

STATE OF MAINE | CABINET ON AGING 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2025



BACKGROUND

Role of the Governor's Cabinet on Aging

Governor Mills established the Cabinet on Aging (the Cabinet) 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, and in ways and settings that best serve individual needs.

The Cabinet includes the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Public Safety, Transportation, 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 Gagné-Holmes of the Department of Health and Human Services and Commissioner Fortman of the Department of Labor. The work of the Governor's Cabinet is coordinated by a staff person housed in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF).

Meetings are held virtually and are open to the public. The Cabinet is supported by designated state agency staff who regularly 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. As part of this role, the Cabinet seeks opportunities to align and coordinate activities related to programmatic plans that guide the work of many state agencies and offices.

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.



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



Sustainable Living
Create sustainable living for aging comfortably 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

Guiding Principles

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 appreciating the diversity of older adults and ensuring that policy and programming is inclusive and addresses unique needs. This also includes promoting dementia friendly approaches that improve the lives of people with dementia and their care partners. Older adults are not a homogenous group, and respective needs can vary based on age, health status, living situation, and other factors. Understanding the unique challenges faced by different subgroups of older adults allows policymakers to design targeted interventions and policies that more effectively address needs.

The Cabinet recognizes that ageism has significant negative impacts on individuals, leading to decreased self-esteem, increased social isolation, poorer mental and physical health, reduced access to opportunities, and even increased mortality rates. At the community level, it creates a less inclusive environment, interferes with workforce productivity, and results in organizational and systemic barriers to full participation of older adults in our society. Ageism also compounds other existing inequities.

The Cabinet partners in statewide efforts to create a more age-positive Maine. Research by the University of Maine’s Center on Aging and other state and national experts has led to a deeper understanding of ageism,

its negative impacts, and opportunities for change. Initiatives such as the Maine Council on Aging’s [Power in Aging](#) and [Leadership Exchange on Aging \(LEA\)](#) are helping to raise awareness and move action on age-bias, with a goal of ending ageism by 2032. Over a dozen leaders across different branches of state government have participated in LEA’s 14-hour intensive leadership development experience.

Engaging in leadership activities to reduce ageism is a main advocacy goal of Maine’s [State Plan on Aging 2025-2028](#), the primary planning document that guides development of key priorities and initiatives for community aging services and programs in Maine.

Key State and Community Partners

The Cabinet appreciates the work and commitment of the many state, regional, and community partners who 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), 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 (AAAs), the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), and Legal Services for Maine Elders (LSE). 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. Maine CDC also supports a statewide coalition of partners focused on risk reduction, early detection, and the quality of life and well-being of people with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. Many organizations, including providers of services, advocates, community-based organizations, Age Friendly communities, caregivers, volunteers, and countless others, contribute to advancing the health, safety, and well-being of older people.



For more information on how we can all partner to end ageism in Maine, visit [Maine Council on Aging’s Power in Aging](#)



CABINET UPDATES

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 2023-2024, many of which reflect multi-year or ongoing efforts.

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 define and understand elder abuse as a community issue. Preventing abuse of older adults through addressing ageism, and ensuring community engagement and inclusion, allows everyone to continue to live as independently as possible and contributes to the vibrancy of our communities.

Maine has a rich history of engaging in regional and statewide collaborative work to advance elder justice. Governor Mills has continued to build on previous elder justice initiatives undertaken while she was Maine's Attorney General. As Governor, she established in 2019 the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership (EJCP), a broad coalition including leadership representing public and private sectors. The charge of the EJCP is 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 resulted 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 are represented on the EJCP, including the

Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation (DPFR), and DHHS. The Coordinator of the Cabinet on Aging serves as co-chair of the EJCP, along with the Executive Director of LSE.

To continue the work of the EJCP and support implementation of the Roadmap's recommendations, the Cabinet successfully applied for, and Maine was one of eight states to receive, a grant through the National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions to fund a coordinator position for the EJCP through September 2025. The EJCP Coordinator position was filled in May 2024 and this support has been instrumental in sustaining the EJCP's progress in moving Roadmap recommendations forward.

As of year-end 2024, the EJCP has made significant progress on the priority recommendations in the Roadmap because of the strong commitment and support of EJCP members. The progress builds on the investments of over \$4 million in the FY24-25 biennial budget that were part of the Roadmap recommendation outlined in the Cabinet's 2023 report. This included on-going funding included in the Governor's budget for the Elder Service Connections program which connects Adult Protective Services (APS)

"Elder justice represents our belief that all people, regardless of age, should live free of abuse and neglect and be able to participate fully in society. The support and partnership of the Cabinet on Aging in advancing elder justice has been pivotal to progress over the last year in advancing the work of the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership and supporting activities implementing the recommendations in the Elder Justice Roadmap."

-Jaye Martin, Executive Director, Legal Services for Maine's Elders

clients to advocacy services at the Elder Institute of Maine (EAIME) who 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 continues to grow. EAIME served over 360 clients last year through this program (and almost 1000 since launching as a pilot).

