

EngAging Illinois

An Executive Summary



Everyone plays a role in making Illinois an exceptional place to live, work, support family, and grow older. Aging well – living well – is about all of us.

The Illinois Department on Aging, in collaboration with a wide range of public and private partners, has developed **EngAging Illinois: A Comprehensive Plan for Living Well**. The Plan establishes policy and programmatic priorities to ensure our state, counties, cities, and towns are great places to grow up AND grow older. It will help all of us – no matter where we live, how much we earn, what we believe, who we love, our abilities, or what we look like – to live well and age with a sense of security and possibility.

With a fundamental concern for equity, inclusion, and accessibility, **EngAging Illinois** describes strategies to improve and transform services, policies, and programs critical to all of us as we get older. It reframes the way we think about aging and recognizes the important value of older adults' experiences, insights, and contributions.

The Plan is organized around four key Focus Areas (See page 10):

- Creating Livable and Connected Communities
- Ensuring Health for All Ages
- Investing in Caregivers
- Affording Aging

Creating EngAging Illinois

In August 2024, Governor JB Pritzker signed an Executive Order establishing a cross-sector planning process to create a strategic blueprint to address the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers over the next decade. He charged a Chief Planning Officer, with support from the Illinois Department on Aging, led by Director Mary Killough, to drive this effort with the participation of 15 state agencies, and a 25-member Community Advisory Council. These groups have included partners with a wide range of expertise in areas from housing and transportation to health, homelessness, and economic development. Input from these talented leaders was complemented by a series of nine public engagement sessions, including hundreds of people from communities around the state. Illinois is among the first wave of U.S. states to develop this type of inclusive and holistic strategy. This comprehensive planning process, and now this Plan, will generate new initiatives, align and coordinate resources, and set out ways to measure progress through 2036.

Looking ahead

Translating this bold Plan into action will take time. In Appendix A there are short-term (1-3 years), mid-term (4-6 years), and long-term (7-10 years) Actions. They will require the energetic and engaged participation of Illinois' Area Agencies on Aging, the state's Aging Network, all levels of government, the business community, educational institutions, health and social service providers, philanthropy, and crucially, community leaders and the people of Illinois. We all have a role to play.

EngAging Illinois is both ambitious and realistic. It serves as a meaningful roadmap for the future. Over time, this Plan will evolve to incorporate new opportunities based on developments in scientific research, advances in technology, and program innovations. Together, we will make Illinois the best state in the country to live well as we age.



Four Focus Areas

The Plan includes a series of goals, strategies, and actions around these four critical areas:

1. *Creating Livable and Connected Communities*

Developing people-centered, physical, and social infrastructure including:

- Aging in community
- Housing stability and security
- Transportation that meets the needs of individuals in their communities
- Social connection and community engagement
- Digital inclusion and technology

2. *Ensuring Health for All Ages*

Helping all Illinois residents to remain healthy and independent throughout the lifespan by:

- Delivering highly coordinated care and services
- Ensuring access to culturally attuned, high-quality healthcare
- Expanding the recruitment, training, retention, and quality of the healthcare workforce
- Increasing attention to the "4Ms" of age-friendly care—What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility
- Building awareness, knowledge, and skills about aging
- Supporting and expanding the Brain Health initiative launched by the Illinois Department of Public Health to facilitate Illinois becoming the most brain healthy state in the nation.

3. *Investing in Caregivers*

Addressing the challenges facing both unpaid and paid caregivers by:

- Increasing caregiver outreach and awareness
- Advancing partnerships, collaboration, and engagement
- Strengthening services and support for caregivers
- Improving financial and workplace security for caregivers
- Expanding data, research, and evidence-based practices
- Ensuring recruitment and retention strategies support a robust paid caregiver workforce that is qualified and supported

4. *Affording Aging*

Working to guarantee that older adults and people with disabilities have:

- Economic security and financial health
- Safe, livable, accessible, and affordable housing opportunities
- Access to long-term care support
- Freedom from fraud, neglect, exploitation, and elder abuse
- Estate planning resources