

Senior Agenda Age-Friendly Initiative for Santa Clara County

JANĒT CAMPBELL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the world's population getting older, the needs of older adults will play an increasingly important part in the shaping of our nation. Awareness and efforts are currently underway to shift and create age-friendly communities that will support people of all ages to actively participate in community activities and treat everyone with respect, regardless of their age. The World Health Organization (WHO) created a template to help communities transform their neighborhoods and attitudes to accommodate the growing population of older adults. The

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) actively serves as the WHO's U.S. affiliate for the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC). Santa Clara County, including all fifteen cities, followed that template and has made a firm, ongoing commitment to making life as friendly as possible for older adults. Alameda County is following the same template and is well on its way to becoming an age-friendly county. The process will require continued discussions, planning, collaboration, and follow-through.

JanĒt Campbell, Program Manager,
Alameda County HHS

Senior Agenda Age-Friendly Initiative for Santa Clara County

JANĒT CAMPBELL

Introduction

Now more than ever our nation is talking about varying sources of inequality, such as gender, race, economic status, and citizenship. However, the topic of aging is often not included in many of these conversations. Per the Frame Works Institute, a public conversation is essential, as the aging of the population is one of the biggest demographic changes in recorded history. The Frame Works Institute reports that if we make the appropriate adjustments, an aging population could yield an incredible “longevity dividend” as Americans gain an average of two extra decades of life in which to make social, civic, and economic contributions. If we fail to prepare, more years might not translate into healthy, productive time, which can complicate and exacerbate any number of existing social problems.¹ The WHO established the Age-friendly City Designation in 2005 as a response to the growing demographic of older people throughout the world. Over the intervening years, hundreds of cities around the world have embraced age-friendly ideals and are creating programs to incorporate the goals developed through the WHO. Understanding the need for a national shift, a partnership between AARP and the WHO was developed and aims to encourage American communities to better meet their older residents’ needs.

The WHO age-friendly process is a five-year cycle of continuous improvement. WHO recommends that cities use these eight domains of liv-

ability for assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation: Transportation, Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Communication and Information, Social Participation, Housing, Civic Participation and Employment, Respect and Social Inclusion, and Community Support and Health Services. An age-friendly world enables people of all ages to actively participate in community activities and treats everyone with respect, regardless of their age. It is a place that makes it easy for older people to stay connected to people that are important to them, helps people stay healthy and active even at the oldest ages, and provides appropriate support to those who can no longer look after themselves. Many cities and communities are already taking active steps towards becoming more age-friendly.

Background

In the spring of 2015, Alameda County launched an initiative to develop a comprehensive plan for older adults. With the support and encouragement of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors, the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), which is housed within the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA), designed a process in which consumers, community-based organizations, cities, and staff could work together to offer input into the plan. The AAA spent a year holding dialogues, surveys, public forums, and focus groups, and incorporating feedback from thousands of Alameda County residents.

To carry out this work, the AAA appointed a planning committee. The committee included 25 people, including representatives of community-based organizations, academia, cities, senior housing, village housing, organized labor, and a long-term care agency. Subcommittees were formed

1. *Finding the Frame: An Empirical Approach to Reframing Aging and Ageism*, Julie Sweetland, PhD, Vice President for Strategy and Innovation Andrew Volmert, PhD, Director of Research Moira O’Neil, PhD, Director of Research Interpretation and Application, February 2017, http://frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/aging_elder_abuse/aging_research_report_final_2017.pdf, Web

and had the responsibility to work on three needs assessment areas: consumer surveys, focus groups, and data analysis. The committees worked to gather feedback about the following areas of concern: Poverty, Housing, Access and Economic Insecurity, Health (including Chronic Disease and Conditions, Dental Health, Falls, Mental Health, and Nutrition Security), Transportation, Elder Abuse & Safety, and End-of-Life Decision-Making. After gathering information from thousands of older adults through surveys, public forums, focus groups, and dialogue with community partners, the Planning Committee generated the following recommendations for creating age-friendly communities in Alameda County:

- **Goal 1:** Engage older adults, community partners, and cities in planning for and developing a community framework for older adults.
- **Goal 2:** Throughout Alameda County departments, develop a coordinated approach to designing, delivering, and measuring effectiveness of programs for older adults.
- **Goal 3:** Working with community partners, address the growing need of services for older adults by supporting a comprehensive network of providers to provide long-term services and supports (LTSS) that engage older adults and seniors with disabilities in community settings.
- **Goal 4:** Enhance the health, safety, and well-being of older adults by offering coordinated services that promote health and wellness, with an emphasis on prevention and early access to behavioral health services.
- **Goal 5:** Enhance programming to create safe communities for older adults by preventing and responding to neglect and abuse of older and dependent adults.
- **Goal 6:** Enhance and increase support for housing and augment the sustainability of housing programs.