Examples of recent activities by EJCP members advancing elder justice include:

- Elevating awareness of Maine's new training requirement for mandated reporters to Adult Protective Services. [State law](#) now requires all mandated reporters to complete a training approved by DHHS at least every four years. The approved training and relevant information about this requirement can be accessed on the [APS Mandated Reporter Website](#).

- Partnering with DPS, the Criminal Justice Academy, and other key subject matter experts to explore curriculum development and specialized training for law enforcement officers on elder abuse.
- Initiating improvements to SeniorSafe,[™] Maine's public/private training initiative for financial institutions on financial exploitation, to move towards developing a virtual, asynchronous option for training. This program is supported by a broad array of partners, including APS, DPFR (which includes the Maine Office of Securities), the Maine Bankers Association, the Maine Credit Union League, LSE, and Maine's five AAAs. All are members of the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention, which helped develop SeniorSafe.[™]
- Adding a financial investigator at Maine's Office of Attorney General to support investigation and analysis of cases involving financial exploitation and related crimes.

Anyone who suspects a dependent or incapacitated adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited can make a report to APS. Some people, deemed "mandated reporters", are required to make reports to APS, based on their professional roles and responsibilities.

24/7 Phone line: 1-800-624-8404

Visit the DHHS APS website or the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention for more information about resources and reporting.

**NO EXCUSE FOR
ELDER ABUSE** 

Strengthening Community Connections

A key priority of the Cabinet is strengthening collaboration and partnership between Maine as an Age-Friendly State and Maine's Age-Friendly communities around shared goals. Maine has long been a national leader in endorsing Age-Friendly principles and leads the country in its number of Age-Friendly communities. Over 100 Maine communities have been designated as AARP Age-Friendly communities or use a similar framework (together, referred to as Lifelong Communities in this report). 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 Lifelong Communities.

To better align strategies around our common goals, the Cabinet launched a \$2.5 million project in 2024 known as the Community Connections Pilot. Maine's AAAs and University of Maine's Center on Aging are key partners. 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 has developed and is piloting a first-of-its-kind statewide integrated community-based program to strengthen partnerships at the state, regional, and local level.

By leveraging Maine's extensive network of Lifelong Communities, the project's core goals are to create pathways for assistance; strengthen ties between and among Lifelong Communities, Maine's five AAAs, and state agencies; and enhance training and technology support for local efforts. This investment recognizes that local communities and regional social service organizations provide a critical set of early intervention and low-cost supports 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.

"AARP has long been a champion for the communities, organizations and volunteers driving Maine's Age-Friendly communities, whose transformative initiatives are benefiting people of all ages. The Cabinet's Community Connections project underscores the vital role of partnership and support in empowering these efforts, helping to build stronger, more resilient communities. By providing resources and fostering key partnerships, the Cabinet on Aging is strategically helping to energize and broaden these initiatives. I applaud the Cabinet's commitment, whose significant impacts are creating lasting change in our state."

-Noël Bonham, Maine State Director, AARP

The Community Connections Program includes several components:

- **Funding to Maine's five AAAs for developing Community Ambassador roles at each AAA.** The Community Ambassadors are building close relationships with Lifelong Communities and with other municipalities in their service area to better understand the unique strengths and needs in each community, connect communities to AAA resources, and connect AAAs to Lifelong Communities for local resources and engagement.
- **Establishing Community Connectors in 12 pilot communities** across the state. Each community has unique needs and characteristics, but all operate on the shared goal of increasing access to resources and opportunities for social connection. Community Connectors are stipended volunteers who live in the community and know it well. As trusted neighbors, Community Connectors can connect with people who may otherwise not reach out for assistance or participate in social opportunities. Community Connectors help bridge access gaps and foster community engagement, ensuring older residents have the tools and support needed to thrive.

- **Providing mini-grant funding to Lifelong Communities** that align with Cabinet priorities for projects that increase impact and enhance community connections that improve quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults. By equipping local communities with funding and support, the initiative fosters sustainable change and community resilience.

- **Developing self-paced training modules to enhance skills and knowledge** for volunteers and community leaders. The chapters are carefully designed by subject matter experts, offering interactive lessons, practical exercises, and real-world examples. The training is open to Community Connectors, Lifelong Community and AAA volunteers, municipal staff, and anyone who works alongside older adults to enhance communication skills, advocacy, outreach, and other relevant topics. These trainings can be accessed for free online on the Skills Building webpage maintained by Lifelong Maine.

