

January 26, 2010

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Health Foundation forms Commission to Explore Healthy Aging

- Who:** MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation
- What:** MetroWest Commission on Healthy Aging
- When:** February 1, 2010 3:00-5:00 pm
- Where:** Foundation's Offices – 161 Worcester Road, Suite 202, Framingham

The MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation has formed the **MetroWest Commission on Healthy Aging**, a sixteen member panel, that will help define what healthy aging should look like in the MetroWest area by 2020, and to identify the steps needed to achieve this vision. The Commission's findings and recommendations will form the basis of the Foundation's new efforts to support healthy aging programs and services in its 25 town service area.

Why Healthy Aging

The number of MetroWest residents 65 and older is projected to grow by 75% in the next twenty years. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 80% of Americans over age 65 have at least one chronic health condition and 50% have at least two. Low-income older adults, particularly those who live alone, are at even greater risk for poor health outcomes. In MetroWest nearly 8% of adults over the age of 65 live below the federal poverty level. We also know that over 30% of our MetroWest elder population over age 65 report some kind of disability whether sensory, physical, or some difficulty with daily living skills.

Most Americans drastically underestimate their chances of getting a chronic disease. An enhanced focus on promoting and preserving the health of older adults is essential if we are to effectively address the health and economic challenges of an aging society.

The Commission will explore a variety of issues, including chronic disease prevention and management; wellness, physical activity and nutrition; active living and community engagement and socialization; falls prevention; depression and substance abuse; and caregiver support.

Key Reasons to Support Healthy Aging

- Health is strongly linked to the quality of life in older adulthood.
- Families, businesses and communities depend upon older adults every day as leaders, caregivers, mentors and volunteers.
- Older adults are at higher risk of losing their independence due to preventable injury and/or disability.
- Substantial amounts of health care costs can be avoided.
- Effective, low-cost programs that improve the health of older adults exist but are not widely offered.
- The societal costs of ignoring healthy aging will be catastrophic as the Baby Boomers reach older adulthood.

Membership:

The Commission includes sixteen “commissioners”. The commissioners are all community members who have an interest in the issue of healthy aging, including advocates, provider of service and elders themselves. **Bill McGinley** of Whitney Place in Natick, the past chairman of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees will chair the Commission.

Meetings:

The Commission plans to have a series of meetings starting on February 1, 2010. The meetings will include presentations on key healthy aging issues, as well as discussion of these issues. We also envision at least two public hearings/focus groups to gain input from the community.

Products:

The Commission intends to produce two important products. The first is a data report on the state of elder health in MetroWest. The second will be a report of findings and recommendations.

About the Foundation:

The MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation is a catalyst for a healthy MetroWest, providing over \$5 million in annual financial support for preventative and responsive health programs. Through its work on issues such as youth substance abuse, racial and ethnic disparities in health, and childhood obesity, the Foundation seeks to develop and support programs that have a positive impact on the health of the twenty-five communities in the MetroWest area of Massachusetts. To date, the Foundation has provided over \$30 million in financial support that helps residents and their families lead healthier lives.

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COMMISSIONERS

Bill McGinley, FACHCA, MBA, Chair
Executive Director
Whitney Place Assisted Living

Christine Alessandro
Executive Director
BayPath Elder Services

Karen Alves
Director
Franklin Council on Aging

Erica "Ricky" Ball
Community Activist

Jay Ball, MSEE
Community Activist

Judith Boyko, MBA, MS, RN
President
Century Health Systems

Janet Giele, Ph.D.
Professor Emerita
The Heller School for Social Policy &
Management

Esther Hopkins, Ph.D., J.D.
Community Activist

Marc Jacobs, MSW
Executive Director
Jewish Family Services of Metrowest

Kristin Kiesel
Director
Sudbury Council on Aging

Barry Levy, M.D.
Health Care Consultant

Ruth Remington, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Nursing
University of Massachusetts Lowell

Cathy Romeo
Manager of Cultural Competency Programs
VNA Care Network & Hospice

Anna Romer, Ed.D.
Associate Director of Evaluation
Facing History & Ourselves

Fredericka "Derry" Tanner, R.N.
Nursing Supervisor
Beaumont at Westborough

Margaret Seaver, M.D.
Lahey Clinic