



# COMMUNITY FORUMS SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 22, 2004

# **Living Long Living Well Community Forum Summary Report Recommendations to the Dying Before Their Time Task Force September 22, 2004**

The Detroit Area Agency on Aging's Advisory Council and the Detroit Senior Citizens' Department sponsored two community forums to obtain input from older adults as well as caregivers, family members and those interested in senior issues regarding ways to promote healthy lifestyle choices. The community forums entitled Living Long, Living Well were designed to provide information for the Mayor's Dying Before Their Time Task Force as they develop strategies and innovative policy recommendations to support system change. Input from the forums is compiled and documented in this report.

The two community forums were held on August 30, 2004 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Belle Isle Casino and on September 2, 2004 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Northwest Activities Center.

## **OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY FORUMS**

The attendance goal of the community forums was 100 participants. The goal was met with 100 participants in attendance at the Belle Isle Casino and nearly 90 participants at the Northwest Activities Center. The formats of the community forums were round table discussions, which ensured a more hands-on approach for all in attendance.

Dorothy Stone Montgomery, chair of the Advisory Council, moderated both forums. Other speakers included Paul Bridgewater, DAAA executive director, and Sandra Tene Ramsey, director City of Detroit Senior Citizens' Department.

The purpose of the forums was to:

- Present the startling findings regarding premature death;
- Engage participants in a brainstorming session to obtain their input on what they need to live long and live well; and
- Summarize the key recommendations for the Mayor's Dying Before Their Time Task Force.

Participants who attended the forums:

- Learned about four critical areas that seniors faced – health care solutions, continuum of care, residential care and healthy aging;
- Examined what Detroit and surrounding communities are doing in those areas to give seniors a healthy lifestyle; and
- Found effective solutions to keep older adults from 'Dying Before Their Time.'

## **DYING BEFORE THEIR TIME BACKGROUND**

The forum began with Mr. Paul Bridgewater and Ms. Sandra Ramsey providing an overview and background of the Dying Before Their Time campaign and how we arrived at this point.

Ms. Ramsey welcomed participants and encouraged them to speak for those who could not be in attendance.

Mr. Bridgewater outlined key findings of the Dying Before Their Time research report and encouraged participants to share their ideas during the brainstorming session. He indicated that the Mayor and his administration are concerned about making sure that health care services and home and community-based services are in place to meet their needs.

Key findings that were reviewed from the Dying Before Their Time report included:

- Seniors are dying at a rate more than twice that of other older adults in the remainder of the state.
- Over half of seniors live in Medically Underserved Areas because of poor access to health care.
- Seniors in the Detroit area are 37% more likely to be hospitalized than seniors in the remainder of the state.
- Disability rates for Detroit area seniors are more than double that of seniors in the other part of the state.
- Chronic illness is rampant because of poor access to care, lifestyle choices and other factors.

After the presentation of findings, the discussions followed. All participants that were in attendance were seated at a round table. There were a total of 12 tables at each forum. Each table included a facilitator who selected a recorder and timekeeper. The topics were announced and participants had one hour to give recommendations. At the end of the brainstorming session, facilitators presented key recommendations from their group.

## **PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DYING BEFORE THEIR TASK FORCE**

### **General Questions**

The brainstorming sessions started with a few general questions, including asking participants to define Living Long, Living Well. The questions concentrated on a general definition of living well.

Participants defined Living Long, Living Well as:

- Being healthy, active, and independent and having control of your life with the resources that you need to be self-sufficient.
- Having access to dependable public services and social support systems if you need them. Having access to preventative health care and other services.
- Living worry-free in an affordable and comfortable home with all your basic needs met.

Participants then went on to examine the four areas - healthy aging, health care, continuum of care and residential care - needed by seniors to Live Long and Live Well. Several recommendations were given in each topic area. We have listed the key services or activities that participants recommended.

### **Healthy Aging**

When examining the area of healthy aging, participants were informed that healthy aging was anything from physical activity, sound nutrition, disease self-management, depression management, fall prevention, immunizations or medication management.

Participants concluded that the top services or activities needed to help Detroit seniors make healthy lifestyle choices include:

- An increase in health care education through health screenings and information fairs
- Additional community outreach and support groups for seniors which cover the topics of diet, nutrition and exercise, access to doctors, financial assistance and coping with loss
- Affordable health care with emphasis on prescription drug coverage and more education on their usage
- Durable medical equipment and supplies ranging from wheel chairs, to ramps and handrails, modifications in the home for fall prevention
- An increase of senior mobile health services such as delivery of meals, delivery of medication and supplies, immunizations and health and nutrition education

## **Health Care**

When examining the area of health care, participants were informed that the area of health care covered acute care, primary care physicians, health clinics, early diagnosis treatment and mobile health services.

Participants feel that the most important system change that needs to take place in the health care system to make it more accessible to Detroit seniors and their caregivers are:

- Access to Detroit-based hospitals and health clinics and more educational awareness of where to receive care
- An overall improvement in senior mobile health services ranging from home visits by physicians, visiting nurse practitioners, home-based dialysis and home health care
- Better health coverage that supports preventative and acute health care, medications and medical supplies
- Additional, health information distribution through area fairs, hospitals, television and radio ads, DAAA, doctor's offices, churches, medical hotlines and direct mailings
- Improved discharge planning of seniors from Detroit area hospitals

## **Continuum of Care**

When examining the area of continuum of care participants were told that this was defined as access to services, home care, community care and caregiver support.