Early findings have demonstrated the value of Community Connection's investment in community partnerships and shared learning. While Maine's AAAs have long provided a critical set of community services to older adults and caregivers directly

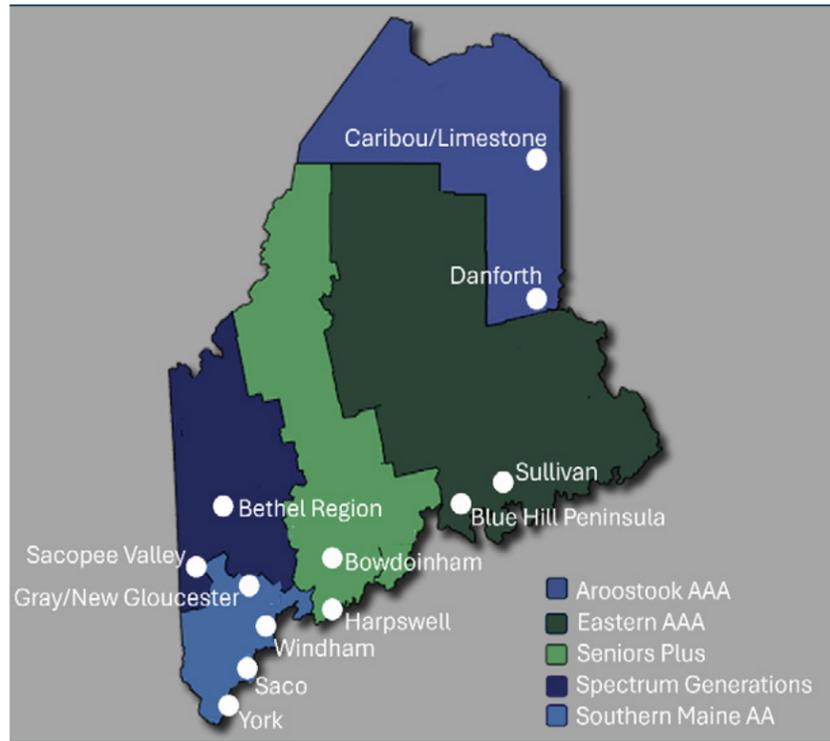


With this initiative... we know exactly who we're connecting people with, what kind of services are available, and can make a referral with a warm handoff."

-Community Ambassador, Southern Maine

Community Ambassadors/AAA staff participating in Community Connections

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR PILOT SITES



and through partnership, they report this program has created new space for deeper collaboration and relationships that have been difficult to achieve due in part to capacity challenges and the state's vast and rural geography. The Community Ambassador for Eastern Area Agency on Aging, for example, covers Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis and Washington counties and traveled over 2,000 miles in September and October alone. Importantly, by creating one point of contact between the AAAs and communities in their service areas, Community Ambassadors have built trust and shared learning opportunities resulting in cross-referrals and sharing of information and resources around benefits and programming.

“The Community Connections program is an incredible resource for older adults in Aroostook County and for the Aroostook Area Agency on Aging. The Community Ambassador role ties together the shared community-based work of the Agency, the Age-Friendly communities, municipalities, and the State of Maine. It’s been invaluable to have one person dedicated to community outreach and partnerships, which is key to connecting community members to our Agency and other critical resources.”

-Joy Saucier, Executive Director, Aroostook Area Agency on Aging

From May 2024 through January 2025, Community Ambassadors have engaged in over 1500 outreach activities to communities and municipalities. This project has also supported peer learning opportunities for the five Community Ambassadors who meet regularly.

Community Ambassadors also work closely with the 12 communities that have chosen to participate as pilot communities in developing a Community Connector role. Community Connectors are trusted members of their community who commit to at least 20 hours a week to help connect people to resources and social connection.

Pilot communities are located across rural and more urban areas of the State, with at least two in each AAA service region. Several pilots, such as Sacopee Valley and Blue Hill Peninsula, represent regional initiatives that cover multiple towns. The backbone of the pilot site model is active partnership and collaboration at the state, regional and local levels. Pilot sites benefit from the connection with their AAA, resource support from the Cabinet on Aging, and technical assistance from UMaine Center on Aging.

“There have been some great meetings [coordinated with the Cabinet] where we learn about new tools like the Medicare Savings Program, Maine Access Navigator tool ... or the new rental assistance program. ... I’ve learned so much in the last couple months about different things that are out there. Telling our residents about these programs is already saving people money.”

-Community Connector, Age Friendly Saco

Reducing barriers and improving access to information about existing services and resources has long been a priority, and often a challenge, for many state agencies. The Community Connections program has provided a forum for state agencies and community organizations to help spread the word through trusted sources about available resources and programming. It has also provided opportunities for elevating critical issues; for example, trainings on elder abuse and the role of Adult Protective Services.

Just a few examples of activities reported by Community Connectors include helping community members gain access to state and federal programs, helping with applications for and transportation to local food pantries, conducting outreach for vaccine clinics, recruiting new volunteers, and helping to establish new programming for social opportunities. This programming includes connecting with people facing barriers to access such as language, homelessness, physical or cognitive disability, and isolation.

Pilot communities have also developed additional programming tailored to local needs. Some examples include establishing:

- A volunteer navigator program that engages retired professionals to help older people better access social and health services.
- A local tradesperson resource listing designed to help community members find much-needed services like electricians, snow removal, chore services, and more.
- A home safety assessment program in collaboration with the local fire and police departments and emergency medical services (EMS) to reduce falls.
- A monthly cross-community events calendar that includes a focus on older adults, published in a local paper distributed to all households.

