

STATE OF MAINE
FIRST YEAR REPORT

2023-2024



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF
**Policy Innovation
and the Future**



GOVERNOR'S
Cabinet on Aging



BACKGROUND

Creation of the Governor's Cabinet on Aging

Governor Mills established the Cabinet on Aging by Executive Order in June 2022 to eliminate silos across state government, enhance communication, and accelerate actions to help every person in Maine age safely, affordably, in ways and settings that best serve individual needs.

Maine's Cabinet on Aging members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Public Safety, Professional and Financial Regulation, Economic and Community Development, and Administrative and Financial Services, as well as the Director of the Maine State Housing Authority. The Cabinet is co-chaired by Commissioner Lambrew of the Department of Health and Human Services and Commissioner Fortman of the Department of Labor. In collaboration with key staff from each of these agencies, the work of the Governor's Cabinet is coordinated by staff in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF).

The Cabinet on Aging plays a vital role in convening and facilitating coordination across state agencies on initiatives and policies that improve and promote safety, health, and engagement of older adults in Maine. The Cabinet convened seven times in the first eighteen months. Meetings are held virtually and are open to the public. In between Cabinet meetings,

staff from the Departments comprising the Cabinet on Aging meet regularly to maintain open communication about changes and developments in programming and policies across state agencies supporting older adults and caregivers, coordinate the implementation of specific strategies, and identify new opportunities to collaborate across programs to advance the Cabinet's strategies and goals.

The work of the Cabinet is rooted in the principle of inclusion and equity, and that Maine benefits from the involvement, experience, and knowledge of older adults in every aspect of our community and economy. This includes recognizing the diversity of older adults and ensuring that policy and programming is inclusive and addresses unique needs. Addressing ageism is a shared focus and the Cabinet recognizes the efforts of many community partners to create an age-positive Maine. Initiatives such as the Maine Council on Aging's Power in Aging and Leadership Exchange on Aging are helping to raise awareness and move action on ending ageism and promoting age-positivity. As the oldest state in the nation by median age and by percentage of population age 65 and older, Maine can build on its history of collaboration and partnership to be a leader in creating innovative and meaningful change to improve the lives of older adults and caregivers and create stronger communities that benefit everyone.



The Role of the Cabinet on Aging

- To elevate opportunities for inclusion and engagement of older adults.
- To promote communication and coordination across state agencies.
- To incorporate an “aging lens” across state policies, programming, and planning.

Key State and Community Partners for the Cabinet

The Cabinet recognizes and appreciates the work and commitment of state, regional, and community partners, all of whom share a common goal to improve the lives of older Mainers. As the federally designated State Unit on Aging under the Older Americans Act (OAA), the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) at Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) works closely with Maine’s network of community organizations serving older adults under the OAA. This network includes Maine’s five Area Agencies on Aging, the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, and Legal Services for Maine Elders. This interconnected structure of agencies helps with coordinated planning and provision of services that support older people to live comfortably in their homes and communities. Many other organizations, including providers of service, advocates, community-based organizations, caregivers, volunteers, and countless others, contribute to advancing the health, safety, and well-being of older people.

A Note about Language

Language plays an important role in creating an age-positive society. Language in this report follows the recommendations of the [National Center to Reframe Aging](#) and uses “older people” or “older adults” interchangeably. References to supporting Mainers “of all ages” generally means that the strategies address historic or current access and other barriers experienced primarily by older people but have the potential to benefit everyone. Similarly, references to independence are used in connection with individual choice and self-determination, reflecting the reality that each one of us relies on people, services, and systems for most aspects of daily life. We acknowledge that societal language used to describe aging, older people, and aging services is currently in transition and may differ based on individual preference or cultural background. Some of the word choices included in this report reflect language currently in use in Maine state statutes, regulations, and programming but inclusive, age-neutral language is used whenever possible.

