



COMMISSION ON AGING

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging (CoA) greatly values the ongoing commitment of the County Executive and the County Council to our older residents. As the population of County older residents continues to grow rapidly and become more diverse, it is imperative that the County maintains its support for essential programs and uses its resources wisely for additional support for programs the CoA identifies in its Priorities and Advocacy statements. These programs are crucial in enabling all older adults to live safely in their homes and enjoy a high quality of life, regardless of their background or economic status.

Summary of issues:

Communications and Outreach

- 1) Create a permanent Marketing and Outreach position in the Department of Aging Disability Services, to be filled by either staff or broker, to promote the many beneficial County programs available to older adults.
- 2) Provide \$10,000 to fund the Commission on Aging's annual public forum that brings together noted experts with members of the public to discuss issues important to older adults.
- 3) Provide funding for the translation of printed materials specific to older adults. Continue funding for important older adult publications such as ads for *The Beacon* and production of the public access TV program, *50+ in Montgomery County*.

Aging in Community Committee

- 4) Funding Request of \$180,000 to fund crucial initiatives that will advance the ability of older people in Montgomery County to be in safe, accessible, affordable, and desirable housing.
- 5) Funding Request of \$60,000 to support a pilot program that will allow MCDOT to provide backup transportation services, especially to Recreational Centers, so that older adults and people with disabilities are not stranded or left behind.
- 6) Funding Requested of \$50,000 to prepare curricula within Montgomery College and the Gudelsky Institute leading to Universal Design (UD) certification (or degree if warranted), recruit faculty, identify on-the-job training and mentorship opportunities, and relevant UD guidance for developers.

Health and Wellness Committee

- 7) Funding of \$250,000 to evaluate and expand the Access HEARS pilot program to cover the expense of additional devices and support for more needy County residents who are experiencing hearing loss and its adverse outcomes.
- 8) Funding of \$250,000 for The Arc of Montgomery to provide respite services to unpaid, live-in, primary caregivers, who are often family members.
- 9) Funding \$120,000 to provide for mental health services for older adults in Montgomery County, particularly for in-home counseling services.
- 10) Funding for the expansion and service levels of in-home care services to older County residents by 1) increasing funding for In-Home Aide Services (IHAS) 2) increasing

funding for additional DHHS staff and 3) increasing funding for supporting contractors and non-profits that provide the In-Home Aide Services.

- 11) Provide \$60,000 in funding to clear the waiting list for a program in senior centers providing structured activities, socialization, and support designed to meet the needs of older county residents with early-stage memory loss who are aging in place. In partnership with the Recreation Department, a small site in another part of the county could be opened.
- 12) Funding for one FTE at a pay grade sufficient to carry out the duties of a full-time Implementation Manager to lead, coordinate, and manage the Implementation Team recommended by the Home and Community-Based Workforce Task Force.

Public Policy Committee

- 13) Conduct an independent review of the Office of the Montgomery County Grants Management system equitable distribution of grants, assess the need for further reform, and address shortcomings.
- 14) Fund a baseline countywide older adult community needs assessment survey to provide insights into the views of our residents on the quality of life in Montgomery County, the effectiveness of current programs in supporting older residents, and areas where additional support is needed.
- 15) Reestablish the Senior Fellow program and authorize funding for four Senior Fellow positions for older professionals whose skills and expertise will enhance the ability of county government meet the needs of residents.
- 16) Advocate with State delegation and other key actors: to enact legislation enabling delegation authority to Counties for nursing home inspections; to re-establish delegation of nursing home inspections to County via MOU with State (pending permission from CMS), to fully restore the budget for inspections and on-site complaint inspections by the LTCO with additional funding from the State. After executing the MOU, allocate County Funding of \$525,000 to hire, train, and onboard a team of nursing home inspectors.

Detailed description of Priorities and Advocacy Issues:

Communications Committee

Our mission is to foster effective communication within our organization and community through strategic planning, innovative approaches, and transparent practices, ensuring clarity, engagement, and unity among older adults in our County. We envision doing this by distributing and publicizing recognizable, understandable, timely, and accessible information on County and public resources and services for older adults.

1. Create a permanent Marketing and Outreach position in the Department of Aging Disability Services, to be filled by either staff or broker, to promote the many beneficial County programs available to older adults. The Marketing and Outreach person will coordinate outreach to all older adults within the County, including the County's diverse and underserved communities. A Commission on Aging pilot project has shown that one-on-one meetings with the public are well received, informative, and popular. In addition to implementing the marketing strategy, this position will coordinate the availability and printing of County materials aimed at older adults, as well as coordinate the CoA's volunteer Ambassador Program and volunteer Library Liaison Program.
2. Provide \$10,000 to fund the Commission on Aging's annual public forum that brings together noted experts with members of the public to discuss issues important to older adults. The money would be used for such things as: (1) providing a quality hybrid meeting option; (2) creating a video archive of the event; (3) producing print and online advertising; (4) publishing a post-forum report; (5) furnishing printed materials including agendas, bios, and posters; (6) providing hydration and refreshment options for the older adult audience; and (7) paying for venue costs.
3. Provide funding for the translation of printed materials specific to older adults. Continue funding for important older adult publications such as ads for *The Beacon* and production of the public access TV program, *50+ in Montgomery County*.

Aging in Community

4) Affordable, Accessible, and Available Housing for Older People

Mission

The overall mission for the CoA's Aging in Community (AIC) Committee is to build a more equitable and inclusive community for older people through policies, programs, and practices that enables longevity, accessibility, community building, and livability. This priority request on "Affordable, Accessible, and Available Housing for Older Adults is framed by this overall mission.

Brief Statement

Bringing together public and private stakeholders, non-profits, community groups, property managers, and citizens to advance ideas and actions on affordable housing for older adults in Montgomery County was the primary goal behind the Montgomery County Commission on Aging's public forum "Reimagining Housing for Older Adults - Ideas and Actions to make Housing Available, Affordable, and Accessible." The forum took place on Thursday, May 16, 2024; 9:30 am to 2:30 pm at the Montgomery County Executive Office Building, Rockville, MD.

As a result of the Forum, the CoA in FY 25 is advocating for the continuation and/or expansion of an existing DHCA working group between County, developers, and non-profit organizations to promote accessibility, affordability, and availability of housing for older people and to advocate for specific projects, funding, and regulations. This advocacy and the following budget request of this priority item was derived for the discussions and outcomes of this public forum.

Request for Housing for Older Adults

FY26: Funding Request: The CoA urges \$180,000 be allocated to advance the ability of older people in Montgomery County to age in community in safe, accessible, affordable and desirable housing by funding crucial initiatives such as:

- the development and implementation at Montgomery College of certification materials and curriculum to train property managers on how to make existing housing for older adults more accessible, affordable, and available.
- the independent development of criteria and a user-friendly tool for analysis of Attainable Housing Report, including all zoning changes, bills brought before the County Council, and all master plans that go before the Planning Commission.
- the development and dissemination of multilingual and accessible information regarding affordable housing, including know your rights training for older people

Background and Rational

Affordable, accessible, and available housing for older adults is a pressing issue in Montgomery County that requires attention and action from policymakers, communities, and stakeholders. By prioritizing affordability, accessibility, and availability in housing development and policy, we can ensure that seniors can age with dignity and security in their communities. Investing in affordable, accessible, and inclusive housing for older adults is not only a matter of social responsibility but also an investment in the well-being and resilience of our middle class and aging population.

Collaboration between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private developers is crucial in creating sustainable solutions for affordable housing for older adults. Initiatives such as training for property managers and tenants and criteria and tools for housing planners and administrators support effective collaboration.

5) Provide backup transportation services to older adults and residents with disabilities for recreation centers

Mission

The overall mission for the CoA's Aging in Community (AIC) Committee is to build a more equitable and inclusive community for older adults through policies, programs, and practices that enable longevity, accessibility, community building, and livability. This priority request on "Backup Transportation Service" is framed by this overall mission.

Brief Overview Statement

The MC Commission on Aging (CoA) has heard from staff at the Recreation Department about several instances where older adults and people with disabilities have been left stranded when scheduled Metro Access or Ride-on transportation services were excessively late or did not show up at all. The JCA also noted of a few instances where their buses were late. Although evidence does exist that these instances have occurred, no data or statistics on these instances have been kept. Considering this, the (CoA) urges the County to provide additional funds the Department of Transportation (MCDOT) for a pilot program that enable them to arrange "back-up" transportation services with already contracted providers on an as-needed basis, when requested from the Department of Recreation. The service would be modeled after MCDOT's very successful Emergency COVID Vaccination Transportation Service, which leveraged pre-existing contracts with Connect-A-Ride and local taxi companies to ensure access to vaccination clinics.

During FY25, the CoA will advocate and collaborate with MCDOT and the service providers to formulate the conditions under which this backup service would work and how the funds requested in FY26 will be provided

Request for Back-up Transportation Services

FY26: Funding Request- The CoA urges the allocation of \$60,000 to fund a pilot program that will allow MCDOT to provide additional funds to currently contracted transportation service providers to implement the backup service as needed and make it available to the Department of Recreation.

Background and Rationale

Too often, older adults are left stranded because their planned transportation service, such as Metro Access or Call-n-Ride, is late or does not show up. The problem is especially acute for older adult programs at the County's recreation centers. The purpose of this initiative is to provide backup service when other scheduled transportation services do not show up as planned, and when there is an emergency transportation need that cannot be scheduled through traditional means. For example, in 2020, Montgomery County residents were vaccinated at a higher rate than many communities because Montgomery County government made a commitment to addressing barriers to vaccination, including transportation to vaccination clinics. This model can be re-purposed with great potential impact.

NOTE: This proposed budget item has been reviewed, refined, and supported by Denise Isreal, MCDOT; Sara Swarr, MC Department of Recreation; and Sara Fought, JCA

6) Certification Program in Universal Design Implementation for Senior Housing

Mission

The overall mission for the CoA's Aging in Community (AIC) Committee is to build a more equitable and inclusive community for older people through policies, programs, and practices that enable longevity, accessibility, community building, and livability. This priority request on "Universal Design Training" is framed by this overall mission.

Brief Statement

The MC Commission on Aging (CoA) urges the development and implementation of a Universal Design (UD) training and certification program for all developers and builders in Montgomery County as well as staff from the County's offices of Housing and Aging and Disabilities. Currently, Montgomery College offers curricula in Construction Management (Degree and Certificate) as well as Building and Construction Technology (Degree and Certificate) but no courses address UD specifically or its application in housing for older people. Adding specific training programs in Universal Design would expand the skill sets of individuals who are currently property developers or will be entering into the construction trades or into construction management. County staff would also be able to apply learning from this curriculum in their day-to-day work. Adoption of UD features routinely in building construction or renovation increases the accessibility and relative value of all housing, particular for older people and people with disabilities. This effort would be done jointly with Montgomery College, the MC Offices of Aging and Disabilities, Office of Permitting Services, and the Housing Opportunities Commission.

During FY25, the CoA will advocate for UD to build a constituency and support. Work with County, State, and national organizations to frame a concept for a training and certification program.

Request for Universal Design Certification Initiative

FY 2026: Funding Request of \$50,000 to prepare curricula within Montgomery College (the programs mentioned above and the Gudelsky Institute, leading to Universal Design certification (or degree if warranted), recruit faculty, identify on the job training and mentorship opportunities. as well as relevant UD guidance for developers.

Anticipated Priority Outcomes

It is envisioned that this initiative will have the following outcomes:

1. All developers in Montgomery County should have at least one staff member who has completed the UD training and received certification. The County Housing Department should have staff similarly certified. UD features should be added to the "Pattern Book" made available to developers by the Planning Department. The current point system for permitting needs to be revised to include adoption of a minimum required set of Universal Design features as follows:
 - a. No step into the dwelling.
 - b. At least one bedroom and bathroom with a walk-in shower on the ground floor.
 - c. All doors are wheelchair accessible.

- d. Electric outlets are accessible from a wheelchair.
 - e. Cabinetry in kitchen and bathrooms have pull out shelves; and
 - f. Dwelling is Bluetooth capable.
- 2. The County Housing Department should educate older potential renters/purchasers regarding the minimum list of UD features.
- 3. All developers marketing homes to older people should ask each buyer to sign a document stating which, if any, UD features (minimum list along with others such as grab bars in showers, lower cabinets, lever handles on doors, handheld shower) should be installed during construction.

Health and Wellness

7) TITLE: Expand Access HEARS Pilot to include more Montgomery County Residents and Evaluate the Ongoing Program

BRIEF STATEMENT

Hearing loss affects nearly two-thirds of adults 70 years and older in the US and is strongly and independently associated with an increased risk of social isolation, depression, accelerated cognitive decline, falls, decline in physical functioning and hospitalization. Age-related hearing loss is recognized as one of the largest potentially modifiable risk factors for dementia. Hearing care may be an essential tool for aging well, not only improving quality of life, but reducing depression, strengthening social engagement, slowing cognitive decline, and improving patient safety. Despite advances in technology, rates of hearing aid use have remained low and disparities in care still exist based on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. For these reasons, Montgomery County through the partnership with Access HEARS, a 501©3 nonprofit, started a program to deliver hearing care to low-income county residents in March of 2023.

This pilot program, funded by special federal funds from the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), has been successfully conducted in Montgomery County, with services being provided to improve the lives of 382 qualified residents with delivery of 480 devices. However, an additional 70 residents are on a waitlist for delivery of their hearing aids and to be educated by Access HEARS personnel. Further, the program was unable to publicize or promote the pilot in the Latino and other minority communities, as well as in other high-need groups in the County due to the lack of additional devices and support resources.

