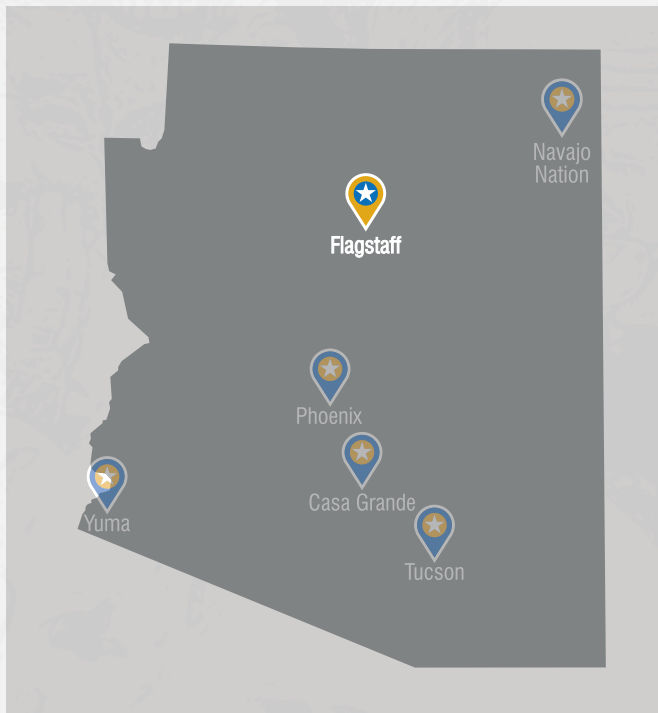


WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING: *Arizona Listening Sessions 2015*

Session Site: Flagstaff, Arizona March 31, 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.

RETIREMENT SECURITY

Top Priorities

Once someone has reached retirement age, it is too late to save for retirement. We have shifted from a world where employers offer pensions and extensive retirement programs for their employees to a world where employees must take responsibility for their own retirement. Yet, we

have also created a society where financial literacy across all ages is at an all-time low. The result is a large population who are wholly unprepared for retirement.

The top priorities for retirement security include creating an awareness of and educating society about retirement and all the issues that follow—including retirement accounts, housing, and healthcare, providing access to healthcare across all communities—including rural, and ensuring the existence of affordable housing in all communities.

Additional Arizona Specific Issues

There are many issues specific to Arizona with regard to retirement planning. First, Arizona has a large retirement population. Second, Arizona has an extremely high senior suicide rate. In addition, healthcare options and long-term care insurance options are limited in rural Arizona. This causes seniors to have to expend extra funds for healthcare, including travel costs, often requiring relocation to larger cities to be able to receive appropriate healthcare services.

Challenges

Challenges to retirement planning include lack of proper funding and lack of societal knowledge. Politicians often use the issue of retirement planning—including social security and healthcare—as political issues rather than attempt to find real solutions to these issues. Other challenges include access to affordable housing in metro, suburban, and even some rural communities.

Additional Arizona Specific Challenges

The cost of living is sometimes higher in parts of Northern Arizona (like Flagstaff) but the wages are on average lower. This creates extreme difficulties both for retirees and the working population who are trying to save for retirement.

Solutions/Options For Addressing Challenges

We must increase financial literacy across all ages; including requiring financial literacy curriculum

in primary and secondary schools and teaching personal responsibility.

Providing financial tools will help empower people to plan for their own retirement and future. Financial institutions could include a provision in their quarterly or annual statements that provide a snapshot of the expected status of their accounts upon retirement. Such a provision could also be included in annual Social Security statements. This type of program would give people an idea of where they are in their retirement planning and could help motivate people to take responsibility now for their own future retirement.

Volunteering has a large economic impact on our local communities. Communities would benefit greatly from an increase in volunteers and volunteering opportunities, including from the retiree communities.

Federal, state, and local agencies and nonprofit organizations should coordinate in planning, developing, and implements programs to assist retirees and the vulnerable population. Such coordination would help to provide better programs, minimize duplication of effort, and be a better use of valuable resources.

Arizona should look at mandating financial literacy curriculum in the primary and secondary schools.

We should contact our own federal and state legislators about these issues, including advocating for curriculum to increase financial literacy among all ages.

We should look within our own communities to find opportunities to serve to change paradigms and show that volunteering is important and critical to our communities.

HEALTHY AGING

Top Priorities

The top priorities for healthy aging include access to quality and affordable medical, mental, and dental healthcare, access to educational material to learn about the preparation of affordable healthy foods, the importance of exercise and healthy living, and addressing social isolation. Development of and access to preventative programs should be a top priority. Access to quality long-term care for those in suburban and rural areas is important.

Challenges

Challenges to healthy aging include having access to affordable medical care within our own communities. In addition, retirees' access to affordable dental care is often not covered by medical plans and a lack of proper dental care impacts overall health. Transportation is a special challenge in rural areas, including Northern

Arizona. Often people are not able to receive adequate healthcare services or attend workshops and classes due to lack of transportation. Access to technology, including internet access, in rural areas impacts the ability of people to manage their own healthcare needs. Many state and local agencies and nonprofits do not have sufficient staff and funding to meet the needs of Arizona's citizens. Technology infrastructure in rural areas is often lacking. Access to quality long-term care facilities in rural areas is concerning.

Solutions/Options For Addressing Challenges

Solutions often start with local communities. The creation of programs such as community gardens can provide opportunities for service and learning for youth, adult, and senior populations.