THE CABINET ON AGING IS FOCUSED ON STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING GOALS



- Sustainable Living**
Create sustainable living for aging in our communities
- Community Connection**
Support community connections to improve quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults
- Active Retirement**
Engage older adults in active retirement by supporting employment and volunteer opportunities

WORK PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Between July and December 2022, the Cabinet on Aging met twice to begin developing priorities and a work plan to guide activities in 2023 and beyond. To appropriately set priorities and activities, planning requires the input of people with firsthand experience. The Cabinet hosted two virtual listening sessions in the fall of 2022 to hear directly from older adults and caregivers about the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of aging in Maine. Based on this input, and working with staff across the different state agencies, the Cabinet developed three primary, and interconnected, areas of focus: supporting sustainable living for older adults in communities; supporting community connections that improve quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults; and engaging older residents in active retirement by supporting work and volunteer opportunities.

In early 2023, the Cabinet developed short and long-term strategies for each focus area. These strategies were identified as those that would require or benefit from cross-agency collaboration and partnership. The complete [workplan](#) is included as an appendix to this report. These strategies correlate closely to the domains of livability that are the backbone of Maine's Age Friendly State designation.

In 2019, Governor Mills and AARP announced Maine's designation as an Age Friendly State, one of six states to receive this designation. This designation represents partnerships at every level of community and government to support Mainers of all ages to live, work, and retire in the state. Maine engaged multiple stakeholders and community leaders throughout 2020 in drafting an [Age-Friendly State Plan](#). Two committees, the Age-Friendly State Advisory Committee, and the Age-Friendly State Steering Committee, worked throughout the year to create Maine-focused Age Friendly domains (see box below). While displayed separately, these domains interrelate and are highly interconnected. The Cabinet's work builds on these past efforts.



Maine's Age Friendly Domains of Livability

- Respect, Equity, and Social Engagement
- Accessible Communication and Information
- Employment & Financial Security
- Health Coverage, Health Care, Healthy Aging and Supportive Services
- Housing
- Natural Resource Management, Outdoor Spaces, and Recreation
- Transportation



WORK IN 2023 AND BEYOND

This section describes key activities of the Cabinet and state agencies over the last year that relate to the goals and strategies established by the Cabinet for 2023-2025. In recognition that many of the challenges identified are systemic or chronic in nature, these strategies often reflect multi-year or on-going efforts. This report provides a snapshot of on-going work and does not encompass the full efforts underway across agencies to improve the lives of older adults and strengthen community inclusion.

Advancing Elder Justice

All Mainers deserve to be safe, secure, and able to flourish at every stage of life. To support a just society for all people, we must all address elder abuse. Maine has a rich history of engaging in regional and state-wide collaborative work to advance elder justice. To further these efforts, Governor Mills established by Executive Order on October 23, 2019 the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership (EJCP), a broad coalition including members from both the public and private sectors. The charge of the EJCP was to identify challenges to the prevention of, detection of, and response to elder abuse and to develop strategic priorities across the public and private sectors to prevent and respond to elder abuse. This work culminated in the creation of [Maine's Elder Justice Roadmap](#) in December 2021, a comprehensive and visionary set of recommendations to advance elder justice goals. Several Cabinet members or their staff are represented on the EJCP, including the Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (DPFR), and DHHS.

To support the continued commitment of EJCP members and implementation of the Roadmap's recommendations, the Cabinet successfully applied for, and was one of eight states to receive, funding through the National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions to fund a coordinator position for the EJCP. This grant runs through September 2025 and will help advance continued progress. Maine has already shown its commitment by investing over \$4 million in the FY24-25 biennial budget to implement several recommendations, including:

- Making permanent the Elder Service Connections program to connect Adult Protective Services (APS) clients to services, allowing APS to refer clients to an Elder Advocate through the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine who can help with arranging services and setting client-centered goals. Originally piloted in 2018 as a grant-funded research project, the Elder Services Connections program has operated successfully statewide since 2021 and will now be sustained into the future with this funding.

"Tens of thousands of older Mainers experience elder abuse every year. By working together, public and private sector entities can help decrease the incidence of elder abuse in our state. We look forward to working closely with the Governor's Cabinet on Aging to elevate the importance of this work and support implementation of the recommendations in the Elder Justice Roadmap."

**—Jaye Martin, Executive Director of
Legal Services for Maine Elders and Co-chair of the EJCP.**



- Expanding APS capacity at OADS to prevent and respond to elder abuse by creating 10 positions statewide within APS.
- Supporting civil legal services for older adults by increasing the capacity of Legal Services for Maine Elders, which offers free legal assistance to Mainers aged 60 and older.
- Funding for the Office of Attorney General to support restructuring of the Maine Elder Death Analysis Review Team (MEDART).

As of 2023, Maine requires training every four years of all mandatory reporters of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. OADS also released an [APS Data Trends Report](#) covering State Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022. The release of the report fulfills a priority recommendation of the Elder Justice Roadmap and will help identify trends and patterns and develop ongoing recommendations for system improvement.

To further help address financial exploitation and raise awareness of scams, DPF’s Office of Securities and DPS have partnered with others, including Maine AARP and the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention, to create a series of YouTube

videos. Additionally, the Office of Securities continues to produce and run a series of Public Service Announcements (PSAs). The YouTube videos and PSAs have proven to be a positive and effective method for increasing awareness and engaging families in important conversations about scams, frauds, and how to protect family, friends, and neighbors. DPF continues to partner with the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention and APS on SeniorSafe™, a training initiative to increase identification and reporting by financial institutions of suspected cases of elder financial exploitation.

Strengthening Community Connections

A key priority of the Cabinet is to strengthen collaboration and partnership between Maine as an Age Friendly State and the Lifelong communities around shared goals. Maine has long been a national leader in endorsing Age Friendly principles and leads the country in its number of Lifelong and Age Friendly communities. Over one hundred communities have been designated as AARP Age Friendly communities or use a similar framework (together referred to as “Lifelong Communities”). Primarily volunteer driven,

these community initiatives provide a range of activities and services based on individual community needs and resources that help address essential needs such as food security, transportation, and socialization. Knowledge of their communities and trusted relationships are key strengths of Maine's Lifelong Communities.

One of the first activities of the Cabinet on Aging Coordinator was to visit communities across the state to see and hear first-hand about the value and strength of these community efforts as well as their needs and suggestions. This work is part of ensuring partnership between Maine as an Age Friendly State and Maine's Lifelong communities and aligning strategies around shared our goals.

To further partnerships at the state, local, and regional level, the Cabinet recently launched a \$2.5 million project, known as the [Community Connections Pilot](#). This project is funded under Section 9817 of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 to support and strengthen the critical work already underway at the grass-roots level. Led by the Governor's Cabinet on Aging, this initiative will develop and pilot a first-of-its-kind integrated community-based navigation program. The goal of this project is to support sustainable living in community by connecting older adults through local and trusted partners to state, regional, and community services that meet critical needs. Past studies have shown that older people are often unaware of available resources, are not sure where to go for information, and tend to rely on people they trust for information or help. Reducing barriers and improving access to information about available services and resources is an identified priority of the Governor's Cabinet on Aging. In addition to the Lifelong communities, Maine's Area Agencies on Aging and University of Maine's Center on Aging are key partners in implementing this initiative.

This investment recognizes that local communities and regional social services providers provide a critical set of early intervention and low-cost supports

“The organizations and volunteers leading Lifelong Maine's age friendly communities are transforming their communities so that residents of all ages can live healthy, socially connected lives. This new funding opportunity represents a significant investment in support of this work. It builds on local relationships, recognizing the key role that neighbors play to create connections to social, community and other essential resources. We are excited to be part of this innovative initiative with the Cabinet on Aging and community partners.”



**—Patricia Oh,
Lifelong Maine Program Manager,
University of Maine Center on Aging**

that help postpone or avoid the need for higher cost services. Supporting community-level efforts to help older adults living at home is part of a broader approach to redefining and visioning the delivery of long-term services and supports (LTSS) moving into the future.

Supporting Sustainable Living

In addition to the Community Connections initiatives, the Cabinet and state agency members have been working on a variety of initiatives that support sustainable living so all Mainers can age safely, affordably, and in ways and settings that best meet our individual needs and preferences.