To address this limitation, the Commission on Aging seeks additional funding of \$250,000 to expand the pilot program to cover the expense of additional devices and support for more needy County residents who are experiencing hearing loss and its adverse outcomes. At the same time, conduct an evaluation of the program to determine who is being reached, what the experience of participants has been, what the need is in the community and how to best address the needs of the culturally diverse Montgomery County population.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

As mentioned above, statistics show that nearly two-thirds of people age 70 and older are affected by hearing loss, which is often associated with many health problems including dementia, social isolation, and hospital readmission. Affording hearing aids, which can be the 3rd most expensive purchase for older adults behind a house and car, is out of the question for many low-income Montgomery County residents.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response to the pilot, with many residents indicating that the pilot has changed their lives and has had a positive effect on the quality of their lives, the pilot is coming to an end due to the depletion of the ARPA funding. Without the requested supplemental funding, many low-income, hearing-impaired County residents cannot be accommodated.

Additionally, with the FDA approval of over-the-counter hearing technology, the need to help older adults navigate the market, select a device, and learn how to use it successfully will also grow. By utilizing the Access HEARS model, the County can develop a sustainable model of hearing care that connects older adults with the technology that represents the future of hearing care. By funding an expansion of the Access HEARS program, the County can avoid costly adverse outcomes caused by hearing loss, while significantly improving the quality of life for many older residents.

8) RESPITE CARE- BUDGET REQUEST FY 2026: \$250,000

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) contracts with The Arc of Montgomery to provide respite services to unpaid, live-in, primary caregivers, who are often family members. Respite services are intended to provide relief for a care partner for a few hours, for a day, for a weekend or sometimes longer. These services can be provided in the home, in conjunction with an adult medical day program, in a therapeutic camp setting, and increasingly, in respite facilities. They are offered at 2 levels: Level I (supervisory and personal care) and Level II (skilled nursing care). This program has an application process and a limit of 140 hours of care per family per annum; it is not designed for ongoing care.

In FY 2024, the Arc of Montgomery provided 2405 respite services in the county, nearly a 13% increase over the 2130 number of services provided in 2023 due in large part to the added one-time \$190,000 funding through ARPA.

Unfortunately, the \$112,000 County Executive Recommended FY25 increase was not approved by the County Council and was not added to the final FY25 budget (no increase for FY25 at all for Respite Care).

The need is evident. By May of 2024, funds had run out and 42 families' requests were left unmet - caregivers' needs left unmet. It is this situation at Arc of Montgomery that this budget request aims to rectify. The requested funding will place Arc in a position to continue to offer non-means-tested, culturally and linguistically appropriate respite services to a broad population.

According to the survey responses of 256 clients served the available services, nearly 91% agree that Arc's employees were knowledgeable, courteous, and respectful. 95% agree that Arc is responsive by returning phone calls/emails within 72 hours. There is a 95% satisfaction overall with the service of respite coordination employees.

Additional feedback comments from clients in the 2024 survey:

Very grateful for all the excellent caring support. The annual allocation could be increased by 20 percent or so, which would be very helpful. Thank you.

Thank you for Perfect service. but I wish you can help us more .

The last year, having access to these hours every month was such a blessing - it's one of those services that you don't realize how meaningful it will be until you experience it, and then it hits you, how good it is to have this break. Thanks to all who help make this program happen.

This program is very helpful for me. I need to do all the house works: anything from cooking, laundry and fixing things around the house... in addition to watching and helping my husband. The caregiver is helpful. Anything they do will help. Thanks The Arc!

Julz with the arc program is great, always helpful, we love her.

This is a wonderful program which supports me and provides a break from my daily caregiving tasks (in addition to my job and head of household responsibilities). Thank you!

We are very grateful for the financial support that Arc of Montgomery provided us. My mother is thriving and enjoying the social aspect of the center. Also prevent us from caregivers burden out.

9) Request - Provide funding for mental health services for older adults in Montgomery County particularly for in-home counseling services.

FY26 Funding Request: Increase current budget by \$120,000

Per the Maryland Department of Planning, over the next twenty years, the population of people 60 and over in Maryland will grow from nearly 1.4 to 1.8 million by 2040. Nationally, seniors use of behavioral health services is lower than any other group. Yet, the rate of completed suicide rates of older adults are much higher than that of young adults. Deteriorating physical health and increased social isolation are factors among older adults that can contribute to increased depression and other behavioral health problems. Yet a number of factors contribute to older adults' reluctance or inability to seek mental health services. Stigma, physical limitations, and lack of transportation make it more difficult for some older adults to receive the mental health help that they need.

Montgomery County provides several services designed to reach older adults. These include individual counseling in clinic, counseling for caregivers of older adults, "coping with change" groups at senior centers, and educational lectures. A particularly unique and important service is in-home counseling service for adults aged 60 or older who are homebound and unable to leave their homes to receive services. This service is provided to residents of private homes, apartments, assisted-living or group home facilities. However, there is a waiting list of approximately 60 people resulting in a waiting period of approximately five months to enter the home-counseling program. The wait time to enter the program has increased by three months since February 2024. A wait time of five months for someone in need of mental health services can be devastating. There is a demonstrated increasing need for these services. The long waiting period can be alleviated by providing funds for additional therapists to offer culturally competent counseling to older adults who can no avail themselves of the services offered through other locations outside their homes.

10) In-Home Care - Health and Wellness Committee Operating FY26 Budget Priority

The Commission on Aging (CoA) requests funding for the expansion and service levels of in-home care services to older County residents by 1) increasing funding for In-Home Aide Services (IHAS) 2) increasing funding for additional DHHS staff and 3) increasing funding for supporting contractors and non-profits that provide the In-Home Aide Services.

The older adult population of Montgomery County is rising at an unprecedented rate. Older adults prefer to remain in their own homes and be provided the matching care services based on their preferences and health status.

Montgomery County with funding from the State of Maryland offers programs that assist low-income, disabled, and elderly individuals to live in the community and avoid placement living in expensive nursing homes. IHAS's targeted population is meant to be individuals living independently in the community with moderate support who only need supportive, not all-encompassing, services to remain safe and stable in the community. Eligibility guidelines are strict based on COMAR regulations and waiting lists are long. As of July 2024, 218 residents were on the Social Services to Adults (SSTA) waitlist waiting to receive an assessment for In-Home Aide Services (IHAS). This waitlist is managed by the Adult Services Intake (ASI) team who assign the cases to designated SSTA Assessors who complete the assessment for IHAS. As of 7/1/24, the County had 175 cases open receiving IHAS. In 2021 the County case level was 200 dropping from a pre-pandemic high of 400 County residents receiving IHAS services.

The CoA advocates for increased funding to reduce the waitlist, expand the number of residents eligible for services, and to decrease the time residents must wait to receive assessments and services. To help achieve these goals, the Commission recommends more personnel for IHAS including a Case Manager and an Intake Coordinator/Assessment Worker to improve the timeliness and quality of assessments that determine eligibility of older adults to receive HCBS.

Further, the CoA urges the County to increase FY26 funding for IHAS clients and other entities to expand services to more people including some of the “gap population” (those above the income limits for Medicaid waivers, who meet the asset limitation of \$20,000 for IHAS and who cannot afford to pay for HCBS on their own).

Examples of other entities funding would include programs geared to reach the “gap” population and could be earmarked through the Non-Departmental Grants process to increase funding for non-profits providing in-home care like our County Villages, Senior Reach in Rockville, and Home Care Partners in Gaithersburg. An "Emergency Home Care" program would allow clients to receive needed personal care/supervision without needing to be brought in as an APS emergency. Increased funding for programs such as Respite Care through ARC of Montgomery would allow clients/families to manage their care/hours without the use of SSTA. Funding for communications on prevention and planning for families would result in a reduced caseload for Adult Protective Services and reduce reactionary SSTA requests that are only triggered when a crisis occurs. If individuals and families were better informed and linked to preventative services (or able to get assessed and started with SSTA quickly), IHAS could be initiated before a crisis occurs.

11) Request - Provide funding to clear the waiting list for a program in senior centers providing structured activities, socialization, and support designed to meet the needs of older county residents with early-stage memory loss who are aging in place. In partnership with the Recreation Department, a small site in another part of the county could be opened.
FY26 Funding Request- \$60,000

BRIEF STATEMENT

The MC Commission on Aging (CoA) urges the requested funding to the MC Department of Health and Human Services to support services for older adults and people with early-stage

memory loss. An estimated one out of seven adults over the age of 60 suffers from mild cognitive impairment. While it is often a precursor to Alzheimer's or other dementias, research has shown that onset can be delayed by several behavioral interventions including promoting social engagement. In addition to serving the individual with early-stage memory loss, the program benefits the caregivers who are vital in helping those with this condition. The funding would provide an important service that can help people continue to live in homes and with their families and may delay the progression of disease. The service has been demonstrated to be a popular one for Montgomery County families and demand will increase as the population of the County ages.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Early-Stage Memory Loss Programs ("Kensington Clubs") provide structured activities, socialization, and support tailored to the individual needs of senior center participants who aging in place and who have been diagnosed with early-stage memory loss. Senior Center staff are encountering more individuals who are brought to the center by caregivers but whose cognitive impairments prevent them from independently joining regular center activities. However, center staff have neither the time nor the training or expertise to provide these individuals with the individualized services they need. As a result, these participants may remain in one location, e.g., lobby area, for the entire day. They would benefit from the Early-Stage Memory Loss Programs.

The Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) has operated this small early-stage memory loss program in Germantown with private grant funds, serving eight people/two days per week on a sliding fee scale beginning in FY16. In FY19, JCA received a County grant to start a second program in Silver Spring—first at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center, then at the White Oak Senior Center. Both programs are operating on a tight budget and would benefit from additional funding that would appropriately fund a program as popular as Kensington Club. With the Recreation Department as a strong and supportive partner, the Kensington Club model could open another site with additional funding. Currently, the White Oak site has three participants on the wait list.

Montgomery County lags neighboring jurisdictions in providing this service. There are currently 43 Senior Center Plus sites in Maryland, including in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, and Howard counties. Fairfax County, Virginia, operates a robust program with more than \$1 million in county funds.

12) REQUEST: Implementation Manager for HCBS Workforce Task Force Recommendations

BRIEF STATEMENT:

The County should allocate funding for a full-time Implementation Manager to lead, coordinate, and manage the Implementation Team recommended by the Home and Community-Based Workforce Task Force (hereafter referred to as the Task Force). The Implementation Manager will be responsible for planning and overseeing all activities performed by the Implementation Team. In addition to the general duties of a project manager (e.g., scheduling activities and staff, allocating resources, performing status reporting, overseeing work performance, ensuring adherence to project plans and budget, and so forth), the Implementation Manager will be responsible for:

- Acting as a single point of contact for all activities associated with the implementation of the Task Force recommendations

- Coordinating across multiple County government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders assigned to implement the recommendations.

The COA is requesting one FTE at a pay grade sufficient to carry out the duties of the Implementation Manager.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Access to high-quality and coordinated home and community-based care (HCBS) is a health care equity issue that disproportionately affects marginalized groups. There is a shortage in the workforce of direct support professionals (DSPs) to provide these services. The prevalence of low wages, difficult working conditions, lack of training, and limited opportunities have all contributed to both a national and local shortage of DSPs. Nursing homes, home health agencies, and individuals are experiencing severe shortages, a problem exacerbated by very low wages paid to direct service workers. Seventy-five percent of nursing homes do not have enough staff to provide the needed 4.1 hours of daily nursing care per resident. The median annual turnover rate for retaining direct service workers who provide 80- 90% of hands-on care is 51%. In addition, available training and education resources to better equip direct service workers falls far short of what is needed.

By funding the position of Implementation Manager, the County will have a single point of contact to plan, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations, which in turn can significantly impact the desirability and professionalism of DSPs, making recruitment and retention of these critical workers easier. Addressing the shortage of these vital workers in the County can benefit a variety of stakeholders including older adults requiring assistance to remain in their homes; direct care service workers; providers of direct care worker services; and public and private employers.

Nationally, a large proportion of the direct care workforce are women, often from minority or immigrant groups. Many have a low level of education (53% of professional caregivers have a high school education or less) and experience poverty (45% of caregiver households live below 200% of the federal poverty level, 47% rely on some form of public assistance, and 36% lacks affordable housing). While statistics for Montgomery County are difficult to compile, anecdotally, the situation in Montgomery County mirrors that of the rest of the nation. By providing an Implementation Manager to ensure the HCBS Workforce Task Force recommendations are implemented, conditions for these workers will improve dramatically so that it will be easier to recruit and retain this crucial workforce.

Montgomery County is one of the most diverse counties in the country. Montgomery County is also home to a rapidly growing older adult population that is culturally and linguistically diverse. This highly diverse clientele requires a workforce with similar characteristics, who meet the distinct cultural and linguistic needs of the population. Many older adults seek in-home care workers who speak their own language and understand their cultural norms, to make them feel comfortable and secure. By reforming this important profession, the County will be able to reduce current shortages that affect availability and quality of care, enabling recipients to have access to the care so vital to their living healthy and independent lives.

