



STATE OF MAINE | CABINET ON AGING
2025 ANNUAL REPORT

FEBRUARY 2026



INTRODUCTION

Governor Mills established the Cabinet on Aging (the Cabinet) by [Executive Order](#) in 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

CABINET ON AGING 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

These goals incorporate and build on Maine's designation as an Age-Friendly State, which represents partnerships at every level of community and government to support Mainers of all ages to live, work, and retire in the state. The domains of livability upon which Maine's Age-Friendly designation is built serve as the foundation for the Cabinet's activities and priorities.

Guiding Principles

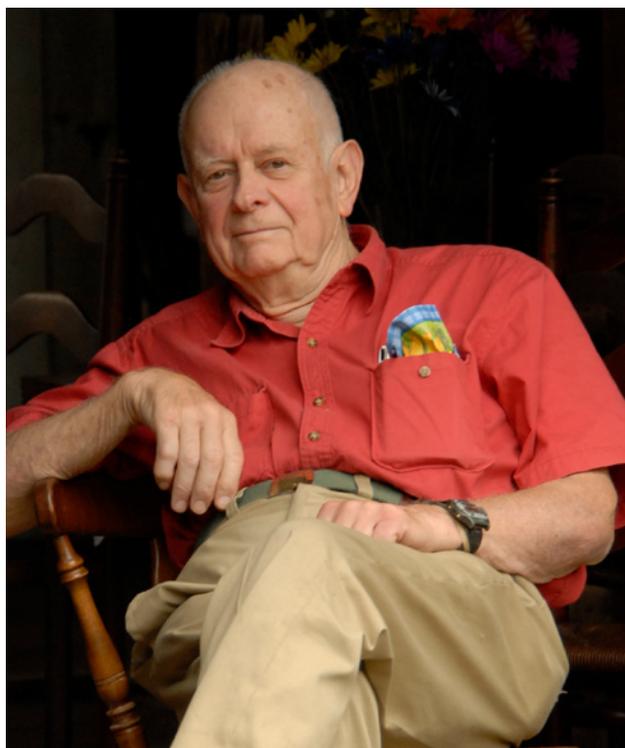
A central role of the Cabinet is to ensure alignment across state strategic planning efforts so that the needs of older adults are fully considered and the opportunities and strengths presented by Maine’s aging demographics are reflected. The work of the Cabinet is rooted in the principle that Maine benefits from the involvement, experience, and knowledge of older adults in every aspect of our community and economy. Because older adults are a diverse group with varying needs shaped by age, health, living situation, and other factors, policy and programming must be responsive and targeted. A deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by different subgroups helps ensure that interventions effectively address these needs.

The Cabinet’s efforts also acknowledge the widespread impacts of ageism—from reduced self-esteem and increased isolation to systemic barriers that limit participation and productivity. In partnership with statewide initiatives, including efforts led by the Maine Council on Aging, the state continues to advance age-positive strategies. These leadership efforts align with Maine’s State Plan on Aging 2025–2028, which prioritizes advocacy to reduce ageism and strengthen community aging services.

The Cabinet recognizes the vital contributions of state, regional, and community partners who share a common goal of improving the conditions in which people live, work, and age. Well-being is shaped by a broad range of systems and supports encountered in daily life. Stable and affordable housing provides a foundation for safety and routine; reliable access to nutritious food supports physical health and disease prevention; timely and affordable health care enables individuals to manage chronic conditions and address concerns before they escalate; and dependable transportation connects people to employment, services, social supports, and community life. When any one of these elements is lacking, the others are often affected.

Addressing these interconnected needs in a coordinated way is essential to helping individuals and

communities thrive. In shaping public programs and priorities, positive impacts are strengthened when community-driven efforts and statewide strategies are intentionally aligned. This work depends on maintaining and strengthening partnerships across sectors and at all levels of government and community. These partnerships have been particularly critical over the past year to help address and mitigate the negative impacts and uncertainties caused by federal policy and program changes.



Maine’s aging network includes Maine’s five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), the Long-term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP), Legal Services for Maine Elders (LSE), and advocacy organizations such as Maine Council on Aging and AARP. 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 others, 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.



CABINET HIGHLIGHTS

Key activities of the Cabinet and state agencies over the last year reflect the goals and strategies established by the Cabinet and align with Maine’s Age-Friendly State Plan. Many of these reflect multi-year or ongoing efforts which while discussed separately intersect across multiple domains of livability.

Advancing Elder Justice

As detailed in the Cabinet’s second Annual Report, Maine continues to build on its rich history of engaging in regional and statewide collaborative work to advance 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, preserves the rights and autonomy of all people, and contributes to the vibrancy of our communities.

In 2019, Governor Mills established the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership (EJCP), a coalition of private and public sector experts representing a wide array of disciplines to develop an Elder Justice Roadmap to address Maine’s response to, and prevention of, elder abuse. Several members of the Cabinet are also members of, or have staff representatives on, the EJCP, including the Commissioners of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Public Safety, and the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation. To further

Elder Abuse Risk and Protective Factors

| RISK FACTORS | PROTECTIVE FACTORS |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cognitive and physical decline | Social engagement |
| Financial strain | Caregiver supports |
| Caregiver strain | Screenings |
| Dependency on others | Community partnerships |
| Social isolation | Ageism education |
| Shared living situations | |
| Limited social supports | |
| Ageism | |

Two in every three clients of Adