older adults and those with physical disabilities, but the bill was deemed inexpedient to legislate this session. AARP-NH is disappointed that the bill will not go forward this year but is committed to try again for an option next year.

Doug McNutt also expressed concern about "safe harbor" legislation that seeks to create immunity from litigation for businesses related to COVID-19. AARP-NH is concerned from a health standpoint that the legislation not go forward.

He also said that the organization had supported paid leave legislation which has been considered inexpedient to legislate this term. He noted that Governor Sununu has promoted a voluntary leave plan, but said AARP-NH is concerned about the viability of such a plan.

In following up on issues from prior sessions, Doug McNutt said that AARP-NH had supported the formation of a Drug Affordability Board from legislation passed in 2020. A five-member board, which includes a representative from AARP, has convened. In addition, NH-DHHS has submitted a petition to the Federal government to create a drug import program. The cost of insulin has been capped with a monthly ceiling of \$30—one of the better caps in the country, he added. The cap does not apply to people covered by self-insured plans or Medicare, just plans regulated by the NH Insurance Department. The link to the legislation is <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/xxxvii/415/415-18-f.htm>.

Heather Carroll spoke about the legislative priorities of the Alliance for Healthy Aging (AHA). The advocacy group within AHA trains advocates for older adults, provides education regarding the budget and providing testimony, and helps to facilitate meetings with legislative representatives. AHA, like AARP-NH, is disappointed that the adult protective legislation is not going forward this session and intends to continue to champion similar legislation in the future.

AHA is following broadband-related legislation and advocates for increasing broadband access and availability across the state. She said that this is an issue that affects several generations, so intergenerational advocacy has been a plus. AHA is also advocating for greater access to oral health by older adults. AHA is following COVID-19 related legislation and budgeting, advocating for allocating some funds toward home and community-based services. Although some rate increases are under consideration, Heather Carroll said the increases never seem to be adequate to meet the needs for those who want to remain in their homes for as long as possible with community connections. Workforce issues continue to be a serious concern. She noted that the Guidehouse report has been released, and added that AHA looks forward to engaging with Commission Task Forces in the future.

Rebecca Sky added that the Commission also follows relevant legislation and said that it is very helpful to hear from other advocacy groups. Heather Carroll said that AHA is suggesting that for budget hearings, individuals add what they are advocating for to their identification (e.g., Heather Carroll—Aging Issues in NH). New Futures has offered a targeted advocacy training for the State Commission on Aging, and Commission members will be informed of the date once it is established.

V. Public Input/Other

Vice Chair Stamatakis encouraged members of the public to participate in the Commission Task Forces. Meeting information is posted on the Commission website.

Lynn Lippitt announced the availability of emergency rental assistance, accessed through the Community Action Program agencies (nhhfa.org/emergency-rental-assistance).

Wendi Aultman said that the Guidehouse Report has been posted on the BEAS website.

John Wilson asked if “Reframing Aging” was in any way part of the Task Forces’ work. Rebecca Sky answered that it is being integrated into the work of the Task Forces on an ongoing basis and that the concepts were top of mind with the writing of the Executive Summary of the Commission Report in November.

VI. Adjournment

Vice Chair Stamatakis declared the meeting adjourned at 11:52 a.m. The next meeting of the Commission will take place on Monday, April 19, 2021 from 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom.