

Promoting Health, Strengthening Communities

Wellness and access to high quality healthcare are critical aspects of successful aging. For grantmakers, investments in these areas can yield important dividends. Initiatives that promote health and forestall disease can create a better quality of life for older people and enable them to continue to contribute skills, wisdom, and inspiration to their families and communities. Looking ahead, these efforts may also constrain the projected increases in healthcare costs associated with a rapidly aging population.

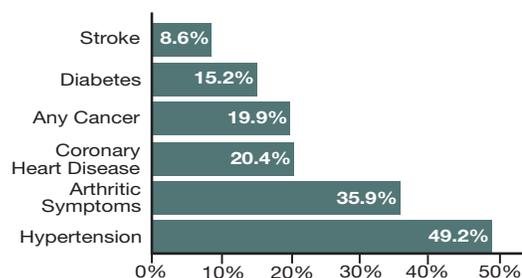
“Healthy aging is a joint venture and responsibility shared by individuals and the communities in which they live.”

*— Mary Altpeter,
PhD, MSW, MPA,
Associate Director for
Program Development,
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Health for Life

Health is not merely the absence of disease. In 1998, the World Health Organization recognized health as a “resource for everyday life—a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capabilities.”¹ This points to the need to foster healthy behaviors and encourage the social connections that keep older adults physically and emotionally healthy. It also means that targeting individuals alone is not sufficient. Engaging the people and environments around older adults—their families, communities, healthcare providers, governments—is critical because they all play a role in supporting healthy lifestyle choices.

Prevalence of Selected Chronic Conditions among Adults Age 65 and Over, 2000-2001



CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey, 2000-2001

Today, older patients account for nearly half of all hospital days and primary care doctor visits.² This proportion is likely to rise as the aging Baby Boom generation swells the ranks of elders. In the future, programs to help older adults maintain their independence, reduce doctor visits and/or hospital stays, and ultimately create healthier environments will become increasingly important. Funders can

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¹World Health Organization. *Health Promotion Glossary (WHO/HPR/HEP/98.1)*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1998, 1.

²Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative. *An Aging Patient Population: The Challenge for Nursing*. <http://www.hgni.org/aging.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. *National Ambulatory Care Survey*, revised March 2006.

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support healthy aging through initiatives that promote positive health practices and healthy communities.

Support Healthier, Elder-Friendly Communities

According to a 2004 survey sponsored by AARP, 74 percent of adults age 50 and older want to remain in their current residence as long as possible.³ By creating communities that foster health and independence, we can support older adults in their efforts to “age in place.”

Elder-Friendly Communities

There are numerous approaches grantmakers can take to help older adults stay healthy and continue to live in their homes. For example, funders can promote safe, walkable neighborhoods that offer easy access to shopping, services, and activities. Also, funders can provide grants to communities for local planning or infrastructure modifications, or fund accessible, inexpensive transportation options.

Coping with Illness or Disability

Many older adults with illnesses or disabilities can remain in their homes with some assistance, avoiding costly assisted living or nursing home care. Home modification programs can reduce environmental obstacles to independent living for adults with physical limitations. Consumer-driven, community-based eldercare programs allow older adults access to a constellation of services from home care to driver escorts. Additionally, caregiver programs can help sustain spouses and other relatives who serve as critical resources to frail, community-dwelling elders.

Grantmaking In Action

- *The Cash and Counseling Program, piloted with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, in Arkansas, Florida, and New Jersey, is now available in 15 states around the country. The*

program helps control Medicaid spending on long-term care by providing participants with a monthly allowance for personal assistance services.

- *Created by Mather LifeWays, **The Powerful Tools for Caregivers Program**, includes a series of classes for family caregivers that help reduce stress through improved self-care and empowerment.*
- *Through its **Communities for All Ages Initiative**, the Arizona Community Foundation awards planning grants to communities interested in addressing issues, such as lifelong learning, civic engagement, transportation, housing, and family support, which can affect any generation.*

Help Older Adults Make Healthy Choices

To make healthy choices and decisions, older adults need sound information and easy access to programs and services. Funders can support efforts to make reliable health and medical information widely available to older people and can ensure that programs designed to prevent disease or promote healthy lifestyle choices are accessible and affordable.