Pilots implemented in September 2024 and after only four months, at year-end have shown significant and promising impacts, particularly in reaching residents and engaging community partners.

PILOT SITES: INITIAL IMPACTS SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2024



Recognizing that not all communities are able to participate in the Community Connector pilot due to capacity or other considerations, the Cabinet included a mini-grant opportunity open to all Lifelong Communities. Over 40 grants were awarded in November 2024 for quick-action projects. Awards range from \$1,500 to \$20,000, for a total of \$330,000, for activities that align with the Cabinet on Aging’s goals of creating sustainable communities and enhancing community connections that improve the quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults. Importantly, these projects address priorities identified by older adults in those communities.

Funded projects include:

- **Emergency preparedness programming** such as community conversations to inform community efforts, go-bags and back packs, education, culturally appropriate food suitable for emergencies, and supporting creation of a regional heating and cooling center.
- **Activities that encourage social connection** to mitigate isolation and loneliness including arts and culture and intergenerational programming.
- **Volunteer transportation services** for medical and social needs.
- **Enhanced accessibility of public spaces** such as installation of benches, ramps, shade canopies, amplification sound systems, improved signage, stair lifts.

“[As a Community Connector] I help with applications, make referrals, and then follow up ...When I receive calls, it may be about one request but with some exploratory conversation most people had multiple critical needs... I’m really feeling the impact of my position as individuals are contacting me, being referred to me and connecting with me by other means.”

-Community Connector, Age-Friendly Sullivan

- **Health and safety initiatives** that include chore and home repairs, smoke detector installation, assisting with visible house/street numbering for emergency responders, falls prevention programming, and supporting technology use for tele-health services.
- **Improved community communications** such as community newsletters and distribution of welcome packets.

Many of these projects complement ongoing strategies and programming across state agencies. These grants also highlight the importance of climate change, its impacts on older adults, and the need to include the voices of older adults as part of the development of



“The Community Connectors are playing a vital role in reducing social isolation and loneliness. [Through social activities, they also] encourage people to complete the application for the Medicare Savings Program, review the Winter Wellness Checklist, connect to the volunteer ride program, review Medicare Options during open enrollment and get information about heating assistance and home repair programs.”

— Community Leader, Age-Friendly New Gloucester



Photo: Courtesy of Age-Friendly Bowdoinham

community and emergency response and resiliency efforts. The highest percent of grant awards (one-third) focused in this area and have already resulted in the formation of a peer learning group to share learnings and lessons across communities. Disaster preparedness and resiliency will be a continued area of focus for the Cabinet moving into 2025. A second round of grants will be awarded in early 2025.

Supporting Sustainable Living

Complementary 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. This goal requires approaches that span multiple policy areas. This report provides a snapshot of ongoing work and does not encompass the full efforts underway across agencies to improve the lives of older adults and strengthen community inclusion.

Housing

Since Governor Mills took office in 2019, her Administration and the Legislature have allocated more than \$315 million to support the construction of affordable homes in Maine, an unprecedented level of investment that has resulted in the completion of more than 3,323 new homes (rentals and for affordable homeownership) so far, with nearly 3,000 additional units in the construction or underwriting stages at MaineHousing. This represents the largest production pipeline in the agency’s history. Included in this number are 43 projects specifically for older Mainers, which alone totaled 1,892 units. This



category of housing was anchored by Maine’s Senior Housing Bond, which was issued as one of the administration’s first actions in 2019.

Even with unprecedented investments in housing production, the lack of affordable and accessible housing remains a significant challenge across the state and remains a top focus of this administration, the Legislature, and public and private sector partners. A key [Housing Production 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. A [follow-up study](#) was released in February 2025 to identify actions that further address Maine’s housing production needs. In 2024, GOPIF created the [Maine Housing Data Portal](#). This data dashboard provides housing, demographic, and economic data to help Maine communities, housing organizations, and the public assess housing trends, compare geographies, and inform state, regional, and local housing goals. Data can be viewed at the state, county, and municipal levels, and includes demographic as well as income, employment, and housing data. A fuller description of housing initiatives, including those addressing emergency housing, can be viewed [here](#).

A program of particular interest for older adults is Maine’s recently established [Home Share Program](#),

which is hosted by Nesterly and is currently under the umbrella of MaineHousing. This program is aimed at helping older persons reduce living expenses by matching older homeowners with spare rooms 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. Maine Housing contracted with the vendor, Nesterly, in early 2024 to implement and administer these services on a pilot basis. The Cabinet serves on the advisory committee along with other community organizations and groups.

As part of its service, Nesterly manages listings, helps screen hosts and guests, and provides a way to collect rent that removes that responsibility from the homeowner. Nesterly also provides on-going support with a team led by a licensed social worker, providing regular check-ins and other assistance as needed. The program became fully operational in the summer of 2024, with the first match being between a college student and an older adult whose children no longer lived at home. Since then, mostly relying on media coverage and word of mouth, along with some targeted webinars and presentations, over 100 hosts have signed up to participate and over 150 guests from across the state have expressed interest in the program. The rents listed have had an effective price of \$600/month on average.



Photo Credit: Nesterly

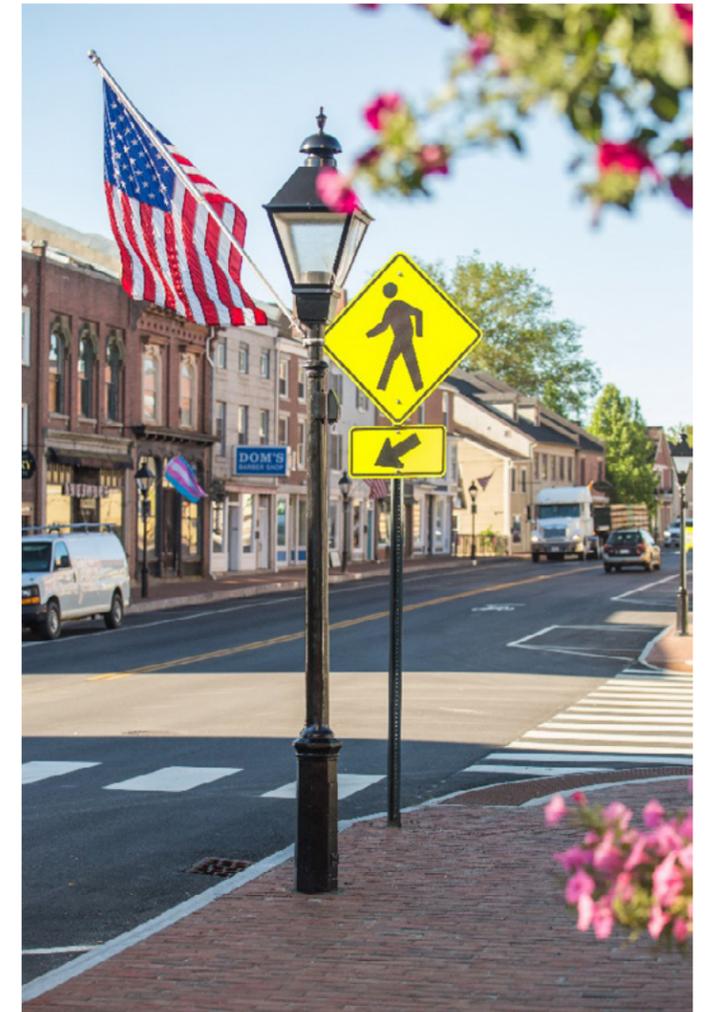
“I believe that homesharing offers an opportunity to build meaningful relationships with others, create a sense of belonging, and support one another in daily life. I’m excited about creating spaces where people have the opportunity to share resources and experiences. Additionally, I see homesharing as a sustainable and affordable way to live, while also fostering a deeper sense of community.”

—Maine Home Share Host

Transportation

Increasing the availability of safe and affordable transportation options and alternatives helps to reduce social isolation, maintain health and independence, and enhance access to needed services in our communities. Providing safe, accessible, and reliable transportation in Maine presents significant and long-standing challenges due to the State’s demographics and geography. In February 2025, the Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) released its [Three-Year Work Plan](#) that includes more than 2,700 work items with a total value of \$4.8 billion. 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 [Long-Range Transportation Plan](#) that takes Maine through 2050. A summary overview of MaineDOT’s “Family of Plans” can be viewed [here](#).

The MaineDOT Three-Year Work Plan recognizes that more locally focused transportation needs can vary. By the end of 2024, MaineDOT had begun or completed over 30 Village Partnership Initiatives or other downtown multimodal transportation studies as part of its suite of Community Based 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 also released an updated [Complete Streets Policy](#) in 2024 to help 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. This has been coupled with recent efforts to make context-based decisions in infrastructure project development that provide for all modes, as well as a new context-based speed limit setting process. When it comes to downtown and village projects



MaineDOT, along with crucial local partners, have secured a combined nearly \$75 million in Federal funding for transformative projects in Sanford and Portland, which are just examples among many other recent projects across the State of Maine.

Describing the full range of state, regional, and community transportation partners and transportation initiatives is beyond the scope of this report, including the role of DHHS, which oversees certain transportation services funded by MaineCare. However, through the Cabinet’s Community Connections pilot, described above, there are 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 community partners to explore ways to leverage [GO MAINE](#),

Maine’s statewide travel resource program, to help match riders with transportation needs beyond commuter rides. While GO MAINE has traditionally focused on assisting employers and employees with commuting options, it has expanded over time to provide free trip planning for all travelers in Maine. GO MAINE now includes a feature for finding single trip rides and available volunteer transportation providers located in that region. GO MAINE also connects travelers across the state to all transportation resources, including public transportation, which provides a safe and affordable way for older adults to connect to a variety of destinations.

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 Roadmap to End Hunger in 2030](#). This work is coordinated by GOPIF relying on the voices and efforts of a broad range of people and partnership organizations. Consistent with principles guiding the work of the Cabinet, a goal of this 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 [2024 Annual Report on Ending Hunger in Maine](#) details activities and progress to date.

