

**New Hampshire State Commission on Aging  
Monday, October 16, 2023, 10 am to 12 noon  
NH Hospital Association, 125 Airport Road, Concord, NH**

**Attendance:**

**Present in person:** Susan Ruka, Chair; Rep James MacKay; Wendi Altman, DHHS; Susan Buxton, Long-Term Care Ombudsman; Tracy McGraw, DOL; Roberta Berner; Polly Campion; Doug McNutt; Representative Lucy McVitty Weber; Carol Stamatakis, Thomas Kaempfer DOS, Christa Clapp in lieu of Sunny Mulligan Shea (DOJ), Suzanne Demers, Dan Marcek, Kristi St. Laurent, Beth Quarm Todgham, Joanne Ward, Beverly Bjorklund, Carissa Elphick, Margaret Franckhauser.

**Online:** Roxie Severance, Shelley Winters, Laurie Duff, David Ross.

**Guest speaker:** Dr. Robert McLaughlin-National Collaborative on Digital Equity ([www.nhdigitalequity.org](http://www.nhdigitalequity.org))

**Present Staff:** Rebecca Sky, Executive Director; Chris Dugan, Communications and Engagement Director; Karen Knowles, Director of Special Projects

**Absent:** Richard Lavers; Jack Ruderman, Susan Nolan

**I. Welcome and Attendance, Approval of minutes**

Chair Sue Ruka welcomed all to the meeting and called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. She conducted a roll call attendance asking commission members to introduce themselves.

**Rep. Lucy Weber made a motion to approve the minutes, and Tracy McGraw seconded. All were in favor. Roxie Severance and Laurie Duff, online, voted to approve.**

**II. Review COA Annual report**

Sue Ruka thanked Executive Director Rebecca Sky for the phenomenal job she did on the report, stating it was a rich report with great information. Rebecca Sky thanked Commission Members for their help on the report, saying she was grateful to have such an engaged group of members. She said that the Annual Report is an opportunity to validate the work the Commission has done. Rebecca led the review of the report section by section allowing for Commission Members to recommend areas for improvement or add ideas or issues not presented.

Rebecca said the report begins with the Commission's mission, vision and values, the list of Commission members, a quick take on Commission activity over the past year, followed by an introduction to four priorities the Commission has for NH. The remainder is divided into four sections, one for each of the four priorities, the progress over the previous year with recommendations for the Governor and legislature for next steps. She asked Commission Members for their feedback on each section.

**Strengthening Systems of Care for Healthy Aging Section Feedback:**

- One Commission Member asked if there was a role for NHCOA in helping or supporting local efforts to support older people in their community. They felt it would be important to recognize the value of nonprofits and informal community initiatives to the system of care. These have the added value of local social connection and often address transportation, home modification, or grocery shopping needs. Several suggestions were made to achieve this addition, including reiterating page 18's civic

engagement section. Another suggested naming the Village Model as an example and as something to be supported and replicated. This conversation ended with empowering Rebecca to develop an addition to this section with this intent.

- A Commission member expressed strong agreement with the next steps related to ServiceLink. They felt there was a need for a public awareness campaign.
- The same member suggested the Commission in the future consider the question of reorganizing NH DHHS to elevate aging services within the infrastructure. NH DHHS has been reorganized in the past. One previous iteration organized more services used by older adults under one roof, which created efficiencies and supported rapid problem resolution. Other states have elevated aging services as its own department and/or Governor cabinet level positions.
- In the provider network section on page 9, it was suggested that “for example” be added and include hearing impairment, gender, sexual orientation, etc. It was suggested that adding a few examples was good, but to also say “including, not limited to”.

#### **Grow the Direct Care Workforce Section Feedback:**

- Rebecca reminded attendees about the previous Commission meeting conversation to include “inclusion of older adults in the workplace” in this section. Rebecca stated she found this difficult to do effectively. She brought the question back to the Operational Infrastructure Taskforce who agreed to keep this section focused on the direct care workforce but suggested that “inclusion of older adults in the workplace” top of the next priority.
- Rebecca thanked Roxie Severance for her instrumental role organizing input to this section using her experience advancing the Healthcare Sector Partnership Initiative. Roxie facilitated a group of workforce professionals to provide feedback on drafts of this section.
- Commission members agreed to adding tuition assistance and student debt relief on page 12 along with scholarships.

#### **Advance Age Friendly Policies, Systems and Environments Section Feedback:**

- It was recommended that transportation terms be updated and to break out mobility management on top of page 15. Shelley Winters offered to work with Rebecca on updating the language in this section.

#### **Multisector Plan for Aging Feedback:**

- Rebecca gave a brief overview of how New Hampshire is part of a national learning collaborative. Going forward this group will be seeking legislative, public/community engagement in the process. She said the end result would be a 10-year vision for New Hampshire.
- A recommendation was made to add the 10-year mental health plan to the list of plans the top of page 19.