Housing

Governor Mills has committed more than \$180 million to address Maine’s housing shortage, more than any other previous governor. To date, these investments have resulted in more than 1,500 housing units being built, or in the pipeline to be built, across Maine. Even with unprecedented investments in housing production, however, the lack of affordable and accessible housing remains a significant challenge across the state and remains a top focus of this administration, the Legislature, as well as public and private sector partners. A key [Housing Production Needs Study](#) was issued in the fall of 2023 that provided important baseline data for future planning that focuses on the relationship between housing production, population, and economic growth at a statewide and regional level.

While the need for additional and affordable housing is urgent among all populations, housing for older adults continues to be a focus for this Administration. Within days of becoming Governor in 2019, Governor Mills released a \$15 million senior housing bond, which has provided 411 affordable housing units for older Mainers in 11 sites. Since then, there have been

about 1,300 additional units built or in the process of construction. These projects are specifically intended for adults age 55 and older and do not include affordable housing projects that are not restricted by age but where older adults may reside.

Cabinet strategies have also focused on developing other options to help address housing needs for older adults and family members. A recent change in state zoning law now allows anyone with a single-family dwelling in an area where housing is permitted to build an accessory dwelling unit (ADU). Recognizing that financing and construction complexities are barriers to expanded use of ADUs, [Resolves 2023 ch.107](#) tasked GOPIF to convene a group to explore ways to these barriers for people interested in purchasing and building ADUs. A [Report](#) for the Legislature and the public was issued in November 2023. Consistent with the Report’s recommendations, DHHS is implementing a pilot in 2024 using Section 9817 ARP Act dollars to explore financing options for use of prefabricated accessible ADUs.



The Cabinet is also participating in implementation of [Resolves 2023 ch. 108](#) that directs MaineHousing to develop a statewide home share pilot program focused on older adults. Home sharing programs are typically aimed at helping to match older adults who have spare rooms in their home to adults in need of affordable housing. In exchange for providing a private room in their home, the host receives rent, and in some cases, light household assistance in exchange for reduced rent. MaineHousing issued a request for proposals in the fall of 2023, and in January 2024, contracted with a vendor to implement and administer these services.

Food Insecurity

Rising costs are creating barriers to food security for many Mainers. Significant efforts are underway to create a hunger-free future guided by [Maine's Road Map to End Hunger by 2030](#). This work is coordinated by the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future relying on the voices and efforts of a broad range of stakeholders and partnership organizations. Consistent with principles guiding the work of the Cabinet on Aging, a key focus of the anti-hunger work is shifting the narrative about food insecurity away from individual blame to an understanding of the historic, social, and economic forces which create and perpetuate poverty—and thus food insecurity and the lack of other basic needs.

The topic of food insecurity and nutrition is also a major focus of the State Plan on Aging, which provides for home delivered and congregate meal services administered through the Area Agencies on Aging as part of the federal Older Americans Act. During the public health pandemic, demand for home delivered meals significantly increased and was supported by federal COVID relief funding. With the tapering of this federal funding, the budget signed by Governor Mills included \$2,286,048 in state general fund dollars to support an additional 270,000 meals in SFY 23 and 375,000 meals in SFY 24. This represents an unprecedented investment in this program and allows the Area Agencies on Aging to sustain the delivery of about 1 million meals per year.

To increase participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a food assistance program that is underutilized by older adults, DHHS has been working in partnership with the aging network and other community partners to develop and circulate targeted outreach materials encouraging older adults to enroll for SNAP benefits. Communications include posters, brochures, and postcards. This enhanced outreach began in the fall of 2023 and data on enrollment impacts will be evaluated in early 2024.





Transportation

Increasing the availability of safe and affordable transportation options and alternatives helps to reduce social isolation, to maintain health and independence, and to access needed services in our communities. We know that providing safe, accessible, and reliable transportation in Maine presents significant and on-going challenges due to the state's demographics and geography. Our relatively low population is spread out across a large, mostly rural state that, while varied and beautiful, tests our ability to create infrastructure and systems that adequately meet the transportation needs of our population. Earlier this year, the Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) released its new [Three-Year Work Plan](#), with nearly \$4.74 billion in funding. Projects range from road paving to highway construction to bridge projects, railway, electric vehicles, and more. This plan is part of a comprehensive series of MaineDOT plans, which includes a more than 20-year visioning and mapping [Working to Move Maine: MaineDOT's Long-Range Transportation Plan](#) that takes Maine through 2050. A summary overview of MaineDOT's "Family of Plans" can be viewed [here](#).