The Cabinet coordinates closely with these statewide efforts as many of the strategies encompassed in the Ending Hunger Roadmap touch older adults. This includes strategies to maximize federal nutrition programs and improve access to public benefits programs through cross-sector collaboration, administrative streamlining, and outreach and application assistance. This work encompasses efforts to increase access to programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, an important support for older adults. Notably, [less than one-third of eligible older adults in Maine](#), age 65 and older, participate in SNAP. Improving the screening and referral process for SNAP, and other supplemental nutrition programs, is consistent with strategies

SNAP can be used at grocery stores and farmers’ markets to buy healthy foods. **Healthy Foods = Healthy You.** SNAP helps older adults with low income and high expenses make ends meet. Adults over 60, have no asset limits. Check to see if you qualify.

Apply Now. It’s Easy:

Visit www.mymaineconnection.gov or call 1-855-797-4357

Paper applications are available at your local DHHS office or can be downloaded from www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofa/applications-forms



for improving the nutritional health status of older Mainers included in Maine’s [State Plan on Aging 2025-2028](#).

As noted in last year’s Cabinet report, the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services, (OADS) partnered with the Office for Family Independence, the AAAs, Good Shepherd Food Bank, and others in 2023 to develop and distribute SNAP education and outreach materials for older adults. The number of calls regarding SNAP received by the Aging and Disability Resource Centers (operated by the AAAs) doubled in August 2023 (80 calls). In January 2024, another distribution of outreach was made by the AAAs and calls increased by 60% (64 calls) compared to the monthly average number of calls (40 per month). Between May 2023, the end of the Public Health Emergency, and March 2024, there was a 5% increase in 60+ households enrolled in SNAP in Maine. Outreach activities continue, including through the Community Connections Program. In partnership with GOPIF’s Senior Anti-Hunger Advisor, the Cabinet will continue to focus on opportunities to increase outreach and streamline access in 2025 to improve participation rates.

Care Partner Supports

Family caregivers, referred to in this report as “care partners”, are the backbone of Maine’s support system and provide a range of social and health supports for older adults. These care partners may be family members, friends, or other individuals who provide some form of unpaid assistance, which can vary greatly based on needs. It is well documented that family care partners can experience negative impacts on their own physical and emotional health, financial security, social networks, and employment. Recognizing the importance and value of this role, care partner supports are a core component of [Maine’s State Plan on Aging for 2025-2028](#), as well as [Maine’s State Plan to Address Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias 2022-2027](#). Both plans were developed with broad representation, the former overseen by OADS and the latter by the Maine CDC. Both plans include complementary goals and strategies for increasing training, education, and counseling for care partners.

Maine’s [Respite for ME Program](#), established in 2022 as a pilot, continued to show positive outcomes for program participants in 2024. Developed to support caregivers, the program connects participants



to Maine's AAAs and initially provided an annual benefit of \$2,000 for services that directly benefit the care partner. As of October 2023, that annual benefit increased to approximately \$5,000. The most common services requested by care partners include respite care, assistive technology, chore services, self-care activities, and home modifications. According to the evaluation conducted by the Cutler Institute, University of Southern Maine, care partners have reported that the services reimbursed by the program:

- Helped alleviate financial stress and worry
- Improved ability to maintain employment
- Supported their mental and physical health needs
- Enabled them to better care for their loved ones.

As a pilot, ongoing funding for Respite for ME will be contingent on future appropriations. Based on the pilot program's success, the Department plans to amend its existing Respite Care program, adopting Respite for ME's successful features and aligning the program with the federally funded National Family Caregiver Support Program to simplify administration for caregivers, Area Agencies on Aging, and the Department.



DHHS 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 include 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. Pilots were implemented in 2024 with four providers, totaling just over \$430,000, to implement programmatic innovations that seek to increase utilization of adult day services. Pilot projects will conclude by June 30, 2025. The pilots include strategies

"I want to thank you for all your help with the Respite for ME program. I have been recently enrolled and the amount of stress relief it has already provided me has been tremendous. I consider myself at a young age for caregiving, and the amount of financial stress I have has been somewhat relieved with this program. I would like to be working, but as a caregiver this is unrealistic at this time. I want to keep my husband home as long as possible, and this program has allowed me with options. Trying to figure out my future (financially), how to navigate doctors' appointments and to keep him home safely, this program has been so beneficial already. Thank you!!"

-Caregiver from Western Maine



around improving transportation options, increasing community outreach, and promoting person-centered service delivery. Some of the activities under the pilots include expanding weekend and evening hours, offering no-cost trial visits to prospective participants, and developing sustainable volunteer transportation networks.

As part of this initiative, DHHS entered into a contract with a vendor in 2024 to develop and implement a statewide public awareness campaign to promote adult day services in Maine. The strategic marketing campaign consists of advertisements across digital media, broadcast and cable television, and streaming television. The media advertisements link to an informational [Adult Day Services webpage](#) on the OADS website.

