



Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA) is pleased to have the opportunity to submit comments in response to the Request for Information (RFI) that has been issued by the New York Academy of Medicine on the Age Friendly New York City Initiative. For over 85 years, FPWA has been the leading policy advocate for individuals and families served by our more than 300 member agencies and churches in and around New York City. We share a particular concern for the elderly.

Our answers to the questions in the RFI are in response to the Community and Health Services section; most specifically the area on the checklist that discusses the adequate ranges of health and community support services for promoting, maintaining and restoring health.

1) What are the age-friendly barriers in New York City?

FPWA believes one of the chief age-friendly barriers in New York City is the limited funds that are allocated for critical health-related programs to aid the growing number of elderly. Given that New York City's older adult population is expected to grow by over 44% from 2000 to 2030, there will be a need for additional resources for these types of community-based programs.

Two examples of innovative programs that could be expanded and offered more readily to seniors if additional funding were available include geriatric mental health services and healthy aging programs. The need for additional geriatric mental health services offered in nontraditional settings throughout the city cannot be overstated. Statistics show that the number of elderly needing mental health services nationwide is expected to grow from 7 to 14 million over the next several decades, with approximately 800,000 of those seniors residing in New York State.

Additionally, funding was recently allocated in New York City's 2007-08 Budget for the New York City Healthy Aging Initiative. Agencies operating senior centers have implemented programs that focus on such important topics as early detection of diseases, immunization, injury prevention, and self-management techniques. Aging initiatives promoting health and wellness activities have been shown to lower the risk of social isolation and decrease long-term care and hospitalization costs. These types of senior programs have been implemented across the country as well. Other states have developed projects such as falls prevention programs, cholesterol screening and awareness campaigns as well as addiction education and prevention initiatives.

2) Where is there room for improvement?

Significant strides have been made in New York City in that several million dollars in funding has been appropriated for essential geriatric mental health services and healthy aging programs. Additional advocacy and planning strategies need to be undertaken to build upon the level of funding that is currently provided so additional programs can be developed and implemented.

3) What specific policy solutions/changes ought to be implemented to address the barriers?

As NYAM conducts its resource and data assessments throughout communities, FPWA suggests collecting information from seniors themselves and officials of City Planning on specifically where additional geriatric mental health and healthy aging programs are needed in communities. Also, there is a need to further explore potential funding sources for programming throughout this assessment phase in order to complement the already existing funding provided by city government.

It is also suggested that NYAM investigate whether funding is available from foundations, corporations and other sources for geriatric mental health and healthy aging programs that has not yet been accessed. Additionally, another strategy is that NYAM encourage potential funders to support these critical types of initiatives.

In conclusion, recognizing the growing number of elderly in New York City, there needs to be sufficient funding for healthy aging and geriatric mental health programs. Advocacy strategies need to be undertaken to acquire additional resources for these programs so that people can manage their own diseases and get services to help them remain in the comfort of their homes and communities; averting premature and costly nursing home placement.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the RFI. Please contact Kathleen Fitzgibbons, Senior Policy Analyst for Elderly Welfare/Youth Services at kfitzgibbons@fpwa.org or 212-801-1341 for additional information or assistance.

Sincerely,

Fatima Goldman
Executive Director/CEO