The Three-Year Work Plan recognizes that more locally focused transportation needs can vary. In 2022, MaineDOT added a Village Partnership Initiative to its other existing community initiatives. This Village Partnership initiative focuses on projects

in lower-speed areas where people meet, walk, shop, and do business, furthering a goal of creating community and connection. MaineDOT's [Complete Streets Policy](#) also helps ensure that all users of Maine's transportation system, including pedestrians, people of all ages and abilities, and bicyclists, have safe and efficient access to the transportation system.

Although describing the full range of state, regional, and community transportation partners and transportation initiatives are beyond the scope of this report, the Cabinet's strategies support opportunities for strengthening initiatives to support older adults to access needed transportation and partnerships between MaineDOT and DHHS, which oversees MaineCare-funded transportation services. Through the Cabinet's Community Connections pilot, there will be opportunities to strengthen and support community volunteer transportation programs that provide rides to medical appointments and other needed services. In addition, MaineDOT has been working with other community partners to explore ways to leverage GO MAINE, the statewide travel resource program, to match riders with transportation needs beyond more traditional commuter rides.

Caregiver Support

Family caregivers are the backbone of Maine's support system and provide a range of social and health supports for older adults. Family caregivers can experience a negative impact on their own physical and emotional health, financial security, social networks, and employment. Recognizing the importance of the caregiver role, Maine established a pilot program in 2022, known as Respite for ME, to expand current caregiver supports. Overseen by OADS, the program is funding through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan and is administered through Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging. Initially, caregivers received a \$2000 annual benefit, to be used for an array of services benefitting the caregiver. Examples include caregiver self-care activities, assistive technology, legal consultation, and respite. As of

October 25, 2023, the annual benefit under Respite for ME increased to \$5,171. The first-year evaluation report by the Cutler Institute, University of Southern Maine, shows several favorable findings. For example, after receiving Respite for ME services for 90 days, the percentage of caregivers reporting:

- Good or very good health status increased 6%,
- Negative impacts on job performance decreased 16%, and
- 50% of caregivers had lower overall burden scores.

The [First Year Evaluation Report](#) was released in December 2023. The pilot continues through September 30, 2024.

The Cabinet continues to coordinate closely with activities under the State Plan on Aging funded through the Older Americans Act. Meeting the needs of caregivers is a focus of those services and last year, OADS in partnership with the Area Agencies on Aging implemented an evidence-based assessment and care management system known as T-Care™ to provide resources and supports for family members providing care.

OADS also received federal approval to use funding under Section 9817 of the ARP Act to focus on improving access to and efficacy of adult day services. Adult day services provide a coordinated set of services in a group setting that typically structured social, recreational and therapeutic activities, limited health services, meals, supervision, support services, personal care services, information and referrals and respite for

caregivers. Although studies have shown that adult day services benefit those attending adult day programs as well as their caregivers, these services tend to be underutilized nationally and in Maine. OADS has been meeting with interested stakeholders to seek advice and shape a pilot program to be launched early 2024. This initiative includes contracting with a marketing firm to rebrand and promote the value of these services to older adults and caregivers.

Long Term Services and Supports and the Direct Care Workforce

Long term services and supports (LTSS) include in-home programs that provide a range of personal care, nursing, home modification, and other needed supports; services provided to people living in their own apartments in congregate settings; as well as residential care and nursing facility services. While the state has made continued investments in its system, it is also generally recognized that improvements have not kept pace with the increasing need for services and for delivering high quality, person-centered LTSS across the care continuum. The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed these weaknesses. Consistent with the vision of reform in its [four year plan](#), DHHS continues to advance LTSS improvement initiatives designed to strengthen aspects of service access and delivery for LTSS recipients.