Long Term Services and Supports and the Direct Care Workforce

Long term services and supports (LTSS) include in-home, day center, and facility-based services that provide a range of personal care, nursing, and other needed supports. While the state has made significant investments, it is generally recognized that improvements have not always kept pace with the increasing need for services and for delivering high quality, person-centered LTSS across the care continuum. Workforce shortages remain a primary concern for ensuring access to LTSS and require partnerships across state agencies, the Legislature, public universities, and private and public sector businesses and providers. Significant efforts have been made to stabilize the workforce, many outlined in last year's Cabinet report. Recruitment and training campaigns, such

as [Healthcare Training for ME](#) and [Careers with Purpose](#), have continued to elevate career pathways and available supports.

The Careers with Purpose marketing campaign was launched July 2024 to build on the successes demonstrated in the Caring for ME campaign. DHHS in partnership with Maine DOL launched the Careers with Purpose marketing campaign which seeks to recruit and retain direct service workers in aging, intellectual disability, brain injury, physical disability, and mental health. The campaign created a new website and new videos which spotlight home and community-based services job opportunities, workers, and service recipients across the state. Ads to raise awareness and elevate the profession for home and community-based services job opportunities have aired statewide on radio, television, gas station TV, movie theaters, and multiple locations online. The campaign website has had 121,375 unique views.

Many leads for the Maine DOL CareerCenter Counselors with healthcare expertise come from the marketing efforts of Caring for ME/ Careers with Purpose. As of December 31, 2024, the CareerCenter



Counselors with healthcare expertise have served more than 615 customers representing every county in Maine. Twenty-five percent of all clients served by the CareerCenter Counselors with healthcare expertise have been further enrolled in a workforce training opportunity. Early results demonstrate that 80 percent of job seekers supported by the CareerCenter Counselor with healthcare expertise are employed or enrolled in a training program, and more than half are already experiencing wage gain.

Maine's Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council

With the support of the Maine Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, Maine established a first of its kind workforce advisory council to give Maine's long-term care workers a voice in policy decisions affecting them. 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 on advocacy skills needed to support policy and system change.

Maine DOL and DHHS continue to partner with the Council, recognizing its value and the importance of hearing directly the voices of direct care and support professionals. For example, Council members have participated in videos for Maine DOL's Careers with Purpose, a resource site that connects people to information on career pathways and information about direct care opportunities, including connections to a one-on-one career navigator. Maine DOL also provided a grant to develop three "day in the life" videos in collaboration with OADS of direct care workers that highlight different types of direct care specialties.



DHHS also continues to work in partnership with other organizations and providers to improve retention strategies for existing workers to reduce turnover which can negatively impact quality of care and costs. In September 2024, for example, OADS participated in a worker-led summit hosted by Maine's Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council to exchange expertise, ideas, and best practices. As part of its broader quality initiatives, DHHS is also working in partnership with providers, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, UMaine's Center on Aging, and others to develop strategies for improving staff retention in nursing homes.

While financial support has been critical to maintaining access to LTSS over the past years, especially since the COVID-19 public health emergency, the pandemic also highlighted the need to improve quality and innovation as part of longer-term reform in how these services are delivered and reimbursed and to streamline access to information and resources. Highlights include:

- **Improved navigation tools for older adults.** Older adults and family members often find it difficult to identify and obtain information and supports, according to the statewide needs assessment completed for the State Plan on Aging. In early 2024, OADS released the Maine Access Navigator Tool (MANT), an online resource that helps individuals and families identify available supports tailored to their circumstances.
- **Enacted nurse delegation.** Working closely with the State Board of Nursing, DHHS proposed, and the Legislature approved, authorization for nurse delegation in 2024 which allows a nurse in their professional discretion to delegate nursing tasks to unlicensed personnel, such as Personal Supports Specialists (PSS).



This is a key strategy that has been used in other states to expand access to in-home and nursing services that people rely on that may otherwise not be available.

- **Adopted Personal Care Agency Licensing.** Personal care services agencies in Maine were previously required by state law to register with the State but were otherwise subject to minimal requirements or enforcement authority. Recognizing the importance of these services, in 2024 the State adopted licensure rules for these agencies establishing minimum quality standards to ensure quality of care.
- **Finalized Nursing Facility Rate Reform.** Working closely with providers and key partners, DHHS has finalized MaineCare (Maine Medicaid) nursing facility rate reform for fiscal year 2025. This represents a significant change in how nursing facilities are reimbursed and is intended to support the direct care workforce, incentivize permanent staff, and promote quality care and positive health outcomes for Maine residents who live in nursing facilities. Maine is also one of nine states selected to participate in the [National Academy for State Health Policy \(NASHP\)'s Nursing Home Learning Collaborative](#) intended to accelerate measurable progress on policies that help address the multi-faceted challenges facing nursing homes and improve care delivery.

