Supporting People as They Age in Community

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Rhode Island’s population is among the oldest in the country, and the number of older adults in the state continues to grow rapidly. By 2040, people over age 65 will make up a quarter of the state’s population, up from 14% in 2010. The vast majority of these older adults will age in the community, rather than nursing homes.

For many people, aging in the community is a better way to grow old. It can offer greater independence and more opportunities for social interaction and community engagement, without the limitations and expense of round-the-clock care in an institutional environment.

However, some older people struggle financially, physically, and emotionally to stay in homes and communities that are not designed to accommodate their changing needs. Robust programs, policies, and supports are needed in order for aging in the community to truly benefit older adults, their caretakers, and the state as a whole.
INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Rhode Island’s legislature passed the Aging in Community Act, which created an Aging in Community Subcommittee of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council. The subcommittee was tasked with studying the programs and services needed to support the state’s expanding older population.

This brief shares highlights from the subcommittee’s final report and associated articles published by the Collaborative. It focuses on how Rhode Island can support people aging in community through housing, transportation, access to information, and senior centers.

MOST OLDER ADULTS AGE IN THE COMMUNITY

- 96% of seniors live in the community, not a nursing home
- 88% of seniors want to stay in their current home as they age

MANY SENIORS ARE STILL IN THE SAME HOME THEY HAVE LIVED IN FOR DECADES

- 70% of seniors have lived in their current home for less than 5 years
- 60% have lived in their current home for 5–9 years
- 50% have lived in their current home for 10–19 years
- 40% have lived in their current home for 20+ years

Most older adults age in the community.
Supporting People as They Age in Community: Housing

CHALLENGES

Most people grow old in the homes and communities they have lived in for years. Aging in the community can be a healthier, happier option for many older adults, but only if they have suitable housing. Homes must be affordable for retirees on fixed incomes and adapted for those with age-related declines in health and mobility. These issues are particularly important in Rhode Island, given the state’s high cost of living and older housing stock that requires more updating. Older people living on their own also need access to community services and in-home supports to keep them healthy and connected.

SOLUTIONS

There are a number of policies and programs that make existing housing less costly and more accessible for older adults and support the development of new affordable, age-friendly housing. There are also more far-reaching innovations being explored that can provide supportive housing for older adults. Villages, naturally occurring retirement communities, intentional communities, cohousing, tiny homes, and other alternative housing models can offer older adults more resources, support, and community connections than traditional housing.

INSIGHTS

The vast majority of Rhode Island’s older adults are aging in the community, which saves money in the long run over institutional care. In order to stay healthy and independent, however, these older adults need affordable, accessible housing with access to community services and in-home support. The state might consider developing and expanding tax credits, subsidies, and low-interest loan programs that reduce housing costs and support age-friendly home modifications. The state may also want to explore expanding or replicating alternative housing models for older adults, such as Providence Village and the St. Germain Residence.
WHERE OLDER ADULTS LIVE IN RHODE ISLAND

23% of households in Rhode Island have a resident over age 65 = 102,237 senior households in Rhode Island

Here's what we know about these households:

Living Arrangements

- LIVING ALONE: 47%
- MARRIED COUPLE: 40%
- OTHER FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS: 11%
- NON-FAMILY HOUSEHOLD: 2%

Home Ownership

- 70% OWN
- 30% RENT

Cost-burdened* Homeowners

- 33%

Cost-burdened* Renters

- 52%

*People are cost-burdened by housing if 30% or more of their household income goes toward housing costs.

STRATEGIES FOR DESIGNING AGE-FRIENDLY HOUSING

- Bright lighting at entrances
- Wide entryways and doorways (36 inches)
- Bedroom and full bathroom on the main floor
- Bathroom with a shower with a seat and no threshold
- Lever-style handles instead of knob-style handles
- Non-slip flooring
- Sturdy hand rails on both sides of stairs
- Anti-scald faucets
- Stair treads
- Adhesive treads and grab bars in the shower
- Remove clutter
Supporting People as They Age in Community: Transportation

**CHALLENGES**

Access to transportation is essential for older people who want to live healthy, independent lives in the community. Transportation helps older adults stay active and socially connected. However, as people age, it often becomes more difficult for them to drive, walk, and use public transportation. In addition, many of Rhode Island’s cities and towns are car-centric and not easy to navigate by walking or public transit.

**SOLUTIONS**

Expanding transportation options for older adults and increasing the overall walkability and transit-friendliness of cities and towns can make it easier for people to age in the community. Rhode Island offers a number of special transportation programs for older adults and people with disabilities, including the Elderly Transportation Program (ETP), the Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) program, a paratransit program, and free and reduced fares on RIPTA’s regular bus service. However, these programs face funding constraints, as well as complaints about service quality since private provider LogistiCare took over the operation of ETP and NEMT.

