



LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

BEST PRACTICES

AGING SERVICES AND PUBLIC HEALTH: OPPORTUNITY FOR ELEVATION

BACKGROUND

More and more local health departments are working to advance healthy aging throughout their communities, and a growing number are addressing dementia, cognitive health, and caregiving concerns. With the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's projected to nearly triple by 2050, local public health agencies are at the forefront of this trajectory. As local health departments undertake this work, local Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) offer a unique opportunity for partnership and elevation.

AAA STRUCTURE

AAAs vary widely in structure, scope, and delivery. In some jurisdictions, local city or county governmental agencies — including the local health department — may also serve as the AAA while in other jurisdictions, a community-based non-profit organization may be the designated AAA.

The delivery catchment can range from a small geographic area to covering multiple cities and counties. AAAs are responsible for assessing, planning, and providing for the needs of older adults. Many focus primarily on providing home- and community-based services that are essential to the health, well-being, and independence of older adults, including those living with dementia and their caregivers.

Aligning Plan Recommendations

Both Area Agencies on Aging and local health departments use assessment and strategic planning to improve health and well-being of older adults. The following recommendations may be incorporated and cross-referenced within each organization's plan to ensure better alignment.

- **Healthy Aging:** enhance knowledge of and promote healthy aging options and opportunities across the lifespan.
- **Program Management and Evaluation:** ensure programs and policies are efficient, reach and serve intended populations, and have a measurable impact.
- **Services and Supports:** assure access and availability of services and supports that encourage healthy aging, protect the independence of older adults, and promote overall well-being.

ASSESSMENTS and AAAs

As part of the Older Americans Act, established AAAs are required to assess the needs and concerns of older adults and caregivers every few years. This includes identifying barriers to access of services and supports, conducting a gap analysis to assess for inadequate services or unmet needs, and include a broader scope

than just the services provided by the AAA itself. These assessments inform strategic plans — known as area plans — with recommendations for programs and services, options for building out services and delivery systems, and a mechanism for updating the plan in 2-4 years.

These strategic plans offer public health officials a prime opportunity to learn about the current landscape of older adult health, services, and supports, and to learn about the existing data sources that inform the assessment process.

HBI Road Map

Alzheimer's and dementia are leading causes of death in many communities. Robust, population-level action is needed to curb the trajectory of Alzheimer's. The Healthy Brain Initiative's *State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map* is an expert-developed guidebook for public health agencies to meet this rising need.

Learn more at alz.org/publichealth



OPPORTUNITY for PARTNERSHIP

In cities and counties where AAAs and local health departments are separate entities, partnering together can yield dividends. During the assessment process, local health departments may have data that can better inform community assessments about needs, burden, chronic condition prevalence, and service utilization. At the same time, local health departments may learn new information by hearing from additional and varied stakeholders that AAAs routinely assess. For instance, AAAs understand the current “lay of the land” as service delivery, access, and utilization are concerned — this can help local health departments identify gaps and underserved areas. This type of collaboration can help both agencies expand attention to cognitive health, older adult health, and dementia, especially by embracing public health’s expertise in utilizing a life-course approach.

In jurisdictions where AAAs and the local health department are the same entity, resources can be streamlined to fully embrace a public health approach to these health issues.

Trust for America’s Health and the John A Hartford Foundation created the [Framework for Creating an Age-Friendly Public Health System](#) (AFPHS) to expand the role of public health agencies in improving the health and well-being of older adults. AFPHS can provide guidance and structure for collaboration between AAAs and local health departments. Main tenets of AFPHS — preventive strategies, population- and systems-level interventions, and attention to social determinants of health — align with the priorities of many AAAs and local health departments.

This best practice guide was developed as part of a collaboration between the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency ([Aging & Independence Services](#)), the Boston Public Health Commission ([Healthy Homes and Community Supports](#)), and the Alzheimer’s Association ([Public Health Department](#)).



For more information on the public health response to Alzheimer's, visit alz.org/publichealth