Workforce shortages remain one of the primary obstacles to ensuring adequate access to LTSS. Addressing the critical workforce shortage has been a priority across state agencies, the Legislature, public universities, as well as private and public sector businesses and providers. Workforce shortages are particularly acute in the health and LTSS sectors. Although severe

“Respite is a huge very important word for all the caregivers that are out there. Respite is the opportunity to kind of regain your energies to regroup yourself and to take care of yourself. My mother is 94 and is quite dependent on me and I am living with her by myself so I don’t have a lot of back up and consequently the Respite program has allowed me without taking money out of my own pocket to pay people to be with her while I’m doing the things I need to do.”

—Respite for ME Participant, Aroostook County

and chronic challenges continue and require on-going efforts, Maine has made progress as demonstrated by the state being [recognized in the top five of states](#) on direct care worker policies and supports. Significant efforts have been made to stabilize the workforce, focused primarily on retention, recruitment, and building future capacity. For example:

- In early 2022, the Mills administration distributed [approximately \\$120 million in payments](#) to MaineCare-funded providers of home care, residential care, and adult family care homes for recruitment and retention bonuses targeted to direct care workers and supervisors across the state, benefitting over 4,000 workers.
- Part AAAA of the biennial budget established that MaineCare and certain state-funded programs reimburse providers rates sufficient to support 125% of minimum wage for direct care workers. The supplemental budgets passed in April 2022 providing additional funding for this initiative and to increase cost of living adjustments.
- The Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan is supporting recruitment and training through [Healthcare Training for ME](#), a statewide collaboration of educational institutions and government agency partners convened to ensure Maine’s healthcare
- workers and employers can easily access training opportunities and supports. Since its launch in 2022, the Tuition Remission program has provided financial support to more than 800 health-care workers—including several in direct care fields such as CNA, LPN, PSS and CRMA.
- A statewide multimedia campaign launched in 2021-2023 to promote direct care and behavioral health career opportunities. The initial phase of the campaign [Caring for ME](#) rolled out in 2021 as a partnership with Maine DOL. The current and future phases of the Direct Care Worker campaign are largely funded by federal dollars and will promote and elevate careers in home and community based settings. To date the Caring for ME campaign has attracted 40,000 visitors to the campaign landing page, and of those visitors 3,000 explored job postings on Maine DOL’s Maine Job Link that were highlighted on the website. Another hallmark of the Caring for Me campaign is the option to connect with a Maine DOL health care career navigator to assist prospective candidates in exploring health care career pathways; over 1,700 individuals have submitted requests to speak with a navigator.
- The Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee (ESWAC) was established in 2021 based on legislation enacted pursuant to LD 898.



The primary duties of the Committee are to examine staffing level needs and monitor worker shortages to examine if efforts to promote these jobs and recruit and retain workers in this field have been successful. And then, based on this information, make recommendations to all levels of state government on improving recruitment and retention.

- The Governor’s Maine Job and Recovery Plan sets forth a comprehensive framework for investing nearly \$1 billion in federal State Fiscal Recovery Funds provided by the ARP Act. Workforce, including LTSS workforce, are central in its strategic investments to help Maine’s people, communities, and economy recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. To support the direct care workforce, these funds have been supplemented by other ARP Act funding through Section 9817.

The Department has also worked to stabilize nursing and residential care facilities from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes recent support provided in December 2023 in the form of a [\\$19 million one-time MaineCare payments](#) to 80 Maine nursing facilities to support their continued recovery from the pandemic, particularly for direct care staff who tend to the health and wellbeing of residents. These investments build on significant financial and operational support for nursing facilities that include:

- In June 2019, Governor Mills signed into law a biennial budget that dedicated \$25 million to provide a cost-of-living adjustment to nursing facilities.
- In March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, the Mills Administration began [\\$9 million in temporary payment rate increases](#) to nursing facilities for extra costs associated with COVID-19.
- In December 2020, the Mills Administration awarded [\\$5.1 million](#) to health care facilities, most of which were nursing facilities, to cover expenses resulting from the pandemic.



Direct Care and Support Professional ADVISORY COUNCIL

Maine’s Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council

Under the leadership of the Maine Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, Maine has established a first of its kind workforce advisory council to give Maine’s long-term care workers a voice in policy decisions affecting them. The Maine’s Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council was established in February of 2022 with funding from the Maine Health Access Foundation and DHHS with federal funds. PHI National provides training and technical assistance to Council members to grow leadership and advocacy skills needed to support policy and system change. Council members are employed in nursing homes, residential care and assisted living facilities, and in home care across the state. Some are new to the profession of providing direct care and direct support while others have many years of experience. Together, their collective voice helps to inform policies that are fundamental to creating a stable and qualified workforce.

