

Making Our Communities Great Places to Grow Up and Grow Old

Tufts Health Plan Foundation Annual Report 2016

Narrator: Welcome to the Tufts Health Plan Foundation annual report. This is something new. Our report is made up of voices, people who are working to create age-friendly communities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Hampshire. Our communities are aging, and by 2030 more than a quarter of our residents will be 60 years and older. This is making all of us innovators. We have to reimagine our communities. Tom Croswell is CEO of the Tufts Health Plan and a member of the foundation board.

Tom Croswell: As Americans grow older, I think we have an opportunity to find creative solutions to ensure that we can all thrive as we get older. By 2020, people 65 and older will, for the first time, outnumber people under age five.

Narrator: The age-friendly movement is happening around the world and in this country, and that's our focus right now, asking what needs to be done and working with government officials, non-profits and older adults to make it happen.

Annie Kincaid: My name is Annie Kincaid, I live in Mattapan.

Narrator: Many adults find challenges as they age.

Annie Kincaid: I find out that the crossings are too rapid. They need to slow down because when handicapped people with canes or whatever are crossing a main street, they get halfway done and the light changes.

Narrator: Changing the timing of a crosswalk may seem a modest act, but multiply that by hundreds of acts. Picture pedestrian ramps, new benches to rest on and better lighting. The build environment is just one area we're focused on. There's our housing, health, and being well, access to services, and social isolation. We all get older eventually. Addressing how it happens now, means we'll be ready for the future, and the most important thing to do is to listen.

Voice speaking in Spanish

Narrator: Tufts Health Plan Foundation is bringing people together, talking and supporting their actions. We're funding our partners to listen, to do surveys and to get data to inform their work, to identify what communities can do to become age-friendly. Everyone has a story. Here's Tom Croswell again.

Tom Croswell: Well I'm from a kind of typical New England family, a family of six, four children. My dad was a World War II veteran, a very proud and independent, probably the strongest willed, most independent person that I've ever known. Unfortunately, he was impacted by dementia in his early to mid-80s. As a family, we struggled to find the right solution to help him cope with the disease.

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Narrator: Supporting families, improving health and wellness, that's our mission. We don't work alone. Here are some of our partners: The Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative, Alliance for Healthy Aging in New Hampshire, and Age-Friendly Rhode Island, to name some. We always work with partners, and everything, every action we take is based on community voices. Last year we invested 2.9 million dollars and 43 grants that engage 650 community groups. We collaborate with state, regional, and national leaders, and because you need a blueprint to make change, we supported the age-friendly Boston Action Plan. Here's Emily Shea, Commissioner of Elderly Affairs for Boston.

Emily Shea: Getting older is not just about existing or getting by, but about thriving and living well. I'm proud to introduce someone else who believes strongly in this mission, my boss Mayor Walsh.

Narrator: Mayor Martin Walsh says he began to realize older people needed help when he was a state legislator. He met seniors who didn't have enough money to pay for their prescription drugs so they had stopped taking them. Recently, he listened to groups of city seniors, and that led to the Action Plan, which lays out the steps to make real change.

Martin Walsh: In 2014 Boston joined the World Health Organization's global network of age-friendly cities. In Boston, we have great respect for our older residents, and we want to make sure that our older residents understand and know that you were the ones that built the city. You were the ones that built the city through different types of struggles for everybody, and we want to thank you for that. We need to make sure that we wouldn't be the city we are today without the great seniors that we have living in our city.

Narrator: Foundation president, Nora Moreno Cargie adds this, "We do not decide the issues, community members do. They are the architects." So, let's hear how it works.

Speaker: I'm thinking as to whether or not, when I do retire, should I stay here or not? I'm wondering as far as services and stuff like that, I know-

Narrator: Slip into a meeting for Manchester residents hosting by the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, another foundation grantee. On this day conversation moves from parks to shuttle buses, and to the possibility of free bus passes. Cindy Lafond is from the Manchester YMCA and originally worked with local landlords to get free parking, but now they're finding out that the older adults need more flexibility.

Cindy Lafond: They want to stay longer than two hours, but then they need to pay for that, and as seniors they're watching every penny. That's one of the struggles, because they like to stay and socialize because a lot of them live at home by themselves.

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- Narrator: These specific details are the clues to solutions that emerge when you listen when you're in conversation with people. Let's go to Brighton, to 30 Wallingford Road, inside the doors there's a vibrant energy. Clusters of people come and go, it feels like a dormitory, complete with ping pong and a pool table.
- Amy Schectman: The biggest public health threat to healthy aging is chronic loneliness, and that's now, you know, is more significant than smoking or obesity or any of the other. Community is the best antidote to loneliness ever invented, so what we call our special sauce, we call it aging in community and we just define that as every older person should have the opportunity to live a full life of connection and purpose in a dynamic, supportive environment. People don't, people are not meant to be alone.
- Narrator: Amy Schectman is the president and CEO of the Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly. Bella, who lives here, says it's about waking up to a wide horizon.
- Bella: Speaking in Russian
- Translator: Okay, what Bella is saying that she doesn't want to be surrounded just with four walls of her apartment, so when she wakes up, she already knows that she can go to do exercise. If not the exercise, she would go to computer room, so she knows that she has all this activities and her depression goes away by this. That's how she feels.
- Narrator: Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly also offers an onsite nurse, making it easier for people to stay healthy. Many, many older adults have said they want to age in their own homes and we are looking at ways to do this. Housing is one of the most complicated areas to make changes in.
- Let's drive now to Framingham, and find 88 Waverly Street. A two-story building by a railroad track.
- Recorded voice: You have reached the Latino Health Insurance Program, if you need assistance ...
- Narrator: Walk into the Health Center and it's like a clubhouse: jokes, hugs, Spanish, Portuguese.
- Voice speaking
- Narrator: Dr. Milagros Abreu, the director, wanted to reach those who are lost to the healthcare system. She designed a program that brings in entire families.
- Milagros Abreu: Sometimes we have the husband, the wife participating because, and sometimes the person who purchased the food is not the one with the disease. So, we wanted to make sure that those who prepare the food as well get

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educated about these programs and we have been very successful in getting that too.

Narrator: Dr. Abreu met with Ezekiel, who has diabetes, and then invited him and his wife Thelma to learn about healthy eating.

Thelma: Speaking in Spanish

Ezekiel: Si.

Thelma: Speaking in Spanish

Narrator: Now Thelma says, "Everything goes in the oven. Fish, chicken, nothing's fried anymore." That's why we too take a holistic approach to our work. Understanding that everyone wants communities that thrive and meet their needs. We are all in this for the long haul. And sneaker-wearing Alice Bonner, secretary for the governor's work on aging in Massachusetts, says it's best to work together to get to where we're going and to get there fast.

Alice Bonner: Ageism is this notion that you make assumptions about people based on how old they are, and those assumptions might be negative, and we have to get past that. Age-friendly communities gives us a framework to demonstrate the incredible knowledge, expertise, strength, passion that you all have and that you bring to our cities and towns. We are truly committed to stamping out ageism, to helping the public to understand that I'm not getting older, I'm gaining momentum.

Narrator: The Tufts Health Plan Foundation will continue to seek out best practices, and we will keep listening. Visit our website, www.TuftsHealthPlanFoundation.org.