Senior Connections, The Capital Area Agency on Aging

For 50 years Senior Connections has provided services for older adults, persons with disabilities and caregivers residing in Planning Service Area (PSA) 15, which includes the City of Richmond and the Counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, and Powhatan. Established as a private nonprofit agency in 1973 and governed by a Board of Directors, the Agency also serves as the Region’s designated No Wrong Door lead as well as the designated lead by Plan RVA for the Human Services Transportation Coordination Entity. Additionally, the Agency partners with local universities, other non-profits and foundations to ensure that the Greater RVA is a great place to live, engage and grow old.

Senior Connections is designated as the Area Agency on Aging for the development and enhancement of comprehensive, coordinated home and community-based services for older adults, persons with disabilities and caregivers. Roles and responsibilities include advocacy, planning, coordinating services, information, referral assistance, leadership, partnerships, collaboration, a focal point for services, and assessing then meeting the needs of older adults. This designation is from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL) through the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

Our Vision:
Older Adults with Improved Quality of Life

Our Mission:
Empowering Older Adults to Live with Dignity and Choice

Provide Direction for Where We are Going

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Summary of Services and Support Your Area Agency on Aging

In support of addressing social connections and helping individuals age successfully, Senior Connections is proposing these programs and services as part of the new 4 Year Area Plan for Aging Services:

**Adult Day Care** *(Partnership with Local Adult Day Care Centers to Support Caregivers and Individuals)*

**Benefits Enrollment Center** *(Accessing Benefits to Connect with Eligible Benefits for Food, Healthcare and More)*

**Care Coordination** *(Assessment of Service Needs, Connection to Resources and Coordinating Services)*

**Care Transitions** *(Hospital-to-Home Partnership to Reduce Readmissions and Help Older Adults Connect with Community Resources)*

**Caregiver Counseling and Training** *(Information, Education and Assistance to Help with Caregiving Role including Direct Payments)*

**Chore Services** *(Coordinate and Provide Payment Heavy Housework, Yardwork)*

**Communication, Referral, Information Assistance** *(Provide Information & Resources to Assist and Access Support Services)*

**Congregate Meals and Activities** *(Friendship Cafés for Nutritional Meals and Socialization)*

**Emergency Services** *(Critical Needs: Help with Payments for Housing, Utilities, and Medications)*

**Employment and Training Assistance** *(Increasing Income through Job Training and Referrals/Matches)*

**Health and Wellness Classes** *(Evidence-Based Workshops for Chronic Disease Self-Management and Fall Prevention)*

**Home Delivered Meals** *(Nutritional Support Delivered through a Contract w/ Meals on Wheels; Partnership with FeedMore, Inc.)*

**Legal Assistance** *(Legal Support through a Partnership with Central VA Legal Aid and Senior Law Day)*

**Long-Term Care Ombudsman and Elder Abuse Prevention** *(Information, Support and Rights Education & Complaint Resolution)*

**Money Management** *(Volunteer Check Writing Service for Bills and Budget Management)*

**No Wrong Door** *(Virtual System and A Statewide Network of Shared Resources to Streamline Access To Long Term Services And Supports)*

**Nutrition Counseling and Nutrition Education** *(One to One or Group Education to Help Ensure Nutritional Needs Met)*

**Options Counseling** *(Supporting Individuals by Partnering with Them and Providing Choices for Service Selection)*

**Outreach & Public Information & Education** *(Helping Community Know Us and Share Resources Through Presentations, Health And Resource Fairs, Newsletters, Publications, Social Media, Press Releases, Advertising, Website)*

**Personal Care, Homemaker and Respite Services** *(Supporting Individuals and their Families/Caregivers through Contracts with Home Care Providers as well as Direct Payments to Caregivers via Respite Voucher)*

**Public Guardianship** *(Providing 24/7 Support to Our Most Vulnerable Population, Those Without Decision Making Capacity)*

