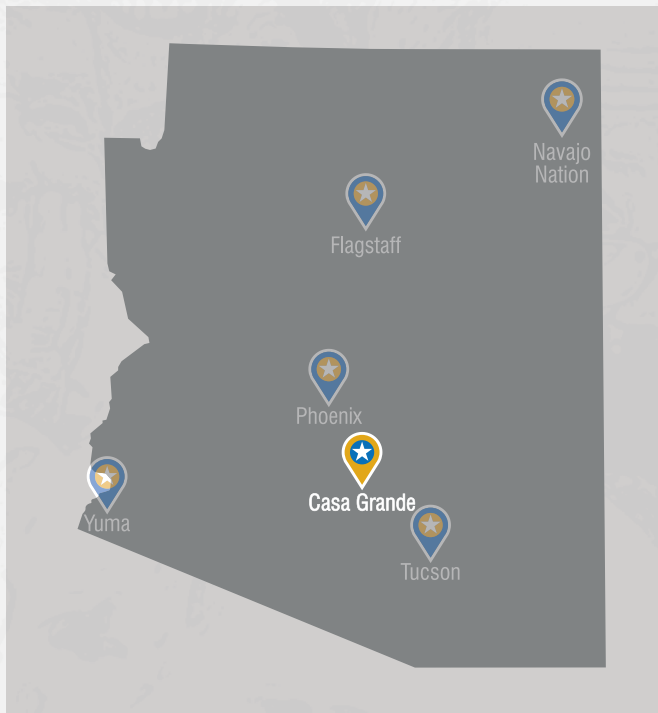


WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING: *Arizona Listening Sessions 2015*

Session Site: Casa Grande, Arizona April 10, 2015



On March 31, 2015, the 2015 White House Conference on Aging hosted a regional forum in Phoenix, Arizona. Others from communities across Arizona were able to participate remotely via two listening sessions that were held simultaneously in Flagstaff and Tucson; in early April three additional listening sessions were held in Casa Grande, the Navajo Nation, and Yuma. A recommendation report from each of the five listening sessions was generated and a Summary of the five listening sessions was produced; the Summary and the individual site session reports (five) are available at www.pipertrust.org/aging2015.

HEALTHY AGING

As Arizona's 65-and-over population continues to grow rapidly, and Arizonans live longer in general, the healthy aging of our seniors becomes increasingly important. Arizona has an opportunity to be a national leader in developing models of care to support healthy aging, but there are many challenges that need to be overcome. For example, healthy aging is very difficult in the absence of sufficient financial resources to, among

other things, pay for transportation to visit specialists and other healthcare providers, purchase nutritious food, and have Internet access or other means to obtain important information. These challenges are particularly serious for seniors living in rural areas, where such resources are not as readily available.

Specifically in the context of healthcare, physicians need to be better educated on strategies for patient care in the context of providing care to seniors, and we need to improve communications between and among healthcare providers and seniors, including with respect to wellness benefits that may be available to seniors. Without proper care, health issues (including depression, PTSD, a spouse's illness, etc.) become stressful and create additional problems that prevent seniors from aging in a healthy way.

Finally, insufficient education and cultural awareness within the broader population has created a stigma regarding the senior population. In some cases, this stigma exists even among seniors, discouraging them from taking advantage of important programming and opportunities for socialization offered by senior centers and similar organizations. Increased funding and other resources are needed to make more amenities like parks, exercise venues, and senior centers available to seniors, and most importantly, we need to provide education and culturally acceptable training—focused on awareness, respect, and love—to Arizonans of all ages.

Specific initiatives should include:

- Workshops or "resource fairs" on aging and healthy living issues, utilizing (and facilitating coordination among) existing resources and community partnerships, with an emphasis on accessibility to seniors and being "in the neighborhoods."
- Improving access to transportation through community partnerships and/or a "buddy system."
- An educational campaign targeted at families and children, utilizing social media and other informational resources.

LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

A variety of resources and initiatives are needed to support Arizonans, and help them maintain their independence, as they age. More funding is needed to support senior centers and help seniors pay for healthcare, medication, adaptive aids, and home rehabilitation/modifications. We need to improve credentialing for Medicare benefits and provide wider access (especially in rural areas) to assisted living facilities that are equipped to provide advancing levels of care as seniors age. Policy changes are also needed, for example, to assist seniors in the “gap” (between eligibility for public benefits and having sufficient resources to fully support themselves in retirement) and address zoning issues that impose significant burdens on seniors.

In addition to new initiatives, we also need to do a better job of educating seniors (and others) about existing resources. In that regard, “navigators” should be trained and made available as a resource for seniors. Navigators would communicate about existing resources by referring seniors to organizations that assist with healthcare, food banks, applying for long-term care benefits, etc. We should also educate families and individuals (before they become seniors) about strategies to prepare for retirement and support seniors, including in the areas of home construction (e.g., plan ahead for wheelchair access), adaptive aids, and other issues associated with aging.

Other specific initiatives should include:

- Lobby for legislative/policy changes to, among other things, address (1) issues creating the “gap” (e.g., by changing income limitations associated with certain public benefits), (2) full funding for the Older Americans Act, and (3) zoning issues.
- Launch a public awareness campaign to reduce stigma and making aging issues more “normal”—need to “tell the story” in the community through senior testimonials, such as tragic abuse and exploitation situations requiring intervention by Adult Protective Services, etc. (use Head Start’s empty chair campaign as a potential model).
- Commission a study on these issues

RETIREMENT SECURITY

Retirement security, specifically including financial security, is critically important to seniors as they seek to maintain their independence and age in a healthy way. Seniors without sufficient financial resources need assistance paying for

healthcare and adaptive aids like dentures, hearing aids, eyeglasses, etc. Even seniors who have saved for retirement can find their savings being “eaten up” by an illness. Education is needed to help seniors budget in retirement, and younger individuals should be educated on how to prepare for retirement from a financial perspective (and also given more opportunities to start saving earlier in life). Finally, existing resources should be better leveraged and communicated—for example, physicians need to be trained to inform seniors of drug costs in connection with writing prescriptions so they can assist with any drug company waiver opportunities that may be available.

In addition to financial assistance and education, seniors also need meaningful employment opportunities that will enable them to continue to earn money and also to remain active and involved in their communities. Those opportunities, in turn, will require training in technology and other relevant job skills.

ELDER JUSTICE

Arizona seniors face significant challenges in the area of elder justice. Many seniors live in mobile home parks or similar accommodations and face neglect by their landlords but are afraid to complain for fear of eviction because they cannot afford a deposit or the other costs associated with moving. Family members take advantage of seniors (for example, by using their funds), causing stress and leaving seniors with no one to trust. Seniors are also targeted in marketing scams. Finally, domestic abuse occurs within the senior population, including in senior living communities. In many cases, there is a lack of public awareness with respect to these serious issues, and seniors lack an advocate or “trusted representative” to help them.

To address these issues:

- We need to identify “trusted representatives” that seniors feel comfortable approaching for help; a resource network should be created to support this initiative.
- More education is needed to increase public awareness (for example, people need to be educated on what abuse consists of, because a lack of awareness leads to a lack of reporting (child abuse/cards could be used as a model).
- Offenders should be prosecuted and forced to pay restitution.
- We should advocate for victim service organizations.