**Rep. Lucy Weber made a motion to approve the Annual Report with edits. Susan Buxton seconded; all were in favor. Roxie Severance, Shelley Winters, and Laurie Duff, online, voted to approve.**

#### **III. Digital Equity Plan – Dr. Robert McLaughlin, National Collaborative on Digital Equity**

Dr. McLaughlin began his presentation by complimenting the group for their excellent work with the Annual Report. He said it was a treat to listen to our accomplishments and work.

Dr. McLaughlin said there will be \$196 million in Federal money coming to New Hampshire over the next five-plus years related to access to broadband – the majority going towards infrastructure development

(deploying or upgrading broadband networks to reach all parts of the state) through the Broadband Equity Access and Development (BEAD) program.

Dr. McLaughlin said he was working with UNH Cooperative Extension and NH Bureau of Economic Affairs (BEA) on the digital equity part of this effort charged with creating a Digital Equity Plan for NH focused on the creation of community-centric solutions to improve digital literacy, cyber safety, affordability of broadband, online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources, and availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support. Older Adults are one of the target populations identified in the program. This part of the work has a budget of \$5 million a year for four years starting in 2024. They have hosted listening sessions across the state to inform the development of the NH Plan for Digital Equity that will outline NH's goals for improving digital equity and how it anticipates spending the federal dollars to achieve them. An online survey closes October 17<sup>th</sup> and he encouraged members of the Commission to complete it.

Dr. McLaughlin shared elements of this plan to date:

- Funding for the next 5 years (or more) to improve digital equity, these funds will commence in June of 2024.
- An 18-member advisory board will be established - 2 people from each of the nine regional planning commissions - to inform investments over each year of federal funding. This advisory board will oversee half the funds, 2.5M per year.
- The National Collaborative for Digital Equity will work with the nine regional Planning Commissions to create regional advisory board with regional stakeholders to discuss regional concerns and recommend regional investments. The spending of the other half of the funds (2.5M per year) will be overseen by these regional advisory boards. They will also provide recommendations to the 18-member statewide advisory board.
- The dimensions of inclusion to be addressed in the plan include expansion of opportunities in the areas of: economic (Work), education, health care access, civic engagement, and housing.
- Statewide broadband mapping through a competitive bid process administered by BEA.
- Commitment to bringing broadband to every address in the state.
- Bringing all households up to faster speeds.
- Bringing broadband to community anchor organizations such as, libraries, schools, senior centers, healthcare centers, and community centers.
- Commitment to affordable access for lower-income households.
- Commitment to requiring digital literacy education in every community to address the issue that 49% of NH residents do not feel safe online. CyberSeniors.org was a mentioned resource.
- Commitment to ensuring all are connected, including low-income, older adults, people living with disabilities, limited English proficient individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, the incarcerated, veterans, people living in rural areas.
- Increased telehealth capabilities.
- Building Collaborations with Businesses who can contribute to local access by providing funding for equipment. Two examples given: Banks are being asked to use CRA money to purchase computers for schools and Delta Dental is providing funds to refurbish computers.
- Local providers will be encouraged to participate in this process/program.
- Stipends for teachers who do after-school programs.
- Assistance to 211 in becoming more user friendly.

Dr. McLaughlin's ask is that we become involved in our regional planning commissions. He also mentioned the need for a ballpark funding estimate on what would it cost to provide devices and connectivity to older adults. This funding estimate is needed as soon as possible, as he is presenting a preliminary budget on October 19<sup>th</sup>. A final budget will be presented in January.

Commission members had a few comments for Dr. McLaughlin:

- Regional public health networks could help connect those leading efforts to those in need. Also, given the outreach public health networks do in their communities, they could be considered anchor institutions.
- Hospital Community benefit money could be leveraged by this project.
- The need is great in the North Country where the digital highway is not populated enough.
- Concern was raised that digital literacy educators and other tech support have criminal background checks.
- What is affordable? Current policies offering discounts to low-income households are not adequate. And how will affordability be maintained after the grant period?
- Other possible "anchor institutions" could be Meals on Wheels providers, the Senior Companion Program, Senior Centers. The Senior Companion program arranges Zoom visits with family members for older adults with limited mobility. For people who cannot operate or maintain technology themselves, their facilitation has provided critical social connections.
- If assistance is being provided to 211 to make it more user friendly, another public resource used by older adults is the online database used by ServiceLink. Providing assistance to make the database more accessible and inclusive would be extremely valuable for older adults.

Commission members interested in putting together input to the Digital Equity Planning Efforts on behalf of the Commission based on this conversation via an ad hoc meeting were asked to connect with Rebecca after the meeting.

Matt Conserva at the NH Dept. of Business and Economic Affairs is overseeing much of this work for the State.

Susan Ruka thanked Dr. McLaughlin for his presentation. Rebecca Sky asked members to send their ideas to her.

Wendy Aultman's report that the State Plan on Aging was received and approved by the Administration for Community Living with a hearty round of applause.

**IV. Public input** - There was no public input.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxie A. Severance, Clerk