



## Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

### Director's Quarterly Leadership Meeting with Boards, Commissions and Committees (BCCs)

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**Date: June 28, 2021 (FY21 Fourth Quarter Report)**

**BCC: Commission on Aging**

**BCC Representative: Barbara Selter**

Montgomery County's Commission on Aging (CoA) continues to serve as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents by identifying significant issues where its voice on the needs of seniors can make a difference. The CoA appreciates the County's efforts to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic and its resulting health and economic crises. The CoA stands ready to provide services and assistance in any way it can during these particularly difficult times.

#### **Age-Friendly Montgomery County**

The CoA continues active participation in the Age-Friendly Montgomery County Initiative. A Commission alumnus is the Senior Fellow that staffs the Initiative, and individual CoA members participate on the various Committees. All have the ultimate goal of continuing to make the County a community for a lifetime.

The COA Chair, Barbara Selter, continues to work with the Age Friendly Home and Community Services Work Group on a series of Round Tables to address concerns associated with ensuring a sufficient supply of direct care workers to support Home and Community Based Services for Montgomery County residents. A series of three Round Tables including participants from the provider community, Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery College, Maryland Association of Adult Day Services, Montgomery County Caregiver Support Program, African American Health Program, WorkSource Montgomery, Charles Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center, the Maryland Regional Direct Services Collaborative, and a variety of consumer groups are attending these Round Tables to develop recommendations for addressing the growing need for direct care workers

#### **Covid-19**

The Commission continued to monitor issues surrounding Covid-19. During this quarter, the Commission monitored the following Covid-19 related concerns: (1) How many older adults received vaccinations, (2) How many home-bound individuals were receiving vaccines, and (3) What outreach efforts were underway to vaccinate older adults of color.

Additionally, the worrisome increase in social isolation and loneliness during the Pandemic resulted in the Commission forming a Task Force on Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors to address this issue. The Task Force performed research on this important concern and presented a Public Forum for older adults and their service providers on May 18, 2021. The theme of the Public Forum was *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*. The Public Forum was well-attended, with 220 registrations. The video-recording is available on YouTube

Five Commissioners, including Barbara Selter, Edgar Rivas, Rev. Dr. Ruby Moone, Tho Tran, and Rev Vikram participated in a three-minute video that encouraged Montgomery County citizens to get vaccinated. The video provided vaccination messaging in English, Spanish, Hindi, and Vietnamese. It is being played on the County television station and is posted to YouTube.

### **CoA Advocacy Letters and Response to Maryland Department of Aging (MDoA) Plan**

The Commission wrote the following letters during this quarter to advocate for issues of importance to older adults:

- Letter to Robin Riley, Department of Recreation, to support re-opening of all senior centers as soon as possible.
- Letter to Councilmembers Gabe Albornoz, Evan Glass, and Craig Rice to express concern about the Maryland Department of Aging's request for \$200,000 to support their Community for Life program entry into Montgomery County.
- Letter to Councilman Katz describing issues regarding affordable housing, and 311 and 7-3000 responses to a COA inquiry about housing for an older adult.
- Letter to Mr. Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary, Maryland Department of Health to request that the Maryland Medicaid Administration apply to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funding to strengthen access to home and community-based services (HCBS) for Medicaid beneficiaries.
- Letter to Dr. Carrie L. Nieman to support a grant application for the extension of the HEARS pilot into Montgomery County.
- Letter to Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D-MI), Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) to offer the COA's support for the draft language for the proposed federal HCBS Access Act.

In addition to these letters, individual Commission members participated in MD Department on Aging town halls on their draft FY 2022-2025 State Plan on Aging and Commissioners also completed the State survey.

### **CoA Response to State Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) Decision to Terminate its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for County Surveyors and Inspections of County Nursing Facilities**

As described in the last Quarterly Report, the Commission was extremely active on this issue.

In this quarter, the Commission continued to communicate with County Councilmembers about the

ramifications of terminating the contract and advocate for sufficient surveyors for the County. The Commission also tracked the response of OHCQ and the County Council to this change in status.

### **Annual Meetings with County Councilmembers**

In April, Commissioners met individually with each County Council member to advocate for the Commission's FY 22 budget priorities. The budget priorities presented to the councilmembers included:

- Establish two additional social worker positions in HHS, one in Adult Protective Services and one in the Public Guardianship Program.
- Provide legal assistance for older renters to avoid eviction from their homes
- Address food insecurity by expanding senior nutrition programs
- Raise awareness of older adult services
- Increase the Housing Initiative Fund
- Maintain and expand older adult programs

As part of the annual visits with County Councilmembers, COA Commissioners asked Councilmembers about their priorities for older adults and how the Commission could best support the Councilmembers' initiatives. In addition, the Commissioners expressed their continuing concern about the loss of surveyors in Montgomery County. The Commission continues to track the response of OHCQ and the County Council to this change in status. Additionally, the Commissioners expressed their support for extending the free Ride-On bus service 24 X 7 for older adults; discussed the Task Force on Racial Equity, Dementia Services, and Policing report; and raised their concern about the difficulty of obtaining information about and navigating affordable housing resources.

### **Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS), Aging in the Community, Health and Wellness, and Transportation**

- This quarter, as last quarter, HCBS and aging-at-home continued to be major areas of work for the Commission. The Health and Wellness Committee (HWC) considered the need for more home-based care particularly for individuals without Medicaid and other resources. This included speakers on the Medicaid waiver programs, as well as discussion of how to address Home and Community Based services for the gap population that is not eligible for Medicaid waivers, but have an inability to pay for HCBS. This Committee also heard from providers on the viability of sharing direct care workers across multiple clients in geographic proximity.
- The Aging in Community Committee (AIC) focused on Accessible and Affordable Housing for Older Adults at its April meeting, Food Insecurity at its May meeting, and technology to help older adults age in place at its June meeting. In follow-up to the letter to Councilman Katz mentioned earlier, several AIC members met with Odile Brunetto and the 3000 staff regarding the 7-300 response to affordable housing questions. The Commission's concerns and suggestions were well-received and Odile Brunetto agreed to follow up, especially

related to the possibility of an affordable housing navigator.

- The Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors (SILOS) Task Force, formed last year from the HWC and the AIC Committee remained very active. It conducted the Commission's April Public Forum, *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults* on May 18, 2021. The Task Force further produced a Fact Sheet on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults and a Resources List. Once completing these tasks, this Task Force was dissolved.
- The Commission's Task Force on Racial Equity, Dementia Services, and Police, also formed last year, continues to work on its recommendations and final report. The report has been reviewed by the Executive and Public Policy Committees and is in its final stages of revision for approval by the full COA.

### **Additional Experts at CoA Meetings**

The Commission was fortunate to be able to learn from distinguished speakers. Experts presenting at CoA meetings included:

- At the April meeting, Leah Bradley from Empowering the Ages and Aditi Merchant from Big and Mini spoke on Social Isolation and Loneliness of Seniors
- At the May meeting, Stuart Butler, Brookings Institute and Visiting Fellow, Convergence Center for Policy Resolution spoke on "Rethinking Care for Older Adults" and stressed the importance of planning for the future with the growing older adult population.
- At the June meeting, Jessica Fusillo, Community Outreach and Public Relations Manager, Department of Permitting Services, Gail Lucas, Department of Permitting Services, Dean Packard and Jeff Jacobson, Managing Partners, Universal Communities LLC spoke on "Design for Life: Accessible Home Design Initiatives in Montgomery County."

### **Communications**

- The newly established Communications Committee has been extremely active. It is currently considering options for renaming the "Seniors Today" program, which will be voted on by the full COA membership next quarter.
- Communications Committee also has been working on revising the current orientation program for new Commission members. It finalized the New Member Orientation Booklet and appointed buddies for all new Commissioners to help new Commissioners quickly become more effective in their new role. The Communications Committee is planning to revamp the Commissioner Handbook as well.

- Communications Committee is working on establishing a speaker's bureau to maintain information about potential speakers on issues of concern to older adults for outside organizations.

### **Public Forum: *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults***

This year's Public Forum, *Countering Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*, was held virtually due to Covid 19 restrictions. Our County Executive, Marc Elrich, provided a welcome video for the event. Liz Necka from the National Institute on Aging provided the keynote address. Lynda Flowers addressed the root causes of social isolation and loneliness and the impact they have on the Medicare system. Lori Marks provided a view of the role that intergenerational strategies play in combatting social isolation, both in older adults and young people. Scott Code described the innovative technologies being used to counter social isolation across the country. Short film vignettes provided information about existing programs that are currently combatting social isolation and loneliness today in Montgomery County. For this Public Forum, 220 people registered, 160 people signed on, and 87 people stayed on for the full session

### **Commission on Aging Strategic Planning**

To better respond to the expected exponential growth of the older adult population in Montgomery County, the COA determined that it should consider ways to support the County Council in planning for and developing programs to meet this growing need. To encourage "future" thinking, a planning group composed of several members of the Executive Committee, began work on a strategic planning document to provide a framework for the COA Committees to consider in their agenda planning for the next few years. This draft document will be reviewed and finalized by the full COA at a special planning meeting in July. It is the intent of this group to provide input to the County Council's near- and longer- term strategies for meeting the increasing needs of Montgomery County's older adult population as it grows in size and diversity.

### **Collaboration with Other Boards, Commissions, and Committees**

- CoA collaborates with other Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as appropriate. CoA also welcomes representatives of other Boards, Commissions and Committees at its standing Committee meetings. These representatives are invited to report on their activities at CoA's monthly meetings.