

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING

MINUTES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2021

1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING (ICoA) MEMBERS PRESENT:

Phyllis Mitzen, Anthony Frazier, Julie Bobitt, Nancy Chen, Christine Goleman, Paulette Hamlin, Kim Hunt, Margaret Huyck, Talat Khan, Britta Larson, Susan Lawler, Sylvia Mahle, Patricia Marton, Anna Oestreich, Susan Vega, Representative Anna Moeller, Cheryl Larson (on behalf of Senator Dave Syverson), Dylan Olthoff (on behalf of Representative Rita Mayfield)

ICoA MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jane Angelis, Melvin Grimes, Mubarak Mirjat, Robert Mueller, Robert O'Connor, Senator Mattie Hunter, Senator Brian Stewart

VISITORS/GUESTS:

Marla Fronczak, CEO of AgeGuide and President of Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT ON AGING (IDoA) STAFF:

Paula Basta, Director
Lora McCurdy, Deputy Director
Selma D'Souza, Chief of Staff
Rhonda Armstead, General Counsel
Lisa Dupoy, Administrative Assistant, Community Relations and Outreach Division
Sarah Harris, Chief Financial Officer
Emily Howerton, Budget Officer
Sandy Leith, Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Director
Amy Lulich, Senior Policy Advisor
Lee Moriarty, Deputy Ombudsman
Katherine Ostrowski, Legislative Liaison
Kelly Richards, State Ombudsman
Iris Schweier, Public Information Officer
Latorya Simon, Administrative Assistant
Lynnette Martin, Deputy Division Manager, Community Relations & Outreach Division
Lisa Zuurbier, Division Manager, Community Relations & Outreach Division

SUMMARY

OPENING:

The meeting was called to order by Phyllis Mitzen at 1:01 p.m. Roll call was taken and it was determined that a quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Phyllis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 28, 2021 meeting. Christine Goleman entered a motion. Paulette Hamlin seconded the motion; all members voted aye, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

AREA AGENCY ON AGING (AAA) PRESENTATION:

Phyllis introduced Marla Fronczak, CEO of AgeGuide and President of the Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Marla presented an overview of the Aging Network and explained how the AAAs and local service providers, working together, provide programs and offer a wide variety of home and community-based services. These programs and services help older adults age at home with maximum health, independence and well-being.

She stated that home and community-based services are the most cost-effective way of caring for aging adults. The AAAs and local service providers support home and community-based services that are not only accessible, but consumer focused and supportive, regardless of income or assets. She stated that for every dollar of funding received from the federal Older Americans Act (OAA), three dollars of resources were leveraged. She went on to explain that when older adults or their caregivers receive community-based services, their health and longevity improve.

Marla said that in 2020, AgeGuide conducted 25 listening sessions and an online needs assessment survey. The top three identified challenges were: 1) technology; 2) language and cultural barriers; and 3) and the impact of Covid-19 on older adults and their access to supportive services. She shared that social isolation was recognized as a health crisis and that addressing it was a statewide initiative even prior to Covid-19. Marla explained that there is funding in place for AAAs to address challenges and that programs and services have been reinvented to help older adults stay safe, connected and engaged at home.

Marla mentioned the statewide efforts to assist individuals impacted by Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias. Services are tailored to caregiver and individual needs and preferences. She highlighted services including the use of the TCARE assessment tool which has proven to delay placement in nursing facilities by 18 to 24 months. She also mentioned the Dementia Friendly Communities initiative that improves quality of life of people with dementia and their family members by promoting inclusion, raising awareness and transforming attitudes. She mentioned that there are currently nine nationally recognized Dementia Friendly Communities in the AgeGuide service area with three more in progress.

Marla also addressed the large number of uncompensated caregivers. In Illinois, there are roughly 1.5 million family caregivers providing 1.4 billion hours of care valued at \$18.5 a billion annually. Currently, two-thirds of persons living at home needing assistance with personal care needs depend solely on personal family and friends for assistance. Only about five percent rely exclusively upon paid providers. To support these unpaid caregivers and bring awareness to this issue, the Illinois Association of AAAs has received a grant from the Retirement Research Foundation (RRF). Funding will be used to build a statewide coalition, educate and sensitize stakeholders to gaps in services, conduct outreach, bolster future legislative endeavors, and advance caregiving policies.

Marla also shared information about the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). She stated that Illinois received roughly \$50 million in ARPA funding. AgeGuide will receive approximately \$10 million. The funding will be used to expand and enhance a very wide variety of programs and services. Marla closed by inviting everyone to follow AgeGuide on Facebook and Twitter or to visit the website at www.AgeGuide.org.

2021 MEDICARE UPDATE/OPEN ENROLLMENT WRAP-UP:

Sandy Leith, Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Director, provided an overview of the 2021 Medicare Open Enrollment period that ended on December 7. She shared information on the Illinois SHIP Medicare Supplement Guide which compares insurance rates for all companies that are licensed to sell Medicare supplements in the State of Illinois. Sandy explained how informative this guide is to educate Medicare beneficiaries regarding their choices. She said SHIP counselors are now able to use the federal Medicare pricing tool to provide broker-type pricing using determinants to help individuals make informed decisions on what coverage is available and the costs.