“It’s important that we develop a strong and sustained collective voice for direct care and direct support professionals. They have so much expertise to share. They do a complex job and they do it with dedication. They care very much about their profession and the people they serve. The Advisory Council plays a critical role in helping to inform policymakers about the issues that impact this essential workforce.”

—Brenda Gallant,
Maine Long-term Care Ombudsman

- In July 2021, Governor Mills signed the FY22-23 biennial budget that dedicated \$36.4 million in cost-of-living adjustments and rebasing funding for nursing facilities.
- In August 2021, the Mills Administration awarded \$12.5 million to nursing and residential care facilities to help them cover expenses resulting from the pandemic.
- In December 2021, the Mills Administration announced its plan to increase rates for long-term care facilities by [\\$4.5 million](#) from January to June 2022, and add another [\\$7.6 million](#) through the budget for supplemental wage adjustments for fiscal year 2022.
- In August 2022, the Mills Administration issued [\\$25 million](#) in one-time funding for nursing facilities, residential care facilities, and adult family care homes to help address ongoing workforce issues and relatively low occupancy;
- In April 2023, the Mills Administration issued [\\$25 million](#) in one-time funding for nursing facilities, residential care facilities, and adult family care homes to help address ongoing workforce issues and relatively low occupancy;
- In July 2023, payment rates were increased by a cost of living adjustment of approximately 4.5 percent
- Since January 2021, the Department has used over \$2 million in Federal funds to support emergency nurse and related staffing to nearly one-third of Maine long-term care facilities to support care for residents during the pandemic.



While financial support has been critical to maintaining access to these services, the pandemic has also highlighted the need to improve quality and innovation as part of longer-term reform in how these services are delivered and reimbursed. Integral to the state’s reform work, DHHS has been convening partners from across Maine’s LTSS sector to explore ways to improve nursing facility and residential care systems to focus on quality, innovation, and accountability to better serve and meet the needs of Maine people. This work has been guided by a national landmark report, [The National Imperative to Improve Nursing Home Quality: Honoring Our Commitment to Residents, Families, and Staff](#), issued by the National Academies of Science, Engineering & Medicine. This report sets a framework which DHHS is using to guide reform in Maine for delivering residential and nursing facility services. In addition to rate reform, this includes strategies to deliver comprehensive, person-centered, care.

Supporting Older Workers

People of all ages are invaluable to Maine’s workforce. As Maine’s population ages, the economic contribution of every individual becomes even more apparent and important. Increased life expectancy also requires us to reconsider how we think about traditional life stages of education, work, and retirement.

A key part of building workforce is ensuring that Maine’s employers are age inclusive and provide meaningful opportunities for older workers to use their skills and experience. As in other areas, the state is leading by example in how employers can put in place practices that support older workers and create better workplaces for all. In 2023, Maine became only the second state in the nation to earn national certification as an Age Friendly Employer by the [Age-Friendly Institute](#). This effort has been led by the Department of Financial and Administrative Services (DAFS) in recognition that as an employer, the state benefits from retaining and attracting the talents and skills of older workers. In partnership with the Cabinet, DAFS provided a training open to all state employees in January



As a Certified Age-Friendly Employer, the State of Maine:

- Values employees based on proficiency, qualifications, and contributions.
- Maintains policies, practices and programs supporting older people.
- Values employee knowledge, maturity, reliability, and productivity.
- Commits to meaningful employment, development opportunities and competitive pay and benefits for older employees.

2024 which was led by the Maine Council on Aging. This session underscored why and how language matters and the importance of addressing ageist stereotypes and practices in the workplace. In partnership with businesses and community organizations, the Cabinet will continue to encourage employers to adopt hiring and employment practices that support and encourage age inclusiveness.

