

FINAL MINUTES
New Hampshire State Commission on Aging
Monday, May 15, 2023 10:00 a.m.-Noon
NH Hospital Association, 125 Airport Road, Concord, NH

Present in person: Susan Ruka, Chair; Carol Stamatakis, Vice Chair; Roberta Berner, Clerk; Rep. James MacKay; Sunny Mulligan Shea, DOJ; Thom O'Connor, DHHS; Tracy McGraw, DOL; Ray Fernandez, DOS; Shelley Winters, DOT; Appointed by the Governor: Polly Campion, Doug McNutt, Daniel Marcek, Kristi St. Laurent, Beth Quarm Todgham, Rep. Lucy McVitty Weber, Laurie Duff, Susan Denopoulos, Roxie Severance Rebecca Sky, Executive Director; Chris Dugan, Communications and Engagement Director

Present via teleconference Dee Pouliot, NH Housing Finance Authority; Rev. Susan Nolan

Absent: Suzanne Demers Rep. Charles McMahan; Sen. Bill Gannon; Richard Lavers, NHES; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Harry Viens

Presenters: Thom O'Connor, MSW, Community Based Programs – Administrator III, Division of Long Term Supports & Services, Bureau of Elderly & Adult Services, NH-DHHS; Jennifer Rabalais, MA, Co-Director, Center on Aging and Community Living, University of New Hampshire; Alison Rataj, Center on Aging and Community Living, University of New Hampshire; Gretchen Stallings, Executive Director, Volunteer NH – State AmeriCorps Office; Kaitlyn Norden, Acting Deputy Administrator, Northeast Region, AmeriCorps; Anne Ostberg, Senior Programs, Northeast Region, AmeriCorps

Guests: Heather Carroll, John Wilson, Isadora Rodriguez-Legendre, Judith Jones, Kris Hering, Teri Palmer, Joan Marcoux, Laura Davie, Shawn Jones, Kristin Barnum, Jessica Eskeland, Jennifer Throwe, Cindy Yanski, Madeline Ullrich, Kim Murphy

I. Welcome, Attendance, Review of Minutes

Chair Sue Ruka provided an overview of the agenda and welcomed the Commission members and guests to the meeting. Today's meeting was held concurrently in person at NH Hospital Association and via teleconference. Because the state Emergency Order is no longer in place, a quorum of Commission members must be present in person to take action. A quorum was present in person. Rep. Weber made a motion to approve the April minutes; Doug McNutt seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.

II. State Plan on Aging Survey and Focus Group Data Results (PowerPoint attached)

Chair Ruka welcomed Thom O'Connor, Jennifer Rabalais and Alison Rataj to present information gleaned from surveys and focus groups to help produce the 2024-2027 State Plan on Aging, currently under development by the Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services (BEAS) of the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The plan is being developed with guidance and support from the NH State Commission on Aging and the Alliance for Healthy Aging.

The goal of the State Plan “is to advance the state’s efforts in understanding, serving, supporting and celebrating older adults across our state.” The State Plan is required to be produced by the federal Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the draft is due to ACL on July 1 with the final product due by October 1, 2023. ACL’s priorities are to advance equity; build a caregiver infrastructure; expand access to home and community-based services (a particular issue in rural areas); recover from the COVID-19 pandemic; and support Older Americans Act Core Programs.

To gather information from older adults in the state, listening sessions were held in person and virtually and surveys were available on-line or on paper from late fall through mid-winter. One hundred and eighty individuals participated in the listening sessions; 755 respondents completed the survey, with 955 individuals answering at least one question.

The largest percentage of participants was aged 65-74 (44%) with respondents ranging in age from young adulthood to over age 85. Ninety-eight percent identified themselves as white; 96%, as speaking English very well; 94%, as heterosexual; and 84%, as female. Respondents came from all 10 of the state’s counties. The largest percentage identified themselves as having no impairment (54%), as retired (47%), and as living with a spouse or partner (58%).

In response to survey questions, the majority of respondents indicated they were comfortable using technology/internet to connect for social, educational, community, and health-related opportunities. More than three-quarters indicated that they do not provide unpaid caregiving support. Ninety percent said that they do not participate in food assistance programs, formal or informal, with 85% indicating that they did not need such assistance. Ninety-three percent said that they use a private vehicle in order to travel to meet their daily needs, and 85% said they do not use community transportation because they do not need it.

A majority of respondents indicated that they get information about community services primarily through the internet/websites (57%), followed by family or friends, e-mail, newspaper/newsletters, social media, the local library, and/or AARP. ServiceLink was cited by 11% of respondents, although 52% answered that they were aware of ServiceLink.

Respondents indicated that most important to aging in their community were access to healthcare (92.7%), maintaining physical health (89.9%), and financial security (87.3%). Rated as most critical service needs were stable internet (broadband/high-speed), social activities, information and referral, affordable housing, and oral health services. The largest barrier to addressing needs was identified as lack of awareness of the availability of a service, followed by finances and the preference not to ask for help.

