

Dying Before Their Time Task Force Blue Print for Action Report

Policy Recommendations

The high incidence of premature deaths, chronic illness and disability among older persons residing in the City of Detroit compelled Mayor Kwame M. Kilpatrick to appoint a 42-member ***Dying Before Their Time Task Force*** to develop policy recommendations to address issues impacting on the health status of older adults. The startling and dramatically higher death rates among older adults in the Detroit area as compared to their counterparts in other parts of the State of Michigan is believed to account for nearly 40% of the loss of older adults in the Detroit area between 1990 – 2000.

Dying Before Their Time Research Findings:

- Older adults living in the Detroit area are dying faster than their peers in the rest of Michigan. Detroit area seniors age 60 – 74 are dying at a rate 48% higher than their counterparts while those 50 – 59 are dying at a rate 122% higher than other seniors in the remainder of the state.
- About 22% of seniors living in the Detroit area are most likely to suffer from at least one disability and 29% of Detroit area seniors report two disabilities compared to 20.9% for the state of Michigan.
- Detroit seniors most likely suffer from at least one chronic illness such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, or arthritis. About 89% of Detroit seniors report having one chronic illness; 39% of Detroit seniors report having three or more chronic illnesses.
- Detroit area seniors have less access to health care, often resulting in little or no preventative care. Over fifty percent (54.5%) of seniors live in federally designated Medically Underserved Areas. Many hospitals and neighborhood clinics have closed in Detroit.
- Overall, poverty in Michigan has decreased since 1990, but not in the Detroit area. Our poverty rate remains twice that of the other parts of Michigan. The poverty rate of Detroit seniors is nearly twenty-five percent (24.9%).

The ***Dying Before Their Time Task Force*** was to identify issues that could improve the quality of life of older adults by strengthening already strained service delivery systems that are having incredible difficulties addressing the health and long term care needs of Detroit seniors and other citizens. The Task Force collectively believes that the four policy recommendations highlighted below provide real choices to Detroit seniors and will help these residents to better access information and services more effectively, given the economic climate. The recommended system changes are consumer-directed and place an emphasis on providing better access to health care and long term care by maximizing the use of new and existing resources. The four policy recommendations are:

Policy Recommendation #1: *Engage the State of Michigan in an immediate system change that creates an effective Medicaid-Eligibility Determination Process for Detroit residents served by the Wayne County Family Independence Agency.*

Policy Recommendation #2: *Advocate for the State of Michigan to work with the City of Detroit to establish a single point of entry demonstration project to expand access to long term care options for Detroit seniors and individuals with disabilities.*

Policy Recommendation #3: *Launch the implementation of a Healthy Aging Community Awareness Campaign in the City of Detroit to educate Detroit seniors on healthy lifestyle choices to reduce the incidence of premature death, chronic illness, and disability.*

Policy Recommendation #4: *Development and dissemination of a Senior Health Status Report Card every two years to help the community monitor the health status of Detroit's elderly. This data resource will be dedicated to monitoring senior health status emphasizing behaviors and health care related to the chronic disease conditions associated with premature mortality. The Senior Health Status Report developed during the Dying Before Their Time Campaign will serve as the baseline data for the Report Card. Factors to be monitored include mortality rate, morbidity, access to care, and hospital use, among other health indicators.*

Impact of Proposed System Changes

The proposed system changes will enable the City of Detroit to improve the quality of life of Detroit seniors by addressing the health status and long term care needs of this vulnerable population, as follows:

- **Policy Recommendation #1** - Seeks to improve health and long term care services for Detroit seniors by capturing millions of Medicaid dollars the City of Detroit is losing that could significantly improve services available through the MI CHOICE Program, nursing homes, hospitals, health clinics, and other facilities. This will be achieved by improving the Medicaid-eligibility determination process at the Wayne County Family Independence Agency in collaboration with Wayne County and the State of Michigan.
- **Policy Recommendation #2** - Supports the development of a single point of entry that can help Detroit seniors to navigate the service delivery system to obtain access to information as well as expanded and enhanced long term care options. This will be implemented by tapping Medicaid and other real choice system change funding available at the federal and state levels to enhance the service delivery system.
- **Policy Recommendation #3** - Increases the knowledge and awareness about healthy aging and the community resources that can help Detroit seniors change their lifestyle behaviors to prevent chronic illness and disability or to better manage them. This will be achieved through the launching of a Healthy Aging Community Awareness Campaign in

collaboration with foundations, corporations, local businesses, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations. Seniors will participate in neighborhood and community-based services such as: nutrition education, physical activity and exercise, fall prevention, smoking cessation, and immunizations. Other health promotion or disease self-management services will include: depression screening, weight loss/obesity education, and chronic illness self-management (i.e. diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and other illnesses).

- **Policy Recommendation #4** - Provides the community with the ability to proactively monitor the health indicators associated with healthy aging in order to periodically assess the health status of older adults through measuring variances in mortality, chronic illness, access to care, and the use of health care resources. This data will help the community to better plan health care and long term care services for Detroit's elders.

Conclusions

The ***Dying Before Their Time Task Force*** was honored to be appointed by Mayor Kilpatrick to develop policy recommendations that will improve the quality of life of Detroit seniors who are at risk to premature deaths, chronic illness and disability, poor access to care, and higher incidences of poverty. It would like to extend its support in assisting in the implementation of these policy recommendations, if approved.