Alameda County understands the importance and value of supporting its older adults, as well as their responsibility to act; therefore, Alameda County has proactively started the process to become an

age-friendly county. In early 2019 Alameda County submitted its application for membership in the WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) and was accepted in May 2019. The foundation of this initiative is about inclusion; therefore, the county is very mindful about supporting a collaborative process involving public and private partners and keeping the focus on the people it is best trying to serve (older adults) as well as supporting all cities in becoming age-friendly.

Santa Clara County Approach

In 2011, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors announced a Seniors' Agenda to prepare for the growing population of older adults in Santa Clara County by commissioning an assessment and strategy. The community responded with over one hundred organizations, agencies, and older adult activists participating in the Seniors' Agenda. A three-year action plan was developed, and a recommendation was made to the Board of Supervisors that Santa Clara County should become an Age-friendly community. Santa Clara County set a goal in 2015 to have all 15 cities within the County designated as Age-friendly by the WHO GNAFCC by July 2017. Not only did they set out to accomplish an assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the eight domains of livability, but they added a ninth one, Dementia-Related Support. Action steps included: a presentation to the Senior Commission, identifying an age-friendly task force, creating Senior Focus Groups and Professional Focus Groups, analyzing and presenting data to the task force, task force development of project ideas, cities completing the WHO application with assistance, cities submitting age-friendly applications, and cities receiving age-friendly designations. A key component of the first step was the buy-in by the elected officials resulting in the mayor submitting a letting of support, which is a requirement to apply.

By working together with community partners, Santa Clara County learned the value in leveraging resources and cultivating partnerships in order to successfully become an age-friendly county. To carry

out this work, a dedicated staff person to lead the charge was identified: Diana Miller, Senior Agenda Project Manager at the Department of Aging and Adult Services. Ms. Miller worked diligently to build relationships with community CEOs to understand their interests as well as what they were currently doing. With a budget of \$30,000 from the county, Ms. Miller used \$25,000 to contract with the Center for Age-Friendly Excellence (CAFE) to provide technical assistance for the assessment and planning phase to the county and cities that wished to become age-friendly. Under the direction of Anabel Pelham, Professor of Gerontology at San Francisco State University, 37 focus groups were conducted and an intern was designated to work with each city; in addition, each city conducted two focus groups and formed their own task force. CAFE also guided each city through the WHO application process and included the participation and direction of local elected officials and community leaders. Furthermore, Ms. Miller leveraged resources with the Public Health Department to conduct an age-friendly survey that received 2,500 responses and analyze the results. Other resources utilized were the AARP survey, individual cities conducting outreach, volunteers at senior centers helping to enter paper surveys, and hiring a summer intern. Santa Clara County also added \$8 million in funding for programs to address the priority needs of older adults during the past three years.

One of the greatest challenges faced during this process has been the universal challenge of ageism and the topic of aging not receiving the recognition it should at a national level, let alone at a county or city level. The process and politics involved with making institutional changes were also a challenge. Funding for older adult services as well as staffing to do the work and lead the charge has been an additional difficulty. Before age-friendly counties and cities can be created and begin to thrive, there must be a cultural shift in how our society views and values older adults.

The commitment, dedication, and hard work of the County of Santa Clara resulted in it becoming

the first county in the United States to have all of its cities, fifteen in total, join the WHO GNAFCC. The Director of Aging and Adult Services, James Ramoni, stated that, "Achieving the Age-friendly designation through planning, engaging, and working collaboratively with 15 individual municipalities is an unparalleled accomplishment." With such an amazing accomplishment, their Seniors' Agenda program team understands that hard work has just begun and that they will continue to work with the cities to offer support and guidance as each community implements their respective projects.