Supporting Older Workers

Another workforce priority is ensuring that we recognize the contributions of older workers in our economy and the importance of creating age-inclusive workplaces. Overall, we are living longer and working longer than in the past. While some people need or choose to work longer for financial reasons, working can also provide social connections, a sense of purpose, and continued opportunities for learning and growth. Research also shows that older workers bring experience and expertise, strong work ethic, mentorship and leadership skills, and diverse perspectives that can contribute to innovative and dynamic workplaces.

Based on the State's [Economic Development Strategy](#) plan, Maine needs to add at least 75,000 people to our workforce between 2020-2030. Maine's demographics provide an opportunity to engage older adults as part of the solution in ways that benefit employers, workers of all ages, and Maine's economy. While the projected growth of Maine's population aged 20-64 is anticipated to decline slightly over the next 10 years, Maine's population of people 65 and older is anticipated to increase, reaching 29 percent of Maine's total population in 2035. Even though labor force participation rates within age groups have not changed significantly over the last decade, the number of jobs held by individuals aged 65 and over has steadily grown from just over 32,000 in 2013 to 53,500 in 2023, a 67 percent increase. This highlights the continued need to identify and reduce barriers to employment and promote age diversity in our workforce.

Fundamental to this goal is the need to ensure that Maine's employers are age inclusive and provide meaningful opportunities for older workers to use their skills and experience. The State continues to lead 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](#)

The Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) selected the State of Maine for its 2024 Business Excellence Award which recognized the State for its on-going efforts to build a workplace culture that supports a diverse multi-generational workforce which intentionally values older workers. Representatives from DAFS and the Cabinet accepted the award at MCOA's annual Change AGEnt Summit in September.



Photo: Courtesy of Maine Council on Aging

[Institute](#). The Administration remains committed to continuing to lead on innovative programming and education to support older workers. This effort is led by the Department of Administrative and Financial 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 offered training to all State employees facilitated by the Maine Council on Aging in January 2024 on the importance of addressing ageist stereotypes and practices in the workplace.

The State has continued to build on this work. For example, the Bureau of Human Resources at DAFS currently administers ten employee resource groups with retention in mind. These affinity groups are recognized entities of Maine State Government that create spaces for networking, resources for mentorship, and opportunities for professional development. They are employee-led and organized around social identities. One is an age positivity group for older adults

and another group has been established for employees who are also caregivers of family members of any age. Leading by example has allowed the State to highlight benefits to others. Several employers have reached out to DAFS to hear more about these efforts and ways to adopt hiring and employment practices that support and encourage age diversity.

Efforts to support older workers are ongoing across State agencies. This includes Maine's [Senior Community Service Employment Program](#) that provides on-the-job skills training to individuals 55 or older with limited financial resources. Maine's [CareerCenter](#) services include training and support for older workers, including access to computers, internet access, and knowledgeable staff ready to help with job searches. Maine DOL also administers the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP), which provides funding and support services for eligible Maine residents to pursue two and four-year degree programs or employer recognized credentials leading to high-wage, in-demand jobs in Maine. This includes helping older adults, both in and out of the workforce, obtain training and professional licenses and certifications that have led to jobs that have provided greater financial stability and personal fulfillment. Maine DOL maintains a listing of [Workforce Resources for Older Adults](#), with links for employers on the benefits and strategies for creating age-inclusive workplaces.

Another important resource is Maine's [Bureau of Rehabilitation Services](#), which assists older workers experiencing disabilities in accessing technology and

assistive devices for employment success. For example, a vocational rehabilitation counselor assisted an older adult who wanted to return to a career as a registered nurse (RN). Maine DOL assisted with retraining, support services, benefits counseling, resume writing, transportation and career guidance and counseling. The individual has since begun working at a local hospital at higher pay than their previous job, with a sign-on bonus as well. The 2024 Employer Summit featured a session with MaineCITE, the State's assistive technology resource, and several employers focused on accommodations and creating inclusive workplaces including low-cost/no-cost ideas that benefit all.

To build on these efforts, Maine DOL is supporting the Cabinet in funding a research project in partnership with the Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, to better understand the motivations and barriers older workers face in remaining in or reentering the workforce. This work will begin in 2025 and provides an opportunity for Maine to continue to advance solutions that help with workforce and building stronger economies and communities for all. Based on our demographics, Maine has an opportunity, and a need, to lead in developing best practices and workforce innovations. This works supports strong partnerships with the many others advancing similar goals, including the Maine Council on Aging and Maine AARP, as well as many other public and private sector organizations and employers. This includes the newly established Office of New Americans, which is housed at GOPIF.



LOOKING FORWARD

As the oldest state in the nation by median age and by percent of population age 65 and older, Maine continues to 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 create stronger communities that benefit everyone.

The Cabinet on Aging continues to build on the foundation set by the Governor's designation of Maine as an Age-Friendly State. The work of the Cabinet is 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.

In 2025, the Cabinet will continue to focus on ways to strengthen programs and policies for older adults by continuing and increasing collaboration and coordination across agencies and the engagement of community partners, and most critically, hearing the voices of older adults. The Cabinet's plans and initiatives in 2025 will build off the achievements and learnings of the past two years, with continued support for building age-positive and inclusive communities that benefit us all.



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