Creating Consumer-Friendly Health Information

Biomedical scientists and public health researchers continue to advance knowledge about living longer, healthier lives. This information, however, is not always available in uncomplicated, easy-to-understand terminology. Funders can support a variety of efforts to “translate” health information into elder-friendly formats appropriate for a diverse range of older adults, including non-English-speaking elders and their caregivers. To address the need for accessible information, some medical societies have created consumer-friendly health information websites.

Expanding Access to Health Programs

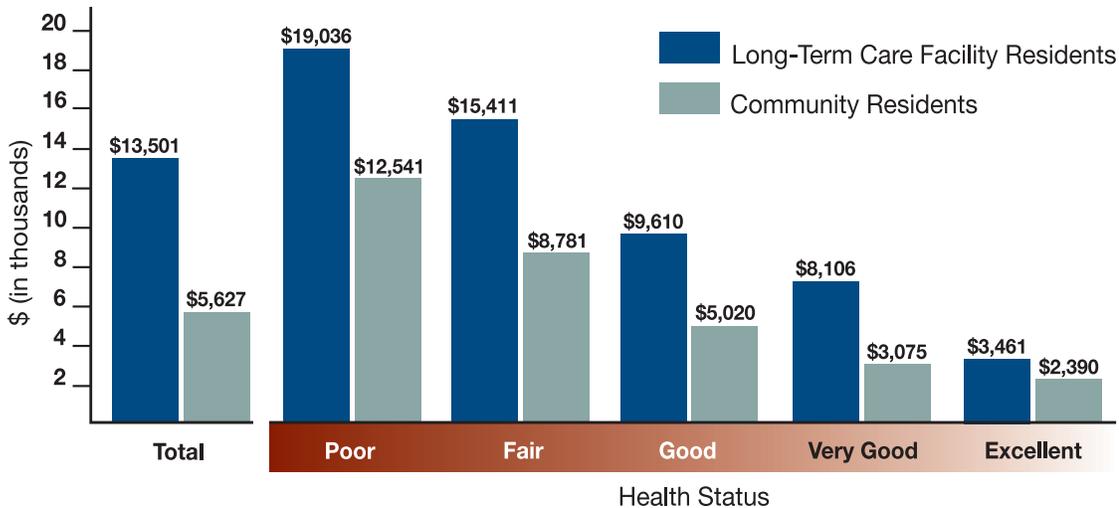
Similarly, community-based health programs are not always readily available or easily accessible. A number of excellent programs that support older adults’ health already exist. Funders can help people gain access to these programs or assist community providers, such as senior centers, to implement them locally.

“Preventable diseases account for nearly 70 percent of all medical care spending.”

— Nancy Whitelaw, PhD, Director, Center for Healthy Aging, National Council on Aging (NCOA)

³AARP Public Policy Institute. *Beyond 50.05: A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities*. (Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute, 2005), 48.

Medicare Spending Per Beneficiary, by Health Status and Residence Status, 2002



Note: Excludes beneficiaries enrolled in HMP plans

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey 2002 Cost and Use File

Grantmaking In Action

- The NCOA helps older adults find and register for existing programs, such as the Medicare prescription drug benefit and state/local meal and utility programs, through *BenefitsCheckUp* (www.benefitscheckup.org).
- The American Geriatrics Society Foundation sponsors the *Aging in the Know* website (<http://www.healthinaging.org/agingintheknow>), which offers older adults information on aging-related health issues and advice on making health-related decisions.
- The *Center for Healthy Aging* (www.healthyagingprograms.org), sponsored by NCOA, is working to help community providers implement evidence-based interventions that improve health. These include programs promoting physical activity, better nutrition, fall prevention, and chronic disease self-management.

Promote Healthy Connections

Research studies suggest that older adults who have strong and positive social connections are healthier—physically, emotionally, and cognitively. This is good not only for them and their families, but also for their communities. Well-connected, healthy elders can continue to contribute

through work, volunteerism, and other activities while promoting their quality of life.

Meaningful Activities

Many older adults are eager to create meaning in their lives. They often enjoy lifelong learning and volunteer programs, which match community needs and their interests and skills.