Per the 2018 Senior's Agenda Annual Report, the County of Santa Clara has achieved the following accomplishments:

- The launch of the House Sharing Program by Catholic Charities, creating intensive case management for vulnerable older adults through a pilot called Community Living Connection;
- The Public Health Department's publication of the first Older Adult Transportation & Traffic Report to provide a snapshot of existing transit, mobility, and safety issues in Santa Clara County along with steps that agencies can take to improve older adult driving, walking, bicycling, and mobility options;
- Transformation of spaces for all ages, such as using the Happy Hollow Park and Zoo for the Senior Safari Walkabout, where for an hour on the fourth Thursday of each month from May through October the zoo is open exclusively for older adults 50 and over, free of charge;
- Supporting older adults interested in getting involved through volunteerism;
- Investing in older adults creating continued funding for age-friendly priorities like housing, transportation, and affordable respite care; and
- Investing in education and professional development to address two major concerns (such as bullying and loneliness for older adults).

Accomplishing its goal of being the first county in the United States to have all its cities join the WHO GNAFCC is only the beginning for Santa Clara

County. This year the county will start its three-year plan of action, utilizing a logic model, or theory of change, developed for this purpose. Each city will continue to work on their local priorities; however, the Senior's Agenda will collaborate and decide with all the cities which county-wide efforts will benefit older adults. The Senior's Agenda will continue to be the backbone in Santa Clara County, but it is understood and proven that it is partnership and collaborative effort by the county and cities that creates effective and sustainable resources for a county that is great for all ages.

Recommendations

Like Santa Clara County, Alameda County recognizes the importance of becoming an age-friendly county; therefore, Alameda County has been actively working towards this goal and submitted its application for membership in the WHO GNAFCC in early 2019 and was accepted in May 2019. In order to continue with the efforts of becoming an age-friendly County, it is recommended that Alameda County establish unified relationships with all of its fourteen cities and that each city joins the WHO GNAFCC.

Since Santa Clara County has accomplished their goal of having all cities receive the WHO GNAFCC age-friendly designation, Alameda County could benefit from consulting with Santa Clara to learn the specific steps they took as well as lessons learned. Therefore, it is recommended that Alameda County designate a person or team to consult and visit with Santa Clara County, as well as some of its city partners.

In order for Alameda County to continue to move this work forward, it should consider a designated position (or multiple positions) to do the following: conduct community outreach with multi-sectorial and public-private entities (i.e. government, community services, advocates, business, diverse communities, faith community) to start building relationships and to learn each city's interest, needs, and challenges; research who the local elected officials are that hold the necessary political

will to champion the work; and establish advisory committees to meet monthly for ongoing collaboration, planning, and implementation. It is important to note that some committees may require subcommittees and that members should be at the leadership level as well as include the voices of older adults by collaborating with essential community partners and recognizing their contributions. The timeframe for achieving this goal could take approximately two years or less.

Since Alameda County has already formed an 'age-friendly council' which includes a subcommittee looking at the age-friendly model, there may not be a cost issue to create a designated position; this will need to be explored further. The county should look internally to see if one or more persons who have already been leading the work can become the designated persons and a cost analysis should be conducted to explore if additional staffing will be needed.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and extend appreciation to Marie Sanders, BASSC County Liaison for Santa Clara County, for her warm and gracious welcome to Santa Clara County Social Services; Diana Miller, Senior Agenda Project Manager, Department of Aging and Adult Services, County of Santa Clara, for taking time out of her busy schedule to meet with me as well as including me in a community meeting to see firsthand how their county and cities are working collaboratively; and James Ramoni, Director of Aging and Adult Services, Department of Aging and Adult Services, County of Santa Clara for taking time out to welcome me and offer his support and encouragement. I also want to express my appreciation to my Alameda County team, including Randy Morris, Assistant Agency Director; Glenn Wallace, Division Director; Marcella Velasquez, Division Director; Nicole Hayes, Program Manager; Elizabeth Verduzco, Program Manager; Joel Ginsberg, Management Analyst; and Michael Little, Training and Consulting Team Staff Development Manager / BASSC County Liaison.