**Residential Repair & Renovation** *(Supporting Older Adults by Coordinating and Providing Payment for Home Repair/Modification)*

**Socialization & Recreation** *(Exercise, Arts, and Activities at the Friendship Cafés)*

**Senior Farmer’s Market** *(Increasing Access to Fresh Fruit and Vegetables with Vouchers for Local Farmer’s Markets)*

**Telebridges Telephone Support** *(Volunteers Connecting with Older Adults Who are Isolated and Lonely)*

**Transportation and Mobility Management** *(Rides to and from Friendship Cafés and Ride Connection for Medical Appointments through Contracts with Providers and Working with Community Partners to Build a Better Human Service Transportation Model)*

**Virginia Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program/VICAP and Senior Medicare Patrol** *(Advocating for Medicare and Other Insurance to Prevent Healthcare Fraud and Abuse)*

**Volunteer Services** *(Providing Opportunities for Engagement though Agency Opportunities, Foster Grandparents and RSVP)*

**Additional Support Services** *(Senior Cool Care, SNAP Benefit Counseling)*
FY24 Area Planning Process

The Agency’s Board of Directors, Advisory Council and Staff is engaged in a multi-year Planning Process. This process involves the integration of several planning initiatives: Updated Strategic Plan, and the Implementation of the Four-Year Plan for Aging Services, which is approved by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services.

Strategic Planning

The Strategic Plan using an equity lens, sets goals and directions for Agency programs and activities based on five focus areas: Visibility and Marketing, Programs and Services, Funding and Resources, Sustainability, Measurement and Evaluation. Goals are:

- Create a distinctive and recognizable public image (brand) for Senior Connections.
- Increase development and delivery of comprehensive and collaborative programs that address the short term and long-term needs of older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers – especially those older adults with greatest need and marginalized groups.
- Develop diverse, sustainable funding sources while continuing strong stewardship of all resources.
- Identify and implement creative strategies to ensure the sustainability of Senior Connections.
- Identify and implement performance measures and outcomes for programs and activities.

Trauma Informed, Person Centered Initiative

Senior Connections has solidified a vision to increase support to the Long-Term Services and Supports network in the Richmond Region. We have begun a two-year Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Care journey designed to help close the longevity gap and address mental health, support home and community-based care services, and foster positive social connection across the region. These strategies developed as a response to the heightened mental health stressors revealed by COVID-19 and the necessity to support older adults and staff.

These comprehensive approaches have been designed using gerontological evidence which puts a spotlight on the intersection of ageism and trauma. With this, there is embedded promotion of social connection to mitigate loneliness and isolation, a continuing goal of Senior Connections and many agencies supporting older adults in our area. Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed approach will guide Senior Connections to shift policies, practices, and spaces to create an environment of safety and belonging that enhance the well-being of staff, volunteers, elders, and caregivers. This initiative will enhance Senior Connections work to address equity and belonging.

Planning for Now and the Next 20 Years:

We are undertaking a process to address our role both internally and externally to meet the growing needs of older adults now and over the next 20 years. To support exploration, a strategic advisor will be hired to address the following questions, which will inform the future direction of the agency:

- How do we elevate our agency to a resource within the aging services network? Are we the appropriate entity to lead in the formalizing of an older adult services system and provide backbone support for that system once it is in place? If so, what sorts of organizational changes need to be made to take on that role?
Planning for Now and the Next 20 Years, Cont.

- What is the internal infrastructure and culture needed to carry out the re-imagined role of our agency and how do we implement the internal changes needed?
- What is the appropriate role of our agency in advocating for improved policy and practice in support of older adults in the region?

