



**Partners for
Livable Communities**

AGING IN PLACE INITIATIVE



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

**National Association of
Area Agencies on Aging**

Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. What does “aging in place” mean?

The term ‘aging in place’ deals with a variety of issues, most importantly having older Americans age in their own communities and homes. Almost 89 percent of the elderly in the United States wish to reside in their own homes, creating a powerful impetus for elderly-friendly communities. To allow older Americans to stay in their own homes, communities must supply elders with appropriate services. Affordable housing, transportation, social services and social opportunities allow elderly people to function independently or with some assistance and continue living their lives within the community.

If elders are healthy enough to live in their own homes and perform everyday tasks with minimal assistance, what services can they rely on within the community to ensure they are happy? The baby-boomer generation is predicted to be one of the most active groups of older Americans. The term ‘aging in place’ attempts to offer communities a way to provide necessary services for the elderly as well as additional opportunities that will keep them absorbed in the community. This may be as simple as offering a free yoga class in a public park or designating a community space for seniors to garden. The Aging in Place issue allows civic leaders to discuss the barriers and solutions that will enable citizens to grow old in their own homes and communities.

2. Who are Partners for Livable Communities and National Association of Area Agencies on Aging?

The **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging** (n4a) is the umbrella organization for the 655 area agencies on aging (AAAs) and more than 230 Title VI Native American aging programs in the U.S. Through its presence in Washington, D.C., n4a advocates on behalf of the local aging agencies to ensure that needed resources and support services are available to older Americans. The fundamental mission of the AAAs and Title VI programs is to provide services that make it possible

for older individuals to remain in their home, thereby preserving their independence and dignity. These agencies coordinate and support a wide range of home- and community-based services, including information and referral, home-delivered and congregate meals, transportation, employment services, senior centers, adult day care and a long-term care ombudsman program.

Partners for Livable Communities is a nonprofit organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development and social equity. Since its founding in 1977, Partners has helped communities set a common vision for the future, discover and use new resources for community and economic development and build public/private coalitions to further their goals. They accomplish this through advocacy, technical assistance and sharing of information.

3. Why is the issue of aging in place so important for my community?

Sometimes communities see the elderly as a shortcoming rather than an asset. With sizeable amounts of free time and disposable money, a majority of older Americans act as economic generators, philanthropists and volunteers in a community. When the elderly are able to get out of their homes and do these things, the area prospers. The older Americans who utilize community amenities positively impact local shops, restaurants, universities and libraries. In addition to their economic authority and philanthropic contributions, urbanists also highlight the importance of seniors' presence in neighborhoods when most people are at work.

If older Americans cannot obtain sufficient resources or be given the option to participate, communities loose on many levels. Obstacles like inadequate transportation, housing and social services can cripple the elderly community. Additional aspects like recreational, social and cultural opportunities and urban design are also significant in establishing an elder-friendly environment. The main purpose of having older Americans age in place is to make them feel comfortable in their surroundings. If the elderly cannot enjoy their latter years due to service, accessibility and program constraints, communities must reevaluate their priorities.

4. What resources already exist to help older Americans in my community?

There may be several organizations, groups and programs that are beneficial to the elderly in your community but a majority of people lack knowledge that they exist. It

is difficult to know the extent of resources in your community without doing some research. One of the most efficient ways to assess the resources your community possesses is to do a search on the internet or contact your community's governmental Department of Elder Affairs or senior center. The internet can highlight programs and smaller organizations that governmental sectors may not know about, while your local government can draw attention to federal or state-funded programs in the area.

5. What is unique about the Aging in Place program that other organizations do not provide?

The Aging in Place initiative is unique in several ways. One of the most important features of the program is that it looks at issues of aging as it relates to the community as a whole. Partners and n4a have taken a very holistic approach in dealing with aging in a community—we view the problem to be multi-faceted and therefore must have an equally intricate solution.

While many organizations recognize livability as a high priority for older Americans, implementation is not necessarily performed. The Aging in Place program allows ten communities a chance to not only embrace ideas but to execute them in their own communities. Technical assistance from Partners, n4a and a host of outside consultants will provide one-on-one professional support to each community. This will enable each participant community to focus on a banner issue of their choice.

Participants also have the opportunity to discuss progress, barriers and solutions with other communities committed to making their community elderly-friendly. The Aging in Place initiative was designed to be an on-going project. With a stable foundation in place, Partners and n4a will assist each community in developing a long-term agenda to continue their efforts.

6. How can we measure if our older Americans' needs are being met now and in the future?

Partners and n4a knows the difficulty of measuring the needs of older Americans in your community. By measuring the services, programs, support systems and local structure, a critical evaluation is performed. The first step to meeting older Americans needs is to assess if there are enough services to aid your community. Participants should have an extensive list of all programs, classes and services your community offers to the elderly and how effective each are to the overall population. Using this list, each community can divide resources into the eight issue-areas to evaluate the

strength of each category. This can give you a rough estimate of where your community stands and what programs you may need to work on.

Due to the influx of elderly, it is inevitable services will be utilized more and additional services may need to be added. Partners and n4a believes each community needs to establish a strong foundation of programs and services that will allow for a smooth transition as the demographic increases. Defining the needs of your community now will help you in the future.

