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### Community Partnerships for Older Adults Build Aging-Friendly Communities

by Asha Chandra

Aging is a process we all share, but many communities are not prepared for the challenges posed by an aging population. Through Community Partnerships for Older Adults (CPFOA), a \$20 million national grant program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), municipal leaders in communities across the U.S. have worked to identify, prioritize and implement local solutions to meet the needs of older adults.



While the national challenges are huge and complex — and doubtless require policy changes at the federal and state levels — CPFOA-funded partnerships have improved support for older adults in communities that have developed a wide range of traditional and non-traditional partnerships.

As a result of these partnerships, community resources have been invested more effectively and efficiently as providers, consumers, city officials and other community leaders work together toward shared goals in a more coordinated system.

#### Pathways to Positive Aging in Fremont, Calif.

Fremont, Calif., offers one such example of a successful community partnership, where the city's Human Services Department, a grantee of CPFOA, has partnered with the Tri-City Elder Coalition to develop the community-based Pathways to Positive Aging initiative. In creating this initiative, the Fremont City Council unanimously adopted the following goal to create a safe, welcoming and aging-friendly community:

"The city will promote an environment which values senior participation; a place where information and services are easily available for all seniors; where seniors can be mobile and actively involved; where meaningful exchanges between cultures and generations exist; and where people come together in support of one another, regardless of age."

One challenge to Fremont's efforts was the extraordinary diversity of the city's senior population: more than 12 percent of residents are over age 60, almost 47 percent of residents are foreign born and more than 57 percent speak a language other than English in their homes.

"Immigrant seniors' needs are exacerbated due to language, cultural and transportation barriers," said Suzanne Shenfil, human services director for the City of Fremont. "As a result, creating community-driven models to reach normally isolated cultural and faith-based groups has been a key to our success."

Fremont's Community Ambassador Program for Seniors (CAPS) is one example of the city's many programs that respond to this challenge by reaching out to seniors and their families. This national award-winning program trains volunteer ambassadors to serve seniors where they live, worship and socialize, in their own language and within their own cultural norms. Ambassadors serve as a bridge between the formal network of social services and seniors' respective faith and cultural communities.

#### Learning Locally, Sharing Nationally

The 15 CPFOA community partnerships are prioritizing their long-term care challenges, and creating innovative solutions to address them. While each community is unique — with its own mix of local history, demographics, resources, politics and personalities — many of the challenges identified and tackled are similar across communities.

"For many, the partnerships have now — eight years after the first RWJF grant was awarded — become integral to their communities, serving as natural platforms in developing solutions on a wide range of issues," said Elise Bolda, national program director for CPFOA.

Further, municipal governments have played a role in supporting the majority of community partnerships.

In addition to Fremont's initiative, other noteworthy local efforts include:

- **Milwaukee:** Significant population shifts in recent decades have left many older adults in Milwaukee feeling isolated. Connecting Caring Communities, in partnership with the city's planning, health and police departments, focused on eight neighborhoods to promote elder-friendly initiatives.
- **Atlanta:** After using GIS mapping to identify regions around the city where the highest numbers of older adults live, the Atlanta Lifelong Communities partnership's first priorities became housing, zoning, community design and transportation.
- **San Francisco:** The Partnership for Community-Based Care and Support, housed in the city's Department of Aging and Adult Services, identified improving services for underserved populations as the top priority.
- **Waynesville, N.C.:** With city and county involvement, the Waynesville partnership recognized the vital role that family caregivers play in long-term care and sought ways to support them.
- **La Grange, Ill.:** The city developed a "One Call" campaign, which promoted a single phone number dedicated to linking older adults to support and trained 300 first responders – police and firefighters – to recognize signs of distress.

Long-term care is a challenge that will soon become dramatically more difficult to manage if communities do not address it now. CPFOA grantees have begun preparing for tomorrow by meeting the increasing needs of older adults today.

**Details:** To learn more about Community Partnerships for Older Adults, visit [www.cpfoa.org](http://www.cpfoa.org).

*Asha Chandra is marketing coordinator for Pathways to Positive Aging in the City of Fremont, Calif., Human Services Department.*

#### **National League of Cities**

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Suite 550 · Washington, DC 20004

Phone: (202) 626-3000 · Fax: (202) 626-3043

[info@nlc.org](mailto:info@nlc.org) · [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)

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