Illinois has developed an excellent program that addresses long-term care needs, the Illinois Supportive Care Program. This model could be taken to other states, including Arizona.

The current economic system often penalizes those who receive assistance by cutting benefits as soon as someone is able to work rather than phase out benefits. As a result, the current system does not provide a sufficient safety net for those who receive assistance. Federal, state, and local agencies could create a volunteer program as a way to create a pay back program for assistance that has been received. Many people may not be physical able to work full-time or part-time but would be available for part-time volunteer opportunities to help others across the community.

State and local governments could incentivize Internet service providers for investing in technology infrastructure across Arizona, especially in rural areas. State and local public and nonprofit agencies could look at creating and/or expanding existing transportation programs, including volunteer networks to provide transportation to needed classes and workshop.

State legislatures should regulate nursing home and assisted living facilities to ensure proper medical care is being provided and mandate a minimum ratio of healthcare providers.

Arizona's state ombudsman program has onerous training and reporting requirements. A program could be created within the existing ombudsman program to provide and encourage volunteers to visit assisted living facilities and long-term care facilities to provide the social interaction that so many need. Such a program should be simple to it easy for volunteers to participate, without requiring extensive licensing.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security could provide a program encouraging dental providers to provide dental care to low income communities, including in rural areas.

Onerous background requirements on volunteers and other workers often inhibit volunteers from being able to serve due to the time and cost of licensing.

LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Top Priorities

Access to affordable long-term care is a top priority. Many insurance companies no longer offer long-term care insurance plans, making it difficult for people to plan for long-term healthcare needs. Educating the public that planning for long-term healthcare needs as part of retirement planning is critical.

Challenges

The cost of long-term healthcare is a top challenge. Costs have skyrocketed over the years, pricing many of out the ability to receive quality long-term care. The reduction of funding in many federal, state, and local programs has drastically impacted the availability of access to long-term care.

Lobbyists for the healthcare industry have the ear of the Arizona Legislature. For example, Arizona's recent deregulation of assisted living facilities in Arizona has resulted in a decrease in the quality of care and increasing crime against seniors. Arizona has no mandated staffing ratio for nursing home and assisted living facilities, which has resulted in an increasing number of elder abuse and neglect cases.

Solutions/Options For Addressing Challenges

The creation of a long-term healthcare program modeled on Social Security may help to mitigate increasing long-term care costs and provide greater access to long-term care. We need a cultural paradigm shift to look at caring for each other, like programs such as healthcare Co-Ops.

Our society and culture needs to recognize that often times, placement in a long-term care facilities is not a failure of the spouse, the family, or the system but is what is in the best interest of the person in need due to their physical, emotional, or mental conditions.

The Illinois Supportive Living Care Program is a good model for Arizona and other states and encompasses both assisted living and memory care.

Adequate funding of the Arizona Long Term Care System must be a priority, including supporting the existing ombudsman program.

We need to change the ways we garner financial support to expand existing services and create new ways to provide funding to meet long-term needs. We need to create short-term incentives for long-term investments to find ways to encourage the legislature and society to address future needs now.

Retirees represent an often underutilized brain trust in our state. We must find ways to put their collective knowledge and experience to use. For example, Michigan has created a retired engineers volunteer program that provides volunteer services to leverage their experience and expertise. Legislatures should encourage these types of programs across all communities.

Due to the complexity of the application process, many people are dissuaded from applying to the Arizona Long Term Care Program.

ELDER JUSTICE

Top Priorities

Helping vulnerable populations become aware of frauds and schemes, especially as a result of new technologies, must be a top priority.

Challenges

- New technologies and the Internet have created myriad new types of scams and fraudulent activities.
- It is often difficult when trying to distinguish between situations involving a vulnerable person's right to make his/her own decisions and exploitation or undue influence, especially when family members and caregivers are involved.
- Victims' shame and embarrassment is often a big hurdle to overcome when investigating claims of elder abuse and exploitation. Victims are often faced with challenges such as overcoming pride or shame or speaking up for themselves.
- Elder abuse does not just come in forms of fiscal or financial abuse. Neglect and emotional abuse by family members and caregivers is a serious concern, and often the victims are unable to speak up for themselves.
- Although Elder Justice Act was enacted, the program has never been properly funded.
- Isolation of the elderly—whether they are in their own homes or in care facilities—contributes to vulnerability and susceptibility to fraud.

Solutions/Options For Addressing Challenges

- Federal, state, and local agencies should coordinate with local organizations to promote awareness of frauds and schemes on the elderly and vulnerable.
- Adult Protective Services lacks adequate resources to prosecute financial exploitation cases. Adult Protective Services also suffers from jurisdictional issues with certain types of crimes and abuse and are understaffed.
- There should be a policy change in how government collects personal information at city, state, and federal level. Often, agencies require information such as social security numbers when it is not necessary for their purposes.
- State, local, and federal agencies should coordinate often to become aware of what other agencies and local organizations are providing to avoid duplication of effort and coordinate the use of limited resources.
- Protection of the elderly and vulnerable should be everyone's responsibility, not just Adult Protective Services. Everyone who works with elders (including governmental agencies, private organizations and companies) should be aware of these issues and all available resources.
- States and the Federal government should coordinate the definition of elder abuse across federal and state statutes and regulations.

Other states have created programs and initiatives to address concerns of elder fraud. Arizona's Legislature should look at other states for examples of effective programs.