



RECOMMENDATION 5

Collaborate to Encourage Actions that Support Healthy Aging Across the Lifespan

Key components of the Health in All Policies framework can be applied to an Aging in All Policies approach to healthy aging – notably efforts to develop a multisectoral and inclusive approach to policy and program decision-making. These collaborations may include agencies beyond health or aging advocacy organizations. For example, universities and community colleges, schools, recreation and arts departments, and local government offices can provide valuable insight and resources related to meeting aging policy goals. Rather than siloing aging initiatives, it is important to integrate healthy aging and the perspectives of older adults into research, policy, and programmatic goals. This approach emphasizes the need for multisectoral partnerships and intergenerational interactions.

Intergenerational and multisectoral collaboration can also address cultural stigma toward aging and older adults in predominant culture. Professional, recreational, and volunteering opportunities that connect people of all ages can show young

people positive images of aging as they interact with older adults who are productive, athletic, creative, and active in their communities. Additionally, intergenerational relationships have been shown to provide older adults with empowerment and a sense of meaning. It is important to note that many cultural and ethnic groups within our state already hold the values of respect, inclusion, and dignity for older adults. These communities and groups can be looked to as a source of best practice and learning for others committed to this work.

Dedicated legislative attention and resources are needed to support healthy aging in our state. With a wide variety of important issues to address, an intentional focus on aging-related topics is needed in both the North Carolina House and Senate committee structure. A greater focus on these topics would help to address pressing issues and resource needs in a timely manner and encourage consideration of how policy actions today will affect future older adults in the state.

STRATEGY 14

Dedicate Resources to Answering Important Research Questions and Developing Data on Aging Services

- a. The University of North Carolina (UNC) System General Administration and North Carolina Community College System should undertake or arrange for a study that includes:
 - i. Identification of existing Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine programs, curricula, and resources on campuses across the UNC and Community College systems;
 - ii. Assessment of the adequacy of the existing programs and curricula and the interaction of these programs across the systems; and
 - iii. Recommendations for enhancing research, education, training, and continuing education to respond to North Carolina's aging demographic, promote healthy aging, and address the workforce needs in serving an aging population.
- b. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services and aging partners should evaluate the outcomes and lessons learned from the additional funding for aging services programs that was available through the American Rescue Plan Act and identify:
 - i. Innovations and programs that should warrant state support,
 - ii. Opportunities to sustain effective programs and whether this requires modification of existing state policies and rules, and
 - iii. The most relevant and accessible outcome measures that can be collected from these programs to facilitate their continued support.

Desired Result – An increase in available training for older adult services, translation of research to assist in enhancing aging policies and programs, and sustained resources for effective programs.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – By 2028, 1 in 5 North Carolinians will be aged 65 and older, and by 2038 it is estimated that 95 out of 100 counties will have more people aged 60 and older than under age 18.³⁵ With the growth in the older adult population, there will be increased need for and use of health care and older adult services and programs. These programs are administered and managed by individuals with specialized knowledge of the needs of older adults and family caregivers. University and community college academic programs in gerontology or aging services can help prepare the next generation of workers for filling these roles. However, work is needed to identify where these programs already exist, the adequacy of curricula to meet future needs, and gaps that should be filled.

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 is a federal law that was passed to provide relief, contain COVID-19, and help the economy. In administering these funds, the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) focused on service innovation in supportive services, nutrition, health promotion, and family caregiver support services. There was also a push to strengthen staff capacity and address workforce issues. However, the issue of sustainability of these enhanced services is a critical question, as these federal funds sunset in 2024. An evaluation of the outcomes from the enhanced services and potential savings they contributed to the state can help to identify where limited resources should be targeted or additional resources are needed for sustainability. This type of evaluative research is an example of why and how the academic community can work together with state, regional, and local entities toward maximizing use of resources for the well-being of older adults and their family caregivers.