Overview

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with a progress report on our continuing work on developing a statewide healthy aging initiative.

As noted at the September 2010 conference, the Healthy Aging Steering Committee has formed three subcommittees in the areas of healthy aging programs, healthy aging communities and public awareness. These subcommittees have been meeting over the course of the last six months and have involved a wide range of representatives from community organizations, government and other key leaders and stakeholders working with older adults. Below is an overview of the work each committee is doing.

We are moving toward an action plan and will keep you up to date.

Healthy Aging Programs Subcommittee

The Healthy Aging Programs Subcommittee has met three times in 2011, led by co-chairs David P. Stevens of the Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging and Rosanne DiStefano and Joan Hatem-Roy with Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley. The committee began by assimilating and reviewing statewide data from evidence-based programs serving older adults. The committee’s focus then turned to examine the challenges and opportunities for building and sustaining the evidence-based programs statewide, including the basic needs for trainers and funding, as well as opportunities for integrating healthy aging programs into the health system. Based on this data and input from committee members, the subcommittee has emphasized the need for increased coordination of healthy aging programs and has discussed how program leaders, policy makers, as well as older adults and their families can be involved in this effort. On a broader scale, the committee is interested in how to get the current and future generations of older adults engaged in developing programs that will improve their health and quality of life. The committee chairs are now working on assimilating members’ ideas about action steps, and building a plan to be implemented within the larger statewide healthy aging initiative.

Healthy Aging Communities Subcommittee

The Healthy Aging Communities Committee, co-chaired by Emily Shea of the City of Boston and Dr. Ann Bookman of Brandeis University, set out with a broad agenda to define what it means to be a healthy aging community and develop a plan to foster healthy aging communities
in Massachusetts. The committee identified many factors, including environmental factors such as an accommodating urban landscape, accessible transportation, intergenerational collaboration, affordable food, coordinated health and social services, opportunity for paid work and volunteering, community engagement, educational and cultural opportunities, and public dialog to involve elders of diverse language, culture and abilities as desirable components of healthy aging and healthy communities. The committee has discussed the importance of involving state and local government as well as community organizations and advocates to work toward improving these aspects of community life. The subcommittee is now developing a plan to centralize work that is happening statewide while creating a center with resources for communities interested in affecting policy and program change to foster healthy communities. Goals of the center could include training future HA leaders across the state, empowering elders and others at the grassroots level, and providing classes, workshops, conferences and other forms of learning that will facilitate HA Community initiatives across the Commonwealth.

Public Awareness Subcommittee

An essential component of the Healthy Aging Initiative is to raise awareness of the importance of individual and community wide health practices and to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to achieve a culture that embraces healthy aging. Co-chaired by Deborah Banda of AARP Massachusetts and Chet Jakubiak of the Massachusetts Association of Older Americans, the Public Awareness Subcommittee is working closely with the program and community subcommittees to define products and population targets as the first steps in developing public awareness and / or social marketing campaigns that support the goals of the Healthy Aging Initiative.

For more information about these three subcommittees, visit www.masshealthpolicyforum.brandeis.edu/forums/healthyaging