Although the COA requested an Implementation Manager in the last budget cycle, the position has not yet been funded. Failure to act on the recommendations of the Task Force is a recipe for

continued deterioration and disfunction, and will perpetuate the severe shortages in a workforce critically needed by the county's aging population. It is imperative to begin to address the multitude of challenges by coordinating public and private efforts to increase the numbers of direct care workers through higher wages, better training, more efficient delivery of services, and more. Having an Implementation Manager in place will ensure that important reforms are implemented in an efficient, cost-effective, and timely manner.

Public Policy Committee

13) Review of the Office of the Montgomery County Grants Management

The six Montgomery County Government/ Nonprofit Consensus Recommendations for Community Grants Reform need a review. The ranking process and awards process have provided inequitable results that have been counterproductive and reduced needed benefits to the older adult residents in the County. By the admission of the Grants Office; "consensus rankings impossible with large reviewer pool" and "purely a data-driven approach using reviewer scores and recommendations" were used. An additional inequity was the distribution amounts; "funding award amounts were set at the average of funding levels recommended by reviewers, with some modification based on the availability of funds" and "lowest ranking application for which funding was available received whatever funds remained for the applicable category". There were only 15 grants approved in the \$1.5 million FY24 cycle for seniors.

The Commission on Aging points out the inequity in comparing the following outcome for this current cycle just ending June 30th, 2024:

The breath and scope of Montgomery County villages is impressive. As of the most recent [Collective Impact Report](#), for 2020-2021, villages engaged an estimated 3,555 Montgomery County residents as members or volunteers, conducted 3,353 social activities and events, provided 6,221 rides, and welcomed 43,347 participants at social or educational events. To expand the local village movement, Montgomery County villages recently collaborated to form a Village Consortium that will offer "back room" administrative services with a small amount of seed ARPA funding approved by the County. The Village Consortium will enable under-resourced emerging villages to develop needed infrastructure. Importantly, the Village Consortium will also help new villages develop in underserved, diverse, communities where villages have not yet been established. *The Village Consortium sought funding of \$80,000 to support operations during FY2024 through the Office Grants Management system and was denied on the two grants submitted.*

At the same time the Consortium has been searching for funding, Partners In Care obtained a massive [\\$200,000 grant](#). This program offers some similar services as the 30 thriving Montgomery County villages, such as rides, household help, and socialization programs. However, this program does not even exist in the County and has no clients or County-based employees.

The Village Consortium and Montgomery County villages have a strong record of success helping older adults in Montgomery County age in place. This record of success should be enough to get \$80,000 in a fairly administered government funding process.

The CoA has heard from other valued non-profit partners that the "reformed" Grants Management system needs further improvements. The Grants Management Office has

recommended changes for reform of the grant process. Eliminate unspecified funding streams with 300 applicants. Include Department participation so there can be expertise in judging and so the OGM has a way of knowing what local and State priorities are or what action they have taken on specific applicants in the past. OGM wants a) targeted, small grant programs with expertise from Departments in judging; b) funds to implement monitoring of grant recipients and implementation of potential claw-back provisions for non-performance which exists in their grants but is not enforced including a new re-bid process for multi-year contracts.

14) Montgomery County needs an Older Adult needs assessment analysis

The recently completed, thorough, and well-produced 2023 Montgomery County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) identifies key health needs, concerns, and issues in the County as shared by about 2500 county residents. This is a resource for developing evidence-based strategies and best practices for achieving equitable health care for everyone in Montgomery County including older adults.

The same kind of evidence-based reporting needs to be completed for more than just health-related issues to plan for the continued rapid escalation of the older adult population. There are some very valuable takeaways in the section on older adults, however, the CHNA only surveyed 594 of the more than 150,000 older residents in the County. The Commission on Aging (CoA) would like to see an assessment with a larger sampling of the older adult population and a larger sampling of the many diverse and vulnerable communities of concern. The needs assessment should go beyond the questions of health-related issues, into the areas of the Age-Friendly livability domains such as transportation, housing, open spaces, employment, civic engagement, community and social engagement, and communications.

By investing in a comprehensive and scientific analysis the CoA believes we can identify the most important issues our County should understand about how our aging population will affect the future. Montgomery County needs to build a community that allows people to age in place and respect the often-overlooked economic value of older workers, retirees, and personal caregivers. We should hear from the residents and learn why they are working past retirement years and replace ageist workplace myths. The County Council has asked for data to make decisions. Analyzing the results of this assessment can effectively put resident insights to use and reduce the uncertainty about how to plan for the demographic change that already exists.

The US Census Bureau reported there will be more Americans over 65 than children under 18 by 2035. This change will impact every aspect of community life. In every workplace, there will be fewer young people available to fill jobs opening up opportunities – if it is given – to an experienced workforce. It also has implications for what the future of health care, caregiving, safety net services, and community design might look like.