7. What communities in the United States have taken progressive steps towards elderly-friendly initiatives?

As the baby boomer generation moves into their later years, there is a great push to develop communities that cater to this demographic. While the United States has had aging programs and organizations since its' founding, impetus to create more elderly-friendly communities is upon us. While a majority of communities see aging issues as a concern in ten years, there are a handful of communities that have taken great steps towards retrofitting their downtowns, street systems, housing options, and social services now to allow older Americans greater freedom. Below are a few communities that have taken a progressive approach on aging issues:

- a) **Dunedin, Florida** is situated on five miles of coastline and near 2 state parks. With a population of 37,000, 54.5% of whom are 45 and older, the community realized it was important to address issues of aging. In 1992, Dunedin established The Committee on Aging to oversee all projects within the community from supportive health and independent living programs to volunteer and leisure services. In coordination with the Senior Citizens Center and the rest of the community, Dunedin worked diligently to be the first city in Florida to submit an 'Elderly Friendly Report Card' in 2001 to be approved by the Governor under the 'Elderly Ready by 2006' Program. This report card stresses key components of an elderly-friendly community.
- b) **Syracuse, New York** has been deemed a pioneer in aging-oriented community issues. Under the Governor's "New York 2015" program, each city in New York must assess the impact of older Americans in their community. Syracuse has continued to develop studies that have propelled them into an elite class of knowledgeable elderly-friendly cities. They are currently collaborating with Syracuse University to host a national initiative on aging with the main aspect being economic development.
- c) **Howard County, MD's** Director of Citizen Services, Manus J. O'Donnell was honored in December of 2002 with the National Leadership Award from National

Association of County Human Services Administrators. Programs like aging in place, assisted living and needs assessments have greatly benefited under his leadership. O'Donnell was instrumental in the Assisted living Program, which grew from three independent homes 12 years ago to 100 homes and six major facilities in 2002. He also helped restructure Howard County's service delivery. The county is also the state leader in helping 500 low-income elderly use assisted living facilities under the Medicaid Waiver.

d) **Landcaster, CA** and her neighbor, Palmdale has been highlighted in the LA Times as communities looking to attract older Americans. In an effort to help kick-start their downtowns, Landcaster and Palmdale are building a 116-unit senior apartment building and a 20-million and 300-unit senior housing complex to lure in the elderly demographic. Palmdale also has plans of vegetable gardens, a chess park and shuffleboard area to encourage community re-building. These are just a few developing efforts the two communities are attempting to win the elderly over.

8. How do we get started?

Signing up for the Aging in Place initiative is the first step. Acknowledging there is room for improvement in your community is a great first move. After you have received your Resource Binder, it's time to start creating the steering committee. Each community's liaison will be responsible for selecting this team. Comprised of 8-12 members, this committee should have expertise in all eight-issue areas.

Once the steering committee has been selected, they must get familiar with the material we have supplied. Each community will receive the Resource Binder in hard copy and PDF-form to make sharing information easy for all parties. The Resource Binder should supply each community with the materials you need to build upon your expertise and develop an elderly-oriented blueprint for your community.

After participants are well versed with their Resource Binder, the first meeting will commence. Each community will have both Partners and n4a on speaker phone as the initial meeting progresses to ensure all questions are answered and you, as a participant, feel comfortable in the role you will play. The first meeting is critical to the direction each community will take. Identifying your banner issue and potential candidates for the Stakeholders Committee will define the agenda of your community.

From here, you will create the Stakeholders Committee and proceed to develop your banner issue with a community project.

9. Once we have highlighted our community's banner issue, how will Partners/n4a go about making this the main area of interest?

While the other seven areas of aging should not be disregarded, the banner issue is a way for your community to focus on a specific area of improvement and develop both a short-term and long-term agenda.

Once your banner issue has been selected, it is our job to help you reach your goals. Each community will receive a packet of national best practices on their issue. These exemplary programs allow communities to review the development and success of projects in communities across the United States. Every best practice will supply a contact name and detailed information to allow participants to speak directly to a director or president about the project.

One of the biggest ways we can help you highlight your community issue is through the community project. This undertaking has been developed in order for each community to demonstrate the importance of their banner issue. Your community project is a small but important step to gain broad support throughout the community on this issue. Informing the community of the problem and how your team anticipates conquering it will bolster support. Partners and n4a have designed projects that will enable a community to create a venture that reflects the banner issue while using reasonable resources. To enable you to gain the most support, we will also supply each community with a Technical Assistance Directory. The directory will be individually crafted for each community depending on geographic location, banner issue and community population. Prominent scholars, directors, consultants, columnists, CEO's and aging experts make up the directory and will help each community benefit from the program. Partners and n4a have supplied each community with a small grant to be used for the services of this group. Their local, national and international experience will serve as an important tool in strengthening your project and local issue.

Partners and n4a will also help your community create a long-term plan that emphasizes your community's banner issue. The long-term plan will help enable your community to develop and maintain programs, services and facilities for the elderly in general while stressing your community's main issue.

Finally, as a collaborator of the project, *Governing Magazine*, has shown interest in the end results of the ten communities. It may be possible to highlight each community and their banner issue in an article for the magazine.

10. Once the Aging In Place program is over, what measures can we take to insure an aging agenda continues in our community?

There are several actions that will help ensure your program continues. The most important being, the Steering and Stakeholders Committee must continue to make aging in place a priority. Without this voice, it will be difficult to rally continued public support.

Finding financial support to continue the elderly-friendly community is also important. Many communities have local foundations, organizations and municipal departments to help with funding initiatives. Issues like transportation, social services and housing can gain federal aid while other issues may resonate more with national foundations.

Informed communities are active communities. Keeping your community up to date with important initiatives, new programs and rising challenges and ways to get involved will stimulate people. Highlighting these issues on your local website is important but also be creative—grocery stores, neighborhood coffee houses, libraries, faith-based facilities, public transportation and health facilities are great places to spread the word.