Meaningful Work

Often, elders would like to continue working beyond retirement in some capacity. Funders can encourage companies to make changes to support older adults in the workplace, such as more flexible, part-time schedules. Also funding studies on flexible work options and/or promoting award programs that recognize aging-friendly companies can improve work environments for older workers.

Grantmaking In Action

- Mather LifeWays created Mather's *More Than a Café* to attract a younger group of older adults to their programs. The cafés offer fitness classes, learning programs, and computer labs in addition to made-to-order cuisine.
- Funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and others, the NCOA's *RespectAbility Project* aims to raise awareness of older

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“Our country will be blessed with a large generation of people with extraordinary abilities and the time to do something with their talents.”

— Marc Freedman, MBA,
Founder and President,
Civic Ventures

NATIONAL RESOURCES

Administration on Aging
www.aoa.gov

Healthy Aging Research Network
www.prc-han.org

American Society on Aging
www.asaging.org

Civic Ventures
www.civicventures.org

The Gerontological Society of America
www.geron.org

The American Geriatrics Society
www.americangeriatrics.org

National Council on Aging
www.ncoa.org

Center for Healthy Aging
www.healthyagingprograms.com

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adults as an untapped resource and improve the capacity of nonprofits to use the services of elders to solve community problems. (www.respectability.org).

- *Supported by several funders, **Experience Corps** (www.experiencecorps.org), created by Civic Ventures, is a 1,800-member volunteer corps of older adults. Active in 14 cities, members mentor and tutor children in urban school districts.*

Only one percent of registered nurses are certified in gerontological nursing.

Of the 650,000 licensed physicians practicing in the United States, fewer than 9,000 are certified as geriatricians—a mere 1.4 percent.

The EngAGEment Initiative, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, is a pilot program to introduce funders to aging through a partnership between Grantmakers In Aging and Regional Associations of Grantmakers.

Encourage Training and Research

To facilitate older adults living healthier and longer lives, we need more healthcare professionals trained to recognize and treat the unique needs of older patients. Continued investment in the development of new treatments and interventions for age-related diseases and conditions is also needed.

Funding Clinical Training

There is an alarming shortage of doctors, nurses, and social workers trained in aging. Less than two percent of nurses and doctors are geriatric specialists and, as of the turn of the century, only three percent of master's-level social work students were specializing in gerontology.⁴ Funders can help by providing grants for the training of more faculty to teach the next generation of health professionals. Grants for students interested in specializing in gerontology or geriatrics can ultimately augment the number of qualified aging specialists. Additional awards can promote continuing education for general practitioners around aging issues.

⁴Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative. *An Aging Patient Population: The Challenge for Nursing*. <http://www.hgni.org/aging.html>; Alliance for Aging Research. *Medical Never-Never Land: 10 Reasons Why America Is Not Ready for the Coming Age Boom*. (Washington, DC: Alliance for Aging Research, 2002). http://www.agingresearch.org/bookshelf_details.cfm?id=38; The John A. Hartford Foundation. *An Aging Infusion: Gerontology Finds Its Place in the Social Work Curriculum*. (New York: The John A. Hartford Foundation, 2004). <http://www.jhartfound.org?IDEAS/swcurriculum>.

Funding Medical Research

The ability to live longer, healthier lives will depend on the future of aging-related research. Grantmakers can offer fellowships and grants that encourage researchers to choose a career in aging. It is also critically important to bolster efforts to translate research findings into practical, evidence-based interventions and programs that can directly benefit our aging population.

Grantmaking In Action

- *The **Hartford Geriatric Nursing Initiative** (www.hgni.org), funded by The John A. Hartford Foundation and others, fosters leadership among academic and clinical gerontological nurses, encourages better training in aging for all nurses, and explores best practices in gerontological nursing.*
- *In a public-private partnership between private foundations and the National Institute on Aging (NIA), **Beeson Career Development Awards** (www.beeson.org) are presented annually to 10-15 physician-scientists working in aging research. The award helps them to establish productive careers in the field.*
- *Supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other private funders, the **Healthy Aging Research Network** (<http://depts.washington.edu/harn/>) translates research findings into sustainable, evidence-based health programs appropriate for community providers.*

Credits

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