

STRATEGY 16

Ensure Legislative Attention to Aging Issues

- a. The North Carolina General Assembly should ensure that legislative committee structures promote discussion and review of policy that impacts older adults, family caregivers, and aging across the lifespan.
- b. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services, in collaboration with AARP NC and the North Carolina Coalition on Aging, should convene an annual meeting of representatives from state agencies and statewide organizations involved in aging issues (e.g., Division of Public Health, Division of Services for the Blind, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation), the Office of the Governor, Governor's Advisory Council on Aging, North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature, NC Association on Aging, NC Association of Area Agencies on Aging, NC Association of County Commissioners, UNC-Asheville Center for Health and Wellness, Disability Rights NC, NC Housing Coalition, NC Falls Prevention Coalition, Senior Health Insurance Information Programs (SHIIP), Meals on Wheels North Carolina, and others as identified to discuss priorities and identify opportunities for alignment of goals and activities.

Desired Result – There will be state-level coordinated attention, urgency, and action to address the needs of the population as it ages.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – Given the growing older adult population and the urgent issues facing this population, the task force wants to ensure that the legislative committee structure is adequate to provide the attention and action needed to meet modern and future needs. Likewise, the task force wants to encourage ongoing discussion and collaboration among sectors and entities that are engaged in activities to meet the needs of older adults and their families. Ongoing discussion and collaboration will help to decrease overlapping efforts, align energy and limited resources, and identify gaps. This strategy is one way to carry out activities identified in Strategy 11 - Promote Aging in All Policies related to supporting an "aging in all policies" lens.

Context

General Assembly Legislative Committees

House and Senate committees within the North Carolina General Assembly are tasked with studying legislative bills that are assigned by chamber leadership. Committee structure is determined at the beginning of a biennium in the rules for each chamber and is essentially the same for each session. In the House the Families, Children, and Aging Policy Committee has responsibility for reviewing age-related legislation, while in the Senate this responsibility lies with the Pensions and Retirement and Aging Committee.^{72,73} Each committee is chaired by two legislators and has membership from the Democratic and Republican parties.

Common practice in recent history is for bills that are passed out of a House or Senate committee to then go to the respective Rules Committee in the chamber for review before going to the floor for vote.

Statewide Aging Organizations

Many statewide organizations are committed to advocating for or addressing the needs of older adults. The list presented in Strategy 16b is not exhaustive but represents organizations and agencies that should "discuss priorities and identify opportunities for alignment." These organizations and agencies include:

- **North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services** - This division is housed within the Department of Health and Human Services and "works to promote the independence and enhance the dignity of North Carolina's older adults, persons with disabilities and their families through a community based system of opportunities, services, benefits and protections."
- **AARP NC** – State affiliate of AARP, the "nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age."
- **North Carolina Coalition on Aging** – Statewide organization with a mission to "improve the quality of life for older adults through collective advocacy, education, and public policy work."
- **Department of Transportation** – The mission of this department within state government is "connecting people, products and places safely and efficiently with customer focus, accountability and environmental sensitivity to enhance the economy and vitality of North Carolina."
- **Division of Public Health** - This division is housed within the Department of Health and Human Services and "works to promote and contribute to the highest possible level of health for the people of North Carolina."
- **Division of Services for the Blind** - This division is housed within the Department of Health and Human Services and "provides services to people who are visually impaired, blind and deaf-blind to help them reach their goals of independence and employment."
- **Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing** - This division is housed within the Department of Health and Human Services and "works to ensure that all Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind North Carolinians have the ability to communicate their needs and to receive information easily and effectively in all aspects of their lives, especially their health and well-being."
- **Department of Commerce** – This department's mission is to "improve the economic well-being and quality of life for all North Carolinians."
- **Office of the Governor** – This office represents the North Carolina governor's initiatives and priorities.
- **Governor's Advisory Council on Aging** – This council has several duties, including "mak[ing] recommendations to the Governor and the Secretary of Health and Human Services aimed at improving human services to the elderly."
- **North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature** - This is a nonpartisan body with representatives from each county across the state with several duties, including "assess[ing] the legislative needs of older citizens by convening a forum modeled after the North Carolina General Assembly."
- **NC Association on Aging** – This is a statewide organization that "represent[s] community-based service providers in the North Carolina aging network."
- **NC Association of Area Agencies on Aging** – This is a statewide organization with the mission to "build capacity and coordinate the activities of the 16 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) in North Carolina."



- **UNC-Asheville Center for Health and Wellness** – This organization’s mission is to “develop healthy North Carolina communities with equitable opportunities, with a particular focus on addressing health disparities in the prevention and treatment of chronic health conditions.”
- **NC Association of County Commissioners** – This association is the “official voice of all 100 counties on issues considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies,” and provides expertise and training on advocacy, research, risk management, and leadership.
- **NC Housing Coalition** – This is a statewide organization that is “leading a movement to ensure that every North Carolinian has a home in which to live with dignity and opportunity.”
- **Disability Rights NC** – This is a legal advocacy agency with the mission to advance and defend the rights of people with disabilities in North Carolina.
- **NC Falls Prevention Coalition** – This coalition “works to reduce the number of injuries and deaths from falls among adults” through a variety of methods, including “maintain[ing] a statewide structure to coordinate falls reduction efforts.”
- **Senior Health Insurance Information Programs (SHIIP)** – These programs “counsel Medicare beneficiaries and caregivers about Medicare, Medicare supplements, Medicare Advantage, Medicare Part D, and long-term care insurance.”
- **Meals on Wheels North Carolina** – This is a statewide organization that “serves as the principal advocate and leadership organization for Meals on Wheels and Congregate Nutrition providers in the state.”

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Statewide attention and coordinated action will create the best opportunity to meet the needs of older adults through policies and programs that support safe and affordable housing, access to transportation, adequate nutrition, and opportunities for social connection and civic engagement.