The largest percentage of respondents (35%) rated their community as a “fair” place to age, with 27% rating their community as “good.” In regard to future concerns, a large percentage identified “feeling safe in my own home,” “affordable health insurance,” “feeling safe in my community,” as top issues.

In the listening sessions, attendees identified what was working well in their community and what was not working well, relating to aging. Identified as working well were senior centers, ServiceLink, community organizations and local initiatives (e.g., the community nursing project and the public health network), transportation, community engagement and government programs (e.g., REAP). Identified as not working well were transportation, the healthcare workforce, funding for services, lack of awareness about how to access information and resources, available, accessible, and affordable housing, the healthcare system, access to broadband, economic security, and coordination across the continuum of care.

Also addressed in the listening sessions were ways that the state can better serve and support its aging population, what attendees said they need to continue to live in their homes as they age, and what can be done to reduce isolation for older adults in New Hampshire.

Chair Ruka thanked the presenters for providing an early look at the data and said that we look forward to seeing the State Plan on Aging—and seeing it used. Executive Director Rebecca Sky noted that the upcoming meeting of the Alliance for Health Aging will also feature the State Plan.

III. Volunteerism in New Hampshire

Chair Ruka welcomed the presenters and noted that May is traditionally the month to recognize volunteers and volunteerism.

- a. Gretchen Stallings, Executive Director of Volunteer NH, described her organization as supporting volunteerism and connecting individuals with volunteer opportunities. Volunteer NH is primarily funded by the federal AmeriCorps and operates AmeriCorps programs in the state including SeniorCorps and VISTA. The organization operates the NH Volunteer Engagement Network for nonprofit agencies and an online resource center. In addition, Volunteer NH recognizes volunteerism through the Spirit of NH Awards and the Governor’s Volunteer Manager of the Year award. She referred attendees to the website: <https://volunteernh.org/>
- b. Kaitlyn Norden, Acting Deputy Administrator for the Northeast Region of AmeriCorps, spoke about AmeriCorps programs in New Hampshire. Over the past year, approximately 2,200 volunteers in New Hampshire worked in some 300 service locations through those programs. The vast majority of those volunteers were older adults serving through the Foster Grandparent Program, Senior Companion, and RSVP.

Anne Ostberg, who focuses on AmeriCorps' senior programs regionally, said that the agency has seven grantees in NH—five RSVP grantees and one each for Senior Companion and the Foster Grandparent program. Volunteers through those programs provide transportation, falls prevention classes, food services, and more.

- c. In response to questions, the presenters discussed the challenges of recruiting and retaining volunteers. The economy and the pandemic affected volunteer recruitment and retention, particularly in the volunteer driver programs.

Thom O'Connor asked if there might be any way to streamline the volunteer vetting process, since every agency still needs to do its own checking of individuals signing up to volunteer.

Shelley Winters introduced guest attendee Teri Palmer, the state mobility manager. She suggested that the presenters and Ms. Palmer meet in order to discuss ways to increase volunteer driver recruitment and retention.

IV. COA Volunteer Awards (Chris Dugan and Beth Quarm Todgham)

The Volunteer Awards event will take place on Wednesday, May 24, at 1:30 p.m. in the State Capitol's Executive Council Chambers. Ten volunteers will be recognized, following a nomination and selection process. The public is welcome to attend, and Commission members are asked to attend.

V. Overview and Discussion of COA State House Team Tracked Bills (Updated descriptive list e-mailed prior to today's meeting)

Polly Campion presented the Commission's policy group Legislative report. She explained that not on the e-mailed list were HB 1 (the House budget) and HB 2 (the House budget trailer), which are now with the Senate Finance Committee then on to the full Senate. Once the Senate has reviewed the budget bills and synced them with its own budget bills, it will return them to the House for concurrence or a committee of conference process. Rep. Weber noted that the committee of conference process is not public. Two bills of interest to the Commission—SB36 and SB86—are attachments to the Senate's version of the budget.

Rep. Weber briefly discussed the Senate and House's review of Medicaid Expansion, of interest to the Commission because of its effect on older workers and on low-paid caregivers and other service workers. The Senate passed SB263 (Medicaid Expansion unanimously; the House is considering amending the bill by offering time-limited extensions.

VI. Other Business

- a. Chair Ruka said that the Commission has applied to be part of a multi-sector plan on aging learning collaborative.

- b. The Commission will be seeking new members, particularly from Belknap and Rockingham Counties, as current members' terms end. The Commission also will be seeking a new clerk, since current clerk Roberta Berner will be stepping down from the role this summer. Executive Director Sky reminded the Commission that the Governor makes the final decision about new members, but takes the Commission's recommendations into consideration.

VII. Public Input

Rep. MacKay said that it was 63 years ago that the State Council on Aging was created, specifically to address Older Americans Act programs in state. The Commission is the successor organization to the Council and has a broader mandate.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at noon.

**The next Commission meeting will take place on
Monday, June 19, 2023, 10 a.m.-Noon
NH Hospital Association, 125 Airport Road, Concord, NH 03301**