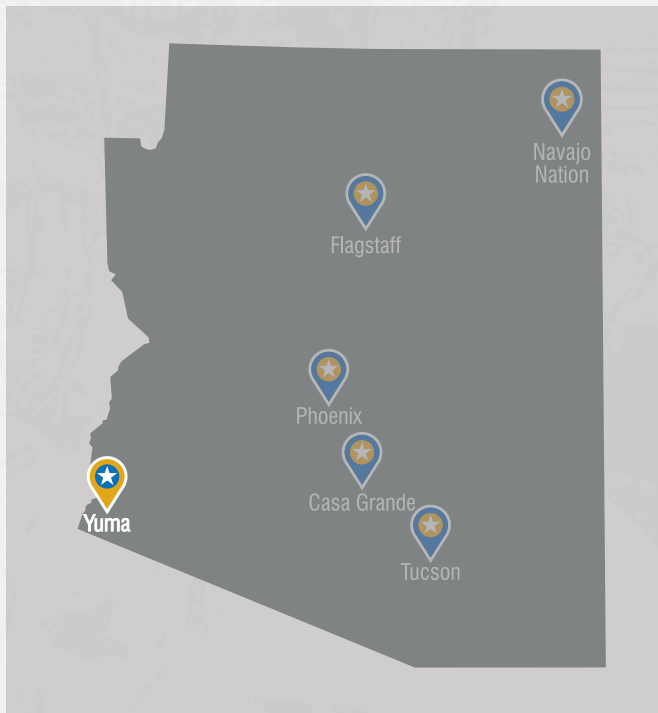


# WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING: *Arizona Listening Sessions 2015*

## Session Site: Yuma, Arizona April 6, 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](http://www.pipertrust.org/aging2015).

### HEALTHY AGING

It is important that people be proactive about healthy aging. Many of the issues involving healthy aging focus on people making good choices about diet, exercise, and nutrition. Maintaining dental health is crucial in order to maintain proper nutrition. Having adequate health insurance is also important. Caregiving is an important factor affecting quality of life. Having meaningful, purpose driven lives in retirement is important to emotional and mental well-being.

Challenges to healthy aging in Western Arizona include the lack of several items: lack of training for caregivers; funding; health insurance benefits in more rural areas; family involvement; appropriate, disseminated educational information regarding nutritive choices and exercise. The lack of transportation to non-medical activities, such as social activities and healthy-focused grocery stores can impact a healthy lifestyle for aging individuals. Individual attitudes also can deter healthy habits. The impact of the hot weather in some areas of Western Arizona, can have a significant impact on individuals and their choice of healthy activities.

There are several solutions to consider when addressing the challenges of healthy aging. A food preparation co-operative could provide at least one healthy meal a day and help educate the elderly on good nutrition choices. Providing a mobile dental unit could address the needs of our elder population who have issues with transportation and access to affordable oral care. Additional training and mentoring would help all as well as education and promotion to those individuals who could utilize services to help relieve stress. An increase in public exercise events would give people an opportunity to increase their physical activities. Grassroots, organized groups could provide transportation, outside of government resources, to individuals in need. We need to emphasize the silver tsunami to younger generations on the importance of family involvement and how the lack of this involvement impacts the elderly. Focus on family caregiver outreach is important to all family members. Increasing insurance options in Western Arizona is crucial to our elderly population and their caregivers.

### LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Living a quality life in familiar surroundings is important to the elderly, as is the constant concern of affordability and not living beyond one's savings. Quality caregiving is also crucial and impacts the individual as well as their family. Improved options counseling is important to provide to the elderly so that they know what's available. The availability of transitional coaches would assist the individuals and their families

and decrease the chances of their returning to healthcare facilities. A better staff to resident ratio in healthcare facilities would help, as well as should be included.

There are many challenges impacting long-term services and supports. If an individual wishes to remain at home, there are upgrades needed to accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, and other necessary adaptive devices, plus the cost associated with these. Individuals may have unrealistic expectations or a denial of what exists. A lack of regulations governing facilities is a detriment. Bureaucracy affects the increase in nonprofits. A lack of well-trained transitional coaches can cause “frequent fliers” who often return to medical facilities. The lack of funding causes a short-fall of resources and services available to the elderly. The general public is uninformed and does not have the knowledge of resources available.

#### **Solutions**

There are many organizations, some already existing, available that provide long-term services and supports to the elderly and their caregivers. These organizations include churches, hospice organizations, AHCCCS, and Helping Hands.

Promotion of services, including social media outreach, to the elderly and their families on available resources is key to providing long-term services and supports. Seeking private sources of grants can be a revenue source for needed services. Training family members to be transitional coaches can provide additional services. Reaching out to the government can assist with additional resources. Statewide, affordable senior housing is crucial.

#### **ELDER JUSTICE**

It is important that all individuals know to report elder injustice and to whom. Increasing awareness of what’s happening in the home or the facility is crucial to combat elder abuse. Information on awareness of elder abuse from a trusted source is needed as well as enforcement at all levels. Continually providing education to elders is important to keep them up to date on scams. It is necessary to fix Adult Protective Services to provide the services necessary. Having other safe locations available to the elderly is greatly needed. Empower the individual.

Challenges to providing elder justice include the lack of available resources, lack of trained law enforcement officers, and general public ignorance of what constitutes elder abuse. Fixing Adult Protective Services takes money and Arizona is in a difficult budget scenario. Providing senior shelters could address the needs of those elders experiencing abuse or injustice. If individuals speak up, they should feel secure there will not be repercussions or loss of support and not feel embarrassment or shame if they have been victim to a scam.

#### **Solutions**

We should search for models of best practices where areas have had success in combatting elder abuse. Some examples could include recertification of caregivers, both professional and volunteer, on how to handle suspected abuse; training of law enforcement officials statewide; and supporting the Arizona Attorney General on statewide abuse initiatives. We could also provide public service announcements to the general public and events such as community coffees for elderly and their caregivers. There should be stricter prosecution of elderly abuse offenders. Consideration of where state resources are spent should be questioned and focused on vital areas, such as Adult protective services. Encouraging existing agencies to provide necessary service levels is crucial.

#### **RETIREMENT SECURITY**

Retirement security should include a diverse mix, such as private savings, pensions, Social Security, and 401k. A decent wage would enable all individuals to not be retirement fragile.

Financial literacy is necessary for all individuals, but especially crucial for the aging. Education about saving for retirement should start at the high school level and all should have a retirement plan. Simplifying the tax and financial system would help all individuals.

Many individuals plan to use Social Security so it is crucial that this system remain solvent.

#### **Challenges**

Challenges to reaching retirement security include individuals’ attitudes towards saving, lack of self-discipline on spending, and reliance on government social programs. Individuals should be proactive and focus on the future, not just the present. Individuals could lose their jobs, which could derail their plans for retirement funding. The continued rising cost of a quality life and unexpected expenses can also affect what expenses are planned for the future. Adequate funding of Social Security is crucial for the general population.

#### **Solutions**

Individuals need to be realistic about the future. Financial literacy education is needed for all individuals through school, including options for saving plans that have direct deposit from paychecks and how to diversify savings or have a backup plan to help retirement include a more financially stable future. Individuals need to know that continual small amounts of savings can help. Transitional coaching on financial matters would help all individuals. Staying healthy through proactive actions can help individuals achieve retirement security.