

RECOMMENDATION 10

Ensure a Strong Community Workforce to Serve Older Adults

STRATEGY 28

Increase Knowledge and Awareness for Serving Older Adults in the Community

Desired Result – Professionals serving older adults in the community will have a better understanding of this population’s unique strengths and needs and be able to adapt services to meet these needs.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – Older adults are sometimes stereotyped as suffering from poor health, loneliness, and cognitive incompetency.²¹ These negative stereotypes can affect behavior and judgments toward older adults, which can in turn result in inequitable treatment.²² On the other hand, there are unique experiences and challenges that older adults may have that can inform how services can be tailored to this population. Educating members of the community, especially those who serve older adults regularly, about ageism and the strengths and needs of older adults will help to address this issue.

Context – There are many professional fields outside of health care involved in meeting the needs of older adults. For example, older adults have different mobility needs and accessible transportation services are critical to helping them live independently within their communities. Transportation workers help fill gaps in community transportation options through resources like door-to-door services, volunteer driver programs, and public transit.²³

The behavioral and medical issues associated with dementia-related diseases can bring older adults into contact with first responders.²⁴ However, first responders are not often trained to recognize or handle the complexities associated with the care of people with dementia.²⁵ Police officers who were trained on dementia were found to better recognize dementia-related behaviors, increasing the safety of the older adult in interactions with law enforcement. EMS providers are also infrequently trained in screening for cognitive impairments, even though older adults with dementia are more likely to visit an emergency room or be hospitalized.²⁴ Increasing awareness can also lead to successful partnerships to address issues like falls prevention.²⁶

These are just a few examples of the variety of professionals in the community who could benefit from education or training related to serving older adults.

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Community services providers who are more educated about the strengths and needs of older adults can better accommodate those needs, helping to reduce falls, improve mobility, and identify when someone may need more assistance related to nutrition and social connections, and where and how to make referrals when needed.



William and his wife Rosalee live in a small town. Rosalee has been experiencing signs of dementia for the past few years and her symptoms have worsened recently. William is her caregiver and loves to take her with him to run errands, go for walks, and have dates to spend quality time together. Their community committed to becoming dementia friendly after William advocated for Rosalee and shared some of their experiences. This has meant that many local businesses, first responders, and public service employees have been trained on best practices for serving people living with dementia and their caregivers. William has seen how this training has led to improved signage in shops and restaurants, and changes to lighting, flooring, and seating in some public spaces. These changes have helped Rosalee adapt better to some of her new symptoms and help William support her during their outings.

**This is a composite story inspired by the toolkit from the Wisconsin Healthy Brain Initiative titled “A Toolkit for Building Dementia-Friendly Communities.”*