Our advisor will help us:

- Identifying history, cultural artifacts, and domain to gain a better understanding of how our agency’s work has evolved, including the programmatic aspects of the work and the internal culture of the agency. Understanding history, exploring change to serve the community in an equitable manner and reconsidering our image and brand identity.
- Assessing the Agency’s Environmental Relationships to better understand and response to the most pressing needs of older adults ensuring equitable service delivery across our community; authentically engage in the voices of older adults as well as our external partnerships as well as engage in the civic dialogue regarding policy and practice affecting older adults, including strengthening our advocacy and civic engagement efforts.
- Evaluating the internal organizational capacity of the agency to respond to the identified programmatic and systemic needs identified through a needs assessment process. Re-imaging the roles, programs, and partnerships of the agency to better meet the needs of older adults in the region will require rethinking our internal structure and processes at the board, advisory committee, and staff levels.
- Building cultural competency to ensure that we, as an agency, are recognizing the needs of marginalized communities and responding to those needs in an appropriate way will require that the entire agency understands and embodies the principles of diversity, inclusion, and equity, both within the agency and as the agency assesses needs and implements new efforts in the community. The board, advisory council, and staff understand the importance of trauma-informed approaches to cared and imbed those approaches in program design and implementation.

FY24 New 4 Year Area Plan

The Area Plan for Aging Services serves as the blueprint for the work of Senior Connections and is the official funding application to the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). It also informs interested persons about the intent of the Agency to deliver services outlined under the Older Americans Act. The Plan also describes the way the Agency will continue to develop a comprehensive and coordinated delivery system for older adults, persons with disabilities, caregivers, and their families – with special attention on reaching those with the greatest need. This is our new FY 24 Four-Year Plan and covers the time period October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2027. The Area Plan is informed by emerging trends, shifting demographics, Community Survey of Older Adults as well as our own community listening sessions and online survey.
The Impact of Demographics and Research for FY 24 New 4 Year Plan

Our new FY24 Four-Year Area Plan reflects important population trends, equity and access concerns and feedback from across our region. Planning Service Area (PSA) 15 is a complex mix of rural, suburban, and urban communities, each with their own unique identity, strengths and challenges. As we have come out of the pandemic emergency, it’s clear that COVID19’s impact will still be felt into the new fiscal year. We have seen an ever-greater gap in health equity, decreased life expectancy, increased lack of connectivity, the effects of long COVID all combined with Medicaid wind-down, end of eviction moratorium and reduction in SNAP benefits - the gaps in support for older adults has increased.

However, we have learned much through the pandemic and its impact on service delivery will remain as we continue to streamline processes and update technology to help people access long term support quickly. In order to create a foundation for our FY24 4-Year Area Plan, we looked at available data from: Census*, DARS Community Assessment Survey of Older Adults (CASOA) Report, United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg Steps to Success, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service**, as well as well as our own Public Listening Sessions and Online Community Survey.

Demographic Characteristics of Older Adults in Virginia PSA 15**: Older adults and persons with disabilities living in our community are heterogeneous and encompasses individuals with different resiliencies, needs and resources. In PSA 15, 22% of the population is 65+ years and older. 56% of those individuals are women, a population that is most risk for poverty in older adulthood. Of note, PSA 15* older adult population (60+) is increasing across all localities and the 85+ and older population continuing to be the fastest growing population. From FY2016 to FY2022, our agency served a 40% increase in the 85+ age category across all agency programs. While advanced age is not in and of itself an indicator of need, when you combine with higher risk of health complications, reduced social supports and an increased risk of dementia, it is a population to watch.

Analysis of Census data ** indicates that in PSA 15 for older adults: 72% are White, 24% are Black, 3% are Asian with 2% identifying as Hispanic. Among 65+ Virginians in PSA 15, 6.2% said they speak other languages at home. With the increase of individuals across diverse populations, we need to respond through our outreach program ensuring accessible materials and language line support. 29% of our older adult population lives alone - one of the many risk factors in terms of financial security, isolation and loneliness. According to the United Way, 26% of older adults in our area lived 200% to poverty threshold and 7.75% live in poverty. The health equity gap continues into older adulthood, a person living in certain zip codes in the city of Richmond can have an approximate 10-year difference in life expectancy than someone living in Henrico’s west end. Sometimes that gap is seen in the same city and or county. In fact, from FY2016 to FY2022, our agency served approximately a 50% increase in the number of low-income people of color.

In planning for aging services, age is not always a predictor of service usage, but it can become a factor as there are groups of older adults who may be at greater risk due to low income, multiple chronic conditions, geographic isolation, and individuals who have historically experienced health and racial inequities. They are at great risk of needing more formal supports, especially when these risk factors are combined.

Looking at the CASOA for the new 4-year plan as and from our own listening sessions and online community survey, (results next page) there are themes we will focus on for the FY 24 Area Plan. Most older adults want to age in place in their own homes and will look for supportive home and community-based services to do so like needing support with home modification and repair. Many older adults are concerned about having financial means to age in place, equity and mental health. Transportation continues to rise the top of concerns, a topic our programs will work to address and expand, particularly in hard to serve areas. Our area plan reflects these concerns.
Voices from PSA 15....
What do you consider are the most important factors contributing to a high quality of life?

Freedom from worry about food, money and a roof. Access to healthcare. Access to a community. Hanover Resident

Good health. Safe and affordable housing. Connection. City of Richmond Resident

Enough Money. Charles City Resident

Communication with Family and Friends. Chesterfield Resident

Access to medical facilities, food, physical activities, and social opportunities like meetups, walk & talks, or events. New Kent Resident

Affordable and safe housing designed for seniors and some of their challenges, having a good social network, being able to get assistance when needed, knowing who to call when help is needed. Henrico Resident

The degree of transportation convenience is relatively high, and people can travel conveniently, which is very important for improving the quality of life. Powhatan Resident

Opportunities for learning and personal growth, Creativity that allows you to create and explore your potential. Goochland Resident
Priorities for the New 4 Year Plan

• Continue to deliver Older Americans Act core programs and services including Group Services, Legal Services, Nutrition Support, Access and Supportive Services, Health and Wellness, Caregiver, and the Elder Rights and Ombudsman Programs, grounded in a person centered, trauma informed, equitable philosophy and practices.

• Strengthen services and supports that encourage self-care for individuals, using evidence-based health and wellness programs. Shifts for new plan include:
  o **Strengthening of our Wellness Programs: Tai Chi for Arthritis, Walk with Ease, Matter of Balance, Cancer Thriving and Surviving Self-Management Programs**

• Provide person-centered planning for older adults across the spectrum of long-term care services.
  o **Enhanced training to expand and strengthen the Options Counseling Program to meet the needs of person-centered planning for all older adults and persons 18+ with a disability.**

• Provide information, referral, training and assistance to better support caregivers.
  o **Enhancement of our Caregiver Support Service program to better respond to the needs of our caregivers by adding a full-time Manager position and funding self-directed care through Respite Voucher Program.**
  o **Increase services through Direct Payments (Supplemental Services) to provide direct payments to reimburse caregivers for non-traditional respite services.**

• Promote the use of advance planning through assistance with legal documents such as wills, powers of attorney, and advance medical directives and through education concerning other end-of-life issues.
  o **Create new partnerships with to expand Senior Law Day – including virtual options for our rural localities.**
  o **Enhance partnerships with Honoring Choices, a No Wrong Door Partner**

• Develop outreach strategies to reach and serve culturally diverse older individuals, persons with disabilities and caregivers targeting specifically those at greatest need including LGBTQ+, persons with low income, persons with English as a second language and communities of color. Develop outreach strategies and partner with local governments to ensure that residents in all localities have information on our services as well as other community resources.
  o **Strengthening the outreach team by adding a part time Communication Outreach Specialist**
  o **Ensure all staff receive LGBTQ+ persons via SAGE, enhanced training for using agency language line technology, Mental Health 1st Aide and trauma informed practices and equity and belonging.**
  o **Ensure marketing materials are accessible in other languages.**
  o **Increase information and outreach accessibility by providing a wider range of communications formats including a quarterly print and digital agency publication which will be available physically at various libraries and community pickup spots in our service area; expansion of digital media including a video and audio content, with closed captioning for the hearing impaired, and more mobile responsive content for phones, tablets, and other devices.**
Priorities for the New 4 Year Plan, Cont.

- Strengthening Elder Rights Programs and ensure those individuals living in long term care facilities are safe.
  - Expanding Ombudsman Program reach by adding LTC Volunteer Coordinator to recruit and train volunteers to work with LTC facilities on ensure residents rights are understood and maintained.

- Collaborate with No Wrong Door (NWD) staff at the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to continue the work of expanding and strengthening the NWD system in the Greater RVA.

- Develop a cohesive person-centered response to housing needs.
  - Strengthen our Residential and Repair Program and Chore Program by having a designated Care Coordinator to assist with home modification, chore services to ensure aging in place.
  - Continue to strategize with community partners, like Homeward, in response to the trend of a rising population of adults age 55+ who are homeless.

- Provide more opportunities for social connection and engagement to decrease loneliness and isolation.
  - Strengthen and increase access to Friendship Café programs, including a Café that serves individuals who speak Spanish as their first language.
  - Strengthen our volunteer programming for full opportunities for civic engagement.

- Strengthen food access to reduce food insecurity through expansion of Friendship Café, strengthening partnership with FeedMore and expanding access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
  - Participation in Senior Farmer’s Market Voucher Program
  - Increasing Friendship Café access through creative partnerships with YMCA and local restaurants

- Strengthen access to in-home services and supports to remain safe at home.
  - Increasing payment to Personal Care and Homemaker providers to prioritize program participants and ensure pay equity for professional care providers.
  - Increasing and restructuring of Care Coordination and Intake team to meet the needs of ever growing older adult population.
  - Expanding Care Transitions Program through a partnership with Family Lifeline and ProjectHomes and to support patients in the Bon Secours Health System. We are currently working with United Healthcare.

- Increasing support to those most vulnerable through Expansion of Public Guardianship Program.
  - Increasing the number of individuals served through the program.

Area Plan Waivers: Wherever possible, the Agency contracts for services with qualified vendors. We request waivers for services that are appropriate to provide direction based on needs and Agency capacity: Care Transitions, Checking, Congregate Meals, Emergency Services, Employment, Money Management, Options Counseling, Socialization and Recreation, CDSME, Fall Prevention and Volunteer. We also request a waiver to use nonfederal funding for In-Home Services to meet the required spending percentage.
Funding Sources

Senior Connections receives funding from the federal Older Americans Act and the Virginia General Assembly through the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). AmeriCorps Seniors provides funding for volunteer initiatives like the Foster Grandparent Program and RSVP. Ride Connection for information and rides to necessary appointments is funded by the Virginia Department for Rail and Public Transportation.

Other federal and state funds support the Agency’s programs and local funds are provided by city and county governments. All the local governments support special initiatives for planning, services and recognition in support of older adults and caregivers. Senior Connections also receives contributions from individuals in the communities it serves, from volunteers and those who receive our services, in addition to grants from the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, local corporations and foundations. Corporate sponsors include Dominion Energy, Bank of America, Genworth, Bon Secours, VCU Health, and Altria. Local foundations include the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, The Community Foundation, The Jenkins Foundation, Mary Morton Parsons Foundation, The Barrington Family Foundation, The Schaberg Foundation and The Pauley Family Foundation, The Herndon Foundation, and the Regirer Foundation. The Agency also receives grants from Altria’s Employee Community Fund.

Senior Connections annual fundraising efforts, Empty Plate Campaign and Empty Plate Luncheon provides much needed funding to help meet critical needs and service gaps as well as celebrates the accomplishments of our agency, staff and community partners who make a difference in the lives of older adults.

Comments, questions on the new 4 Year Area Plan? Please submit to Colleen Wilhelm, Senior Connections at cwilhelm@youraaa.org or call 804.622.3063