Participants feel that the most important changes to improve access to long-term care options are:

- Early education regarding long-term care options such as retirement and caregiver planning and in-home alternatives to nursing home placement
- Information about accessing services without barriers of technology – churches, AAA, insurance companies, information fairs, television, radio, newspapers and hotlines without recordings
- Well trained and paid home care workers who are bonded and have background checks
- Expansion of long term care options for home and community-based services

## **Residential Care**

Finally, when discussing residential care, participants were told that this ranged from anything from safe neighborhoods, nursing home care, assisted living, senior housing and home repair.

Participants feel that the most important changes needed to help seniors remain independent in their homes and communities included:

- Affordable housing options including quality nursing homes and assisted living tailored to the senior community with ramps, hand rails and emergency response, fire detectors and alarms, fire extinguishers and carbon monoxide detectors
- A stronger police presence and block club presence to ensure a safer feeling in the neighborhood
- Improved city services such as removal of debris, garbage collection, snow removal, help with home chores and lawn upkeep
- Development of home repair and home weatherization services

*The co-sponsors of the two community forums compiled this report. While the participants provided several suggestions, this report focuses on the main issues that participants would like the Dying Before Their Time Task Force to address while writing the Blue Print for Action report. The key issues which emerged at the community forums appear on pages 6 and 7.*

***Living Long ~ Living Well Community Forum  
Issues to Guide the Formation of Policy Recommendations  
For the Dying Before Their Time Task Force***

The co-sponsors of the Living Long ~ Living Well Community Forums present the following suggestions to the Mayor's Dying Before Their Time Task Force as a result of input from older adults, caregivers, and other community stakeholders at the community forums held on August 30, 2004 and September 2, 2004:

**Healthy Aging**

1. Increase health education through health screenings, information fairs targeting specific chronic illnesses and preventative health care strategies, media campaigns, and the development of wellness programs. Viable options for wellness programs include DAAA – funded senior centers, recreation centers, health clinics, and partnerships with existing privately-owned fitness centers.
2. Develop special outreach to older adults at risk to chronic illnesses and disability to encourage good diet and nutrition, physical activity, early diagnosis, access to health care insurance and disease self-management support groups.
3. Implement expanded mental health services for the elderly through the Detroit Wayne County Mental Health Board in partnership with the Aging Network to address depression, bereavement, and other stress management issues.
4. Develop a strategy that supports advocating for affordable health care that supports prescription drug coverage and preventative health measures.
5. Explore ways to subsidize and further expand access to durable medical supplies ranging from wheel chairs to medical supplies for persons with chronic illnesses (i.e. diabetes blood strips).
6. Advocate for funding to prevent falls and injuries through home modifications, fall prevention education, installation of ramps, chore services, and fire safety equipment in the homes of at-risk elder adults.
7. Encourage the Aging Network, health care systems, the City of Detroit, and Wayne County make mobile health services available for the at-risk/isolated seniors. This includes the delivery of special meals, prescriptions, medical supplies, and health services to the homes of seniors.

**Health Care**

1. Develop strategies to assist older adults and their caregivers to obtain better access to Detroit-based hospitals, health clinics, and primary care physicians in order to get early diagnosis of illnesses and health education. This may include the development of a Health Education Hotline.
2. Promote and encourage Detroit-based health systems to collaborate with the Aging Network, Detroit Health & Wellness Promotion Department, and Wayne County on establishing senior mobile health services. This may

- include health screenings, visiting physicians and nurse practitioners, influenza and pneumonia shots, home dialysis, and other services targeted to older adults and the disabled.
3. Develop a strategy that supports health coverage for those who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare that offers preventative and acute care, prescriptions, and medical supplies.
  4. Distribute consumer-friendly health care information at health fairs, hospitals, television and radio commercials, churches, medical hotlines, doctors offices, health clinics, and direct mail campaigns.
  5. Advocate for improved discharge planning of seniors from Detroit area hospitals.

### **Continuum of Care**

1. Develop collaborative partnerships that support early education regarding long term care options related to retirement, caregiver planning, and alternatives to nursing home placement.
2. Develop strategies to increase access to services through partnerships with AAA's, churches, insurance companies, media, and information hotlines.
3. Support the training and monitoring of well-trained home care workers who are bonded and provided with background checks.
4. Develop policy recommendations that expand long term care options.

### **Residential Care**

1. Expand residential care options that include affordable, low rise senior housing, quality nursing homes, licensed assisted living, and licensed group homes.
2. Implement home safety measures that support fall prevention, fire, carbon monoxide, and radon safety, home security, and emergency response for those experiencing medical difficulties.
3. Strengthen police/block club presence in neighborhoods to make seniors feel safe.
4. Improve city services including garbage collection, snow removal, lighting, help with chores, and lawn maintenance.
5. Develop strategies to lessen the cost of property taxes and utilities.
6. Develop and expand programs and activities to protect Detroit seniors from fraud victimization.
7. Recommends the development of a senior home repair program through the City of Detroit and/or Wayne County.
8. Recommends expansion of weatherization assistance for Detroit seniors.