Sandy shared information regarding a survey that was conducted with Illinois SHIP counselors following the 2021 Medicare Open Enrollment period. There were 119 survey responses. The questions dealt with the counseling and support given by SHIP. Overall, the responses were favorable. However, feedback regarding the Medicare 2021 plan finder indicated some improvements were needed to make the tool more useful in helping beneficiaries choose the best plan. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) will be made aware of the challenges to implement improvements in the future.

Misleading Medicare Advantage Plan advertisements were discussed. Sandy said that letters were sent to Advantage Plan providers to be more transparent about their costs and benefits in their advertising to beneficiaries. Due to past advertising claims, beneficiaries aggressively called and enrolled in Advantage Plans and later contacted SHIP for assistance in moving back to plans that better addressed their needs. Discussion followed regarding the importance of SHIP counselors and the work they do to educate and save beneficiaries money. Phyllis noted that the more the Council can do to share information about the SHIP program, the better it is for Illinois Medicare beneficiaries.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES:

Chief of Staff Selma D'Souza reported on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. She shared that a Department on Aging Equity Advisory Council was created and that it has met monthly since the fall of 2020. She said that IDoA plans to hire an Executive Assistant to the Director to advance DEI goals. The goals include ensuring that programs administered and monitored by the Department reflect the values of racial equity, cultural competency and diversity. Efforts include translating materials and expanding language access. She described another goal of increasing staff diversity, noting that this will include expanding recruitment efforts into underserved and underrepresented communities of color. Selma added that another goal is to develop a work culture that promotes racial equity and diversity. She said that training has been developed on racial equity, cultural competency and unconscious bias to advance this goal. Discussion followed about continued training and feedback from these trainings, as well as implementation of solutions to language barriers.

Sarah Harris introduced Emily Howerton as the new IDoA Budget Director. Emily shared that she started with the Department last September and previously served eight years in the Governor's Office of

Management and Budget. Emily said that the IDoA Fiscal Year (FY) 23 budget was submitted to the Governor Office. She added that the Governor will share highlights of the introduced budget during his State of the State address.

Sarah spoke to the invaluable experience Emily will bring to the Department. Sarah encouraged Council members to reach out to the budget office if they have questions or concerns.

Brief discussion followed about American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, noting that all the funds will go to the AAA's to support programs for older adults. **Updates regarding ARPA funding will be shared at future meetings.**

Amy Lulich, Senior Policy Advisor, provided an update on Covid-19 boosters and vaccination efforts. She noted that the Department worked with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document regarding boosters and third doses. Amy noted that boosters are available and appointments can be made if needed. She added that IDoA continues to work with our sister state agencies to promote vaccinations and boosters for older adults. Director Basta encouraged ICoA members to view the COVID updates that the Department shares weekly with the Aging Network. Discussion was had concerning Covid-19 testing and Amy posted the link to <https://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/testing.html> for more information.

Nancy Chen initiated conversation concerning the older adults being attacked and brutalized. She noted that yesterday an older Chinese man was killed in Chinatown. She questioned what can be done to promote public safety for older adults. Director Basta added that public safety issues should be addressed and that everyone should feel safe in their own neighborhoods. She added that the State Plan on Aging does include language about public safety. **Phyllis added that is an important issue and that public safety should be added to a future agenda for more discussion.**

INTRODUCTION:

Phyllis welcomed new member Sue Vega to the Council. Sue is a Program Manager at Alivio Medical Center. Sue shared that she oversees several externally funded non-clinical programs. She noted that Alivio Medical Center is a Federally Qualified Health Center that brings people together to provide and access quality health care services. She manages senior and benefits enrollment programs, as well as community healthcare workers and family case management programs. She stated that Alivio Medical Center has many partnerships, including a partnership with the National Council on Aging, and that it serves as a Benefits Enrollment Center and a SHIP site. Alivio offers a wide range of outreach programs to assist individuals of very diverse backgrounds.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Phyllis then introduced Anna Oestrich, Chair of the Nominating Committee, sharing that Anna recently announced her ICoA resignation. Phyllis thanked Anna for many years of dedicated service and opened the floor for her to discuss the slate of officers that will be voted upon at the next meeting.

Anna thanked all members of the ICoA Nominating Committee. She said that the Nominating Committee is presenting a very strong slate of candidates for next year and encouraged everyone to review the candidate biographies as posted online. **The candidates include Christie Goleman for Chair, Kim Hunt for Vice Chair, Julie Bobitt for Secretary, and Nancy Chen for Nominating Chair. This slate**

was put forward to be voted upon at the next meeting. There will also be nominations accepted from the floor.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Lisa Zuurbier reminded Council members to complete Ethics/Harassment and Discrimination Prevention Training and to forward their Certificates of Completion to her attention. She also introduced Lisa Dupoy, noting that she has recently joined the Division of Community Relations and Outreach as Administrative Assistant and that she will be helping to coordinate ICoA meetings moving forward.

Director Basta shared that it is always good to have the Council gathered and emphasized the importance of staying healthy and safe during the holiday season. She added that 2022 will be busy and that the Department looks forward to continuing its work in partnership with the Council.

Phyllis thanked meeting attendees for their participation and wished everyone a happy holiday season.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Phyllis Mitzen, Chair

Illinois Council on Aging