

Blaine House Conference on Aging

Listening to Older Mainers

The Blaine House Conference on Aging was more than just a one-day event. It was part of a much larger, ongoing process to involve Maine's older persons in the creation of policies and programs that affect them.

The process began in March 2006, when Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) urged the State of Maine to bring back the Blaine House Conference on Aging after a 16-year hiatus. Governor Baldacci and Commissioner of Health and Human Services Brenda Harvey agreed that this was an excellent idea.

The Office of Elder Services then created a Steering Committee to help plan for the conference. Participants included representatives of the AAAs, AARP, Alzheimer's Association-Maine Chapter, Council of Senior Citizens, Elder Law Section of the Maine Bar Association, Keeping Seniors Home, Legal Services for the Elderly, the Long Term Care Ombudsman, Maine Center on Aging at the University of Maine, and the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine. We thank the Steering Committee for their invaluable guidance.

In August 2006, the AAAs coordinated and supported 15 local forums to explore issues and identify delegates for the Blaine House Conference on Aging. More than 300 people participated in forums held in Bangor, Calais, Dover-Foxcroft, Ellsworth, Fort Kent, Hallowell, Houlton, Lisbon, Millinocket, Newcastle, Presque Isle, South Paris, Scarborough, Wells, and Wilton. We thank the AAAs for their strong and continuing commitment to older Mainers.

On September 21, Governor Baldacci and Commissioner Harvey convened the Blaine House Conference on Aging. During the conference—

- Laurie Lachance, Executive Director of the Maine Development Foundation, shared riveting demographic information in her presentation, entitled "The Face of Aging in Maine."
- Delegates met in eight smaller group sessions to explore a variety of topics—caregivers of long term care services (paid), caregivers of long term care services (family members), community involvement/ volunteerism, creative housing and services, elder abuse, employment, healthy aging, and transportation.
- The full conference voted on 25 action resolutions reported out from the smaller group sessions. These are being shared with executive branch officials, legislators, and community leaders to help guide them as they develop and carry out aging policies in the coming months and years.

Twenty-Five Action Resolutions

Delegates at the Blaine House Conference on Aging participated in one of eight smaller group sessions to explore a variety of topics—paid caregivers of long term care services, caregivers of long term care services who are family members, community involvement/volunteerism, creative housing and services, elder abuse, employment, healthy aging, and transportation.

The full conference voted on the following 25 action resolutions reported out from the smaller group sessions. These are being shared with executive branch officials, legislators, and community leaders to help guide them as they develop and carry out aging policies in the months and years ahead.

Issues	Action Resolutions
Caregivers (Family)	1. Do not adopt proposed DHHS rule that compensation payments to family caregivers be treated as a gift for the purposes of determining eligibility.
	2. Provide family caregivers entering the long term care system with well-publicized and centralized access to needed information and educational resources.
	3. Provide tax credits for unpaid caregivers.
	4. Require that comprehensive plans for municipalities include a component addressing senior issues.
Caregivers (Paid)	5. Increase the pay and benefits for direct care workers to a living wage.
	6. Provide good training and pay direct care workers for the level of training and difficulty of the work they perform. Value the work they do.
	7. Provide opportunities for worker involvement in collaborative decision-making.
Community Involvement/ Volunteerism	8. Provide and/or modify stipends / incentives for volunteers and organizations.
	9. Designate regional offices as clearinghouses for recruitment, education, and recognition.
	10. Outreach— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to ask for volunteers. • Take an inter-generational approach.

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Creative Housing and Services	11. Actively work with federal, state and private sectors to prioritize and support seniors' ability to stay safely and securely at home, including incentives and resources for things such as home modifications, repairs, and supportive in-home services.
	12. Expand affordable housing alternatives/arrangements for people with dementia and other special needs.
	13. Develop cooperative models that are inter-generational, community-based and that promote elders helping elders and families helping families with coordinated assistance from government (federal, state and local) and from the private sector.
Elder Abuse	14. Create a powerful educational marketing campaign to highlight the problem of elder abuse in Maine, led and supported by the highest government officials in the State.
	15. Establish a task force to review elder abuse legal issues and recommend legislative actions relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration and licensing of home contractors, • Requiring financial institutions to be mandated reporters, • Requiring background checks for all unlicensed assistive personnel, and • Amending the improvident transfer of titles to include transfers that occur at the time of death.
	16. Create a broad-based effort to educate people who work with seniors, including where they can go to report and get help. This education would include anyone involved, including home care assistance, health care, professionals, and non-professionals.
Employment	17. Establish a work group to review senior employment issues and recommend legislative actions to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify laws that are barriers to senior employment, • Promote best practices in senior employment, • Alleviate benefit reductions for working seniors, • Undertake a public education campaign to promote the value of seniors, and • Establish a senior corps.

Issues	Action Resolutions
Employment continued	18. Undertake an initiative—involving chambers of commerce, business associations, and all state agencies involved with seniors and employment—to educate employers and businesses about the value of senior workers, how to attract and retain them, and how to implement senior-friendly policies.
	19. Ensure that ‘no senior is left behind’ by establishing an all-inclusive interactive senior website and establishing several pilot training programs to develop best practices for senior employment training.
Healthy Aging	20. Ensure that elders have affordable access to and education about all the drugs they <u>truly</u> need by urging: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congress to eliminate restrictions on negotiating discounted prices on drugs through Medicare Part D, • Maine AARP to lobby for the elimination of these restrictions, and • The DHHS Office of Elder Services and all agencies serving the elders to publicize the availability of low cost drugs through MaineR(x) or the pharmaceutical companies, using all media (e.g. TV, PSAs).
	21. Bring together partners to create a sound plan for preventive services and programs to enhance physical and mental health, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All life stages, • Collaborating to find outside funding, • Determining legislative action, and • Coordinating across programs.
	22. It is possible to age in a healthy way. Communication and having information available on a local level are essential. Increase communication and outreach by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating older Mainers to be better self-advocates in the health care system, • Getting prevention information to health care providers, • Putting flyers in everyone’s mailbox about local services, • Getting information on aging to community organizations,

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Healthy Aging continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting information on aging to local legislators, and • Using Area Agencies on Aging newsletters, community newspapers, public access TV, and PSAs.
Transportation	23. Create an information clearinghouse to keep seniors aware of available services, including transportation and 211.
	24. Develop an integrated bus network, including all publicly funded systems (even school buses): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That provides a reliable, regular schedule for older people and people with disabilities, • In which payment for services takes into account one's ability to pay, and • That will happen now!
	25. Have a "transportation tsar", appointed by the Governor to focus on transportation for older Mainers, whose job is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee a line item in the state budget for transportation funding for older Mainers, • Serve as a watchdog and ensure adequate funding, and • Monitor and report back on implementation of funded programs.