**INSIGHTS**

Rhode Island does not have a coordinated approach to analyzing current and future transportation patterns among older adults and developing potential solutions to meet the needs of this population. As RIPTA updates the state’s Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan, it may want to consider incorporating an Elder Mobility Study on these issues. There are also a number of ways the state’s existing transportation programs for older adults could be improved through increased technology, greater accountability, and enhanced service quality.
AVERAGE MONTHLY RIDERS OF THE ELDERLY TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM (ETP), BY AGE (2016)

Average Number of ETP Riders per Month in 2016: 1,810

AGE

NUMBER OF RIDERS

60-64 134
65-69 249
70-74 272
75-79 272
80-84 297
85+ 586

AVERAGE MONTHLY RIDERS OF NON-EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION (NEMT) OVER AGE 60 (2016)

Average Number of NEMT Riders over Age 60 per Month in 2016: 3,391

AGE

NUMBER OF RIDERS

60-64 897
65-69 610
70-74 512
75-79 419
80-84 347
85+ 606
Supporting People as They Age in Community: Access to Information

CHALLENGES

Access to appropriate services and programs is essential for enabling older adults to age in the community. Existing programs offer a range of services with varying eligibility criteria provided by a patchwork of governmental, non-profit, and private agencies. Finding the right resources can be confusing and overwhelming for older adults and their caregivers, particularly those who have disabilities or lack internet access.

SOLUTIONS

Older adults and their caregivers can benefit from a comprehensive “one-stop shop” that helps them identify and obtain the support and resources they need, from applying for Medicare benefits and finding long-term care facilities to accessing transportation and meal delivery services. In Rhode Island, The POINT Network is the primary state program for helping older adults and their caregivers navigate the complex system of aging support services. However, The POINT faces several challenges: declining federal funding, limitations in the information and referral services it provides, no functioning website or interactive consumer guide, and a lack of awareness of the program among older adults.

INSIGHTS

Rhode Island devotes significant resources to providing the services and programs older adults need to remain healthy and live independently in the community. An infusion of resources, staff, and technology into The POINT would help ensure that older adults and their caregivers have access to these services, maximizing the effectiveness of this investment. Publicity campaigns and internet trainings could also help promote existing information resources like The POINT.
THE POINT CLIENTS & INTERACTIONS IN 2016

Client Contacts

Total Client Contacts in 2016 = 57,497

Client Needs Addressed

- Medicare Applications & Issues: 37,999
- Prescription Assistance: 32,242
- Medicaid Applications & Issues: 25,504
- Home & Community Care (Public & Private): 8,610
- HealthSource RI Insurance Marketplace: 7,241
- Transportation: 4,185
- Housing (Senior Housing, Emergency Shelter, Eviction): 2,338
- Fraud & Self-Neglect: 395
- Abuse & Self-Neglect: 357

AGE

- Under 60 Years Old
- Over 60 Years Old

PREFERRED LANGUAGE

- English
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Other

MONTHLY INCOME

- Below 150% of Federal Poverty Level
- Above 150% of Federal Poverty Level
- Not Collected
Supporting People as They Age in Community: **Senior Centers**

**CHALLENGES**

Senior centers play an important role for people aging in the community. They help older people stay healthy, engaged, and independent by offering social and educational activities, information and referral services, recreation, nutrition, and health services. As our elderly population expands and changes, the role of senior centers in the continuum of long-term care is being reevaluated and adapted to meet the needs of today’s older adults.

**SOLUTIONS**

Senior centers continue to evolve and experiment with how to best serve a new generation of baby boomers coming of age. They are exploring opportunities to offer new programs and activities, integrate healthcare more deeply into their services, and cultivate spaces that attract younger seniors. Senior centers are also developing innovative funding models, with financial support coming from a patchwork of federal, state, and municipal funding supplemented by membership fees, private donations, and fundraising events.

**INSIGHTS**

Senior centers serve as an essential hub in the network of support that enables older adults to age in the community and avoid unnecessary institutionalization. By expanding their offerings, funding sources, and target populations, Rhode Island’s senior centers might better meet the needs of today’s older adults. One innovative idea for increasing funding is to channel Medicaid funds for long-term care to healthcare and prevention services provided at senior centers, an approach that aligns with the state’s Reinventing Medicaid initiative.
SERVICES & ACTIVITIES PROVIDED BY RHODE ISLAND SENIOR CENTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FITNESS</th>
<th>HEALTH</th>
<th>SOCIAL ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>SERVICES</th>
<th>MEALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reiki • Yoga • Massage • Exercise Classes • Tai Chi • Zumba</td>
<td>• Podiatrist Visits • On-site Nurses • Health Screenings • Geriatric Assessments • Support Groups • Health Education</td>
<td>• Arts • Bingo • Trips • Shopping • Classes &amp; Educational Programs</td>
<td>• Case Management • Benefits Counseling • Housing Assistance</td>
<td>• Congregate Meal Sites • Meals on Wheels • Food Pantry</td>
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SERIOR CENTERS IN RHODE ISLAND

Fig. 1 Services & Activities Provided by Rhode Island Senior Centers

SOURCE: Raimondo (2016).
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