

ILLINOIS COUNCIL ON AGING

MEETING MINUTES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2024

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

COUNCIL ON AGING (ICoA) MEMBERS PRESENT:

Susan Vega, Britta Larson, Anthony Frazier, Christina Hardin-Weiss, Talat Khan, Susan Lawler, Sylvia Mahle, Patricia Marton, Mubarak Mirjat, Phyllis Mitzen, Crystal Odom-McKinney, Edgar Ramirez, Kate Schwartz, Meijan Linda Yu, Representative Rita Mayfield represented by Ruben Sanchez

ICoA MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kim Hunt, Julie Bobitt, Melvin Grimes, Paulette Hamlin, Senator Mattie Hunter, Senator Laura Fine, Senator David Syverson, Representative Maura Hirschauer

VISITORS and GUESTS:

Jack Myers, Social Security Administration, Public Affairs Specialist

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT ON AGING (IDoA) STAFF PRESENT:

Rhonda Armstead, General Counsel
Lisa Dupoy, Administrative Assistant, Division of Community Relations & Outreach
Jennifer Hebel, Special Assistant for Research
Sandy Leith, Senior Health Insurance Program Director
Lee Moriarty, Deputy State Long Term Care Ombudsman
Brian Pastor, Division Manager of Advocacy & Prevention Services
Kelly Richards, State Long Term Care Ombudsman
Gloria Simmons, Legislative Liaison
Iris Schweier, Public Information Officer
Roberta Vojas, Legislative Assistant
Lisa Zuurbier, Division Manager of Community Relations & Outreach

SUMMARY

OPENING:

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Council Chair Susan Vega. Roll call was taken and it was determined that a quorum was established.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The Chair asked Council members for a motion to approve the minutes from the September 17, 2024 meeting. Britta Larson entered a motion and Crystal Odom-McKinney seconded the motion; all members voted aye, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION UPDATE:

Jack Myers, Social Security Administration (SSA) Public Affairs Specialist, spoke to the Council about recent SSA updates. He shared that the SSA website highlights many services at www.ssa.gov. He recommended to Council members that they create personal accounts to access the best information specific to them and their work histories, as well as to receive Social Security benefit verification letters and apply for or monitor benefits. He shared that SSA is now an appointment-based agency. Jack added that an individual can make an appointment online for an in-person meeting. He said that the 2025 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) will be 2.5 percent starting January 1, 2025, compared to 3.2 percent last year. Letters explaining this increase will be mailed out early in December but are available now online to individuals in their SSA account.

Jack also talked about Social Security scams and how to recognize and report a suspected scam. He said to learn more about scams, visit www.ssa.gov/scam. To report scams, use the website <https://www.oig.ssa.gov>. Individuals may also contact SSA by calling their toll-free number 1-800-772-1213. For deaf or hard of hearing the TTY number is 1-800-325-0778. Individuals may also find their local SSA office by using the Social Security Office Locator at www.ssa.gov/locator.

The floor was opened for questions. Council members asked Mr. Myers several questions about information access and available services. ICoA members emphasized how valuable the Social Security system is to the well-being of our senior and disabled population.

ILLINOIS CARE CONNECTIONS OVERVIEW:

Jennifer Hebel, Special Assistant for Research and Project Manager for the Illinois Care Connections (ICC) grant, shared information about the program. She mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic, a grant of \$1.7 million in Cares Act funding was given to IDoA, the Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) and Developmental Disabilities, and the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP) to address social isolation. This grant was used to provide hotspots and tablets to older adults and served 1,039 recipients. DHS also served approximately 3,000 older adults with their funding. While the federal funding and DHS partnership ended in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22), IDoA continued with \$2 million in state funding to provide hotspots and tablets to Community Care Program (CCP) participants. The program served 215 older adults in FY22 and 560 older adults in FY23. The program was expanded in FY24 to include assistive technology and limited durable medical

equipment, as well as tablet bundles. New referral sources were added, and funding increased to \$2.5 million. In FY24, 1,728 older adults were served, and in FY25 to the date 2,147 referrals have been received.

Jennifer shared that ICC eligibility is not asset or income based, but rather need based. A “need” is defined as a functional, cognitive, social, or psychological need that an older adult experiences that causes difficulties functioning at home or in the community or that causes them to be socially isolated. A participant may receive multiple items if there is a demonstrated need and available funding.

In addition to computer electronics, some examples of the equipment that ICC can provide are vision devices, hearing amplifiers, mobility devices, adaptive utensils, dressing and toileting devices, lift chairs, smart doorbells and locks, smart thermostats and lights, wheelchairs, shower chairs, and transfer devices. Jennifer said that a new grant is being written for FY26 and FY27 and outreach efforts will increase to reach all demographic categories more effectively. Jennifer provided contact information for ICC on the IDoA website at <https://ilaging.illinois.gov/programs/illinois-care-connections.html> and shared her email address at Jennifer.Hebel@illinois.gov. She added that IATP can be reached at iatp.care@itech.org or by phone at 1-800-852-5110.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT:

Brian Pastor, Division Manager of Advocacy and Prevention Services, provided an Adult Protective Service (APS) update. Brian shared that results were received from an evaluation of the APS program that was recently completed by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) to identify strengths and weaknesses. Through staff and network partner input, comparison to other state programs and compliance checks of acts, rules and procedures, the report will shape strategic planning for the Illinois APS program. The APS team is working through the 245 pages of the final report and will receive additional feedback and recommendations from NAPSA in the near future.

Brian also explained that several new APS Advisory Committee Sub-Committees have been recently formed to get real time feedback from the field making sure that programs are working like intended and that there are no redundancies, inefficiencies, or gaps in services. Lastly, Brian spoke about workforce retention efforts through a new federally funded *APS Pathways Internship Program*. The goal is to engage college interns and interest them in an APS career. During their internship they will complete certification training, shadow caseworkers, and receive supervisor mentorship with the goal of a conditional job offer as an APS caseworker upon graduation from college.

Sandy Leith, Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) Director, provided an update on the Medicare Open Enrollment Period which closes at midnight on December 7, 2024. There are approximately 1,200 counselors working through 300 sites assisting beneficiaries with their enrollment choices. SHIP counselors have been very busy matching Medicare recipients to the best plans for their individual situations. Sandy shared that there are many plan choices available this year and a single call with a beneficiary may take one to two hours to arrive at the best choice.

Sandy also mentioned that the Clear Spring Medicare Part D prescription drug plan has been terminated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). With such late notice, beneficiaries who had selected this plan for 2025, will be allowed a special enrollment period in January and February to select a new plan. Sandy said situations like this is why it is very important to encourage people to open and read the letters they get from Medicare to avoid having undesirable coverage in 2025. Sandy will be having a meeting with the SHIP counselors on December 10 to review this year's process. Feedback will be shared with the Administration for Community Living (ACL).

NEW BUSINESS:

Lisa Zuurbier, Division Manager of Community Relations and Outreach and Council Liaison, reminded the Council members that their annual trainings are due by the end of December.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion to adjourn was asked for by Chair Susan Vega, a motion was made by Britta Larson and seconded by Sylvia Mahle.

The meeting adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

Julie Bobitt, Secretary

Illinois Council on Aging