Other efforts to support older workers is on-going across state agencies. Maine DOL and Economic and Community Development, along with the State Workforce Board, hosted an in-person Employer Summit in late May to share experiences, best practices, and innovations in creating a more inclusive, sustainable workforce. With over five hundred,

“A best practice I learned at the [Workforce] Summit that I’d like try is recruiting the older workforce.”

—Summit Participant Survey Response

representing employers from all sectors, sizes; and geographical areas, one of the top-rated sessions was *Hiring and Retaining Older Workers*.

Maine DOL also recently launched a [website](#) for older workers providing resources and a broad array of information for anyone seeking to change or return to the workforce. Maine’s [CareerCenters](#) offer specialized training and support for older workers, including access to computers, internet access, and knowledgeable staff ready to help with job searches. Maine’s Bureau of Rehabilitation Services assists older workers experiencing disabilities to access technology and assistive devices for employment success. Additionally, Maine DOL has initiated a statewide campaign of public service announcements aimed at attracting older adults back into the workforce.

Longer term plans of the Cabinet include engaging older adults to re-imagine retirement and work and supporting workers in thinking about transitions to retirement, work, or volunteer opportunities. This includes a focus on increasing public education and awareness of financial education and financial retirement resources.





LOOKING FORWARD

The Cabinet on Aging made significant progress in its first full year, in part because it was able to build on the foundation set by the Governor’s designation of Maine as an Age Friendly State. The work of the Cabinet has also been closely aligned with other state plans that focus on or include strategies to improve the safety, health, and well-being of older adults. This includes plans focused specifically on older adults as well as those addressing broader issues of climate change, broadband access, and equity. The Cabinet will build on this progress by further strengthening collaboration and coordination across state agencies and by elevating the voices and visibility of older adults.

Moving into 2024, the Cabinet will review the priorities established in early 2023 and adjust as needed to align with the findings from the statewide Needs Assessment of older adults and caregivers conducted in the fall of 2023. The Cabinet reaffirms its commitment to robust community engagement and outreach to ensure that the Cabinet’s priorities reflect the diversity that older adults represent.

Elevating Community Voices: Statewide Needs Assessment

This past fall, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Cabinet on Aging initiated an extensive statewide study looking at the needs of older adult and caregivers. The findings from this study will inform the development of Maine’s State Plan on Aging for 2024-2028 and help shape priorities of the Cabinet. The State Plan on Aging details how services funded by the Older Americans Act will be delivered statewide.

The study was conducted by the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine and consisted of a statewide survey for older adults, a survey for family caregivers, focus groups, key informant interviews, and listening sessions. Topics include healthcare, food/nutrition, housing, transportation, receiving and providing care, safety, and socialization. A [final report](#) of findings was issued January 2024.

Proposed Priorities

Sustainable Living

Areas of Focus	Cabinet on Aging Strategies (2023-2026)
<p>Support sustainable living for older adults in communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map the Community Continuum of Care to identify capacity and projected need for long-term services and supports and community resources at the county level. • Increase access to affordable housing and housing with services options. • Improve access to energy efficient housing, weatherization, and heating assistance. • Increase access to home repair and home modification services and home safety. • Reduce food insecurity for older adults. • Promote financial literacy that develops skills and knowledge to help people with informed decisions about resources. • Support elder justice strategies that improve prevention, detection, and response to abuse and exploitation. • Elevate strategies that attract and build direct care workforce capacity. • Expand supportive services to informal caregivers. • Pilot delivery of non-emergency transportation to older adults.

Proposed Priorities

Community Connections

Areas of Focus	Cabinet on Aging Strategies (2023-2026)
Support community connections that improve quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve coordination with volunteer networks for transportation needs. Partner with communities to strengthen information and referral systems and navigation services to connect people to resources. Engage with municipalities on local and regional housing needs. Support community interventions that address social isolation/loneliness. Promote digital literacy and affordable access to the internet.

Proposed Priorities

Active Retirement and Work

Areas of Focus	Cabinet on Aging Strategies (2023-2026)
Engage older residents in active retirement by supporting work and volunteer opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and promote strategies for retaining and attracting older workers in the workforce to leverage skills and experience. Support/promote volunteerism and community service. Lead by example as an age friendly employer.

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