



Commission on Aging
Health & Wellness Committee
February 11, 2025, minutes
9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Attendance

CoA Commissioners

Linda Berkofsky
Wayne Berman
Virginia Cain
Betsy Carrier
Robert Cosby
Vernell DeWitty
Nicole McDonald
Kamilah Mantle
Yvette Monroe
Sibo Ncube
Eleanor Tanno

CoA Alumni

Jean Dinwiddie
Marcia Pruzan
Beverly Rollins
Rev Vikram
Marsha Weber

Staff

Mamiko Hada, Asian American Health Initiative
Tina Purser Langley, Health and Wellness Program Manager
Stacy Sigler, Recreation Program Manager

Guests

KuoHwa Wang

Call to Order

Co-chair Jean Dinwiddie called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

Jean stated what the Committee would be discussing today. She said that staffer Shawn Brennan would join the group to share the results of a recent Age-Friendly survey on what services and programs are important to older adults in the Montgomery County area.

Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and voted on. The minutes were approved.

Needs of the County: *Shawn Brennan*

Shawn talked about the early results of the recently conducted Age-Friendly survey. Over 2,000 responses were received. Shawn stated that although the survey did not delve into specific health issues, it did address health across all the policies discussed. She noted that when we are looking at people over the age of 65, things such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, and mental health are major concerns. In addition, neighborhood safety is also of concern. As for risk factors for older adults, a major one is low physical activity.

Shawn said that Montgomery County usually shows up in better shape than other areas of Maryland, but not on all issues. She also examined several issues in the State of Maryland and compared their status with other States. She said that what is looked at are the three pillars of aging—being physically active, socially active, and being in good health. But some of these pillars depend on other things, such as successful transportation. Shawn stated that pedestrian safety is also a big issue. She noted that individuals who really want to be active must have a safe infrastructure. Targeted audits could be conducted to examine this. Shawn is developing a fact sheet examining efforts to improve infrastructure in neighborhoods, and she will ask the CoA to review what she finds.

In the survey, Shawn asked whether folks feel age discrimination. She said that most of the age discrimination was experienced by individuals aged 50-59. Interestingly, the least amount was felt in individuals aged 90 and older. The survey asked where this age discrimination is most often felt; most responders noted that it is in the health care arena.

Shawn stated that it is difficult to create a culture where these older adult issues can be addressed. Although some communities have figured out how to address these issues, unfortunately, not enough have.

Shawn said that when the Age-Friendly final report from the survey is available, she will share it with the CoA. She noted that we need folks who are willing to do the in-home care work. At the State and County levels, we do not have much oversight of this, and some in-home care conditions are not great. She said that the items rated highest on the survey were County parks and libraries, and the Montgomery County Senior Olympics. Shawn suggested that the parks and libraries in the County could have a cross-partnership and work together.

Robert Cosby commented that working with the parks and the libraries is something the CoA should tout. Individuals can get books and help them to stay connected. Older adults need to maintain the highest possible quality of life.

Betsy Carrier said that if we consider advocating for older adults, we will have to be aware that folks who are 60 will be different from someone who is 80. Virginia said that it makes sense that the 50-year-olds feel more discrimination in the workforce than older folks. Also, many older adults do not have the money to take care of

themselves, such as shoveling the driveway and sidewalks. Rev Vikram said that senior centers are good places for activities, and we could encourage folks to participate.

Marsha Weber said that the Committee could do a fact sheet on whether someone should stay in their home or move to a senior living facility. Those of us in this field take a lot for granted, and we assume other folks have the same amount of information.

Marcia Pruzan agreed that many people do not know what to do when they need something. She said that we could also look at solo aging. Tina Purser Langley said the Palliative Care and End-of-Life Coalition will hold a forum in April to discuss solo aging.

Home Care and Work Force Task Force Recommendations

Linda Berkofsky said there is a motion before the County Council to increase funding for health care, including bumping up training for in-home health care for caregivers. One thing the CoA could do is ask our legislators to fully fund in-home health care, including caregiver support. We need to pay caregivers for in-home respite care.

Jean stated that the Committee had agreed to study something in depth and then produce a product, maybe white paper. Unfortunately, advocating for more money is not the same as producing a product. Robert commented that the issue is that \$1 million will not go far toward paying caregivers; however, we still need to ask for more money. But this is a shortfall for what we are trying to do. He stated that the Committee could write a paper stating that more money is needed for homecare.

Marsha Weber said we need to consider cluster caregiving because it might help with the problem. It is a more efficient use of funds and services and could work in senior high-rise buildings and senior living quarters. Robert added that individuals who do caregiving work are trying to cobble together enough hours to support their families. Because of transportation costs, placing direct service providers in senior buildings would work. Often, workers have to drive long distances to serve more than one patient a day.

Virginia Cain noted that the CoA has had these conversations before. The task force looked at doing a better job of recruiting people and providing training opportunities. But unless you improve pay, we will not be able to improve recruitment. Robert agreed.

Beverly Rollins said that if we keep coming down on immigrants, we may have a shortage of home care workers. Sibio Ncube said that she is a provider of healthcare workers in Montgomery County. The workforce challenge is real. If the providers do a good job of matching caregivers with nearby patients, it lessens the problem. Sibio stated that she has experience in matching patients with the correct caregivers. And she has seen the advantages and value of in-home care.

Marcia Pruzan asked whether there is still a regional coalition in place to discuss this issue. Former commissioner Judy Levy was part of the coalition. It was about the caregiver workforce.

Virginia said that if the County lobbies for more funding, we also need to look at the “gap” population—individuals who have too much money for Medicaid, but not enough money to pay for expensive services. Linda said that the regional coalition committee is still around, and the CoA could ask Megla Port (the head of the coalition) to talk to us. The CoA could help individuals sort out what caregiving is and what it entails. Tina commented that maybe Judy Levy could go through the necessary steps with the CoA.

The recommendation was to invite Judy Levy to discuss this topic with us.

Jean asked whether we really want to discuss how we can keep people in their homes as they age, since it may be tied to social isolation. Should we focus on small-sized group homes or assisted living care? The Committee should think about what kind of recommendations it makes.

Marcia said this is a massive issue: finding approved, quality in-home care. What can the CoA accomplish by tackling this problem?

Betsy said that there is a whole level of care that does not exist. Social connections are a very serious issue, and we do not know how to crack that nut. Rev said that her culture says that you keep your older adult relatives at home. But finding home care for her 97-year-old mother was impossible. Placing someone in a facility provides social interaction.

Other Business

The Hearing Loss Fact Sheet has been updated.

Adjournment and Next Meeting (3/11/26)