An older adult community needs assessment survey will give our County leaders, Aging and Disability Services, and the Area Agency on Aging insights into the views of our residents on the quality of life in Montgomery County. The evidence-backed results can be used to show how our leadership can better support the aging demographic and where we are succeeding.

15) Senior Fellows Program Funding Request

The Commission on Aging is urging the County Executive to authorize four Senior Fellow positions to be added to the FY26 Recommended Operating Budget.

The Senior Fellows program is intended for experienced and seasoned applicants in professional-level positions who want to work less than 40 hours per week and want to contribute and provide leadership for their local government using the skills and expertise developed during their professional careers.

The history of Senior Fellows employment has shown proven benefits to the staff they have been assigned. New positions are requested to be part of the Public Information Office, Aging and Disability staff, and Worksource Montgomery to fill gaps where the County Budget does not allow for additional full-time employees (FTE).

The Commission on Aging has identified in its Priority and Advocacy statements the need for full-time employees to provide gaps in services and programs that will benefit the older adults in Montgomery County.* The Office of Human Resources Management is overwhelmed and the County is understaffed. Austin Heyman, a very successful Senior Fellow, noted in his 2021 paper on *A Community for A Lifetime*, that “there are not enough younger workers in the talent pipeline to fill vacancies and older workers represent an untapped talent pool.” The hiring of Senior Fellows is an extremely cost effective and proven human resource tool to use to fill the gaps. As a Senior Fellow in the Division of Housing, Leslie Marks, in collaboration with Montgomery College, launched a twelve-session certificate education program for staff of affordable housing communities. As a Senior Fellow, Marcia Pruzan successfully led, for several years, the Age-Friendly Initiative through initial certification and re-certifications with AARP/WHO.

The County adopted, Senior Agenda, notes that older adults are a valuable economic, cultural, and social resource and will be included in all County planning activities at the Executive and Council levels. Montgomery County will recognize the extent and value of the contribution of older adults to the economy. The County will encourage County agencies and private companies to offer employment opportunities as older adults transition to retirement.

* Implementation Manager for the Home and Community Based Workforce Task Force Recommendations.

* Coordinator of the Commission on Aging’s Library Liaison Program and Ambassador Communications Programs providing Older Adult Resources and Services to the Community.

* Assist the Department of Health and Human Services and Aging and Disability to provide increased communications on County services and programs to the increasingly diverse and growing older adult communities in the County.

16) Protecting Montgomery County's Most Vulnerable Residents

Mission

The Public Policy Committee of the Commission on Aging (CoA) advocates for policies, programs, and proposals at the local, State, and Federal levels that positively affect the lives of Montgomery County's older adults.

Background and Statement of Rationale

The responsibility for conducting periodic surveys of nursing homes has resided solely within the State Department of Health (specifically the Office of Health Care Quality or OHCQ) since the beginning of FY 2022, when the State declined to renew a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Montgomery County Department of Health to perform this function. Since the transition to State oversight, the CoA has been seeking details on whether inspections have been conducted timely by State staff according to COMAR 10.07.02.08, In reviewing data from Nursing Home Compare for all the licensed nursing homes in Montgomery County, there are no survey/inspections results available that are more recent than August 23, 2022, or 23 months ago. Ten facilities, including several with deficiencies categorized as posing immediate jeopardy to residents (from the last survey), have had no documented survey/inspection since 2019. Several facilities have changed ownership since the MOU expired; research has shown that change in ownership often presents unique challenges to nursing home operations and can negatively impact resident care. Further, the OHCQ website does not have any of the survey, or deficiency reports either. We also learned that complaints made through the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) program have not been followed up timely by State staff.

Taken as a whole and in the absence of information to the contrary, we are extremely concerned about the well-being of vulnerable nursing home residents in the County, but our hands are tied because we are not responsible for monitoring via periodic surveys and inspections nor do we have the power to impose Civil Monetary Penalties.

Request for Regaining Responsibility for Conducting Periodic Surveys of Nursing Homes

Immediately: a) advocate with State delegation and other key actors for State legislation to enable delegation of authority to Counties for nursing home inspections, b) re-establish delegation of nursing home inspections to County via MOU with State (pending permission from CMS), c) advocate for additional funding from State to fully restore the budget for inspections and on-site complaint inspections by the LTCO.

FY 2026 County Operating Budget: Upon execution of the MOU, allocate \$525,000 to hire, train, and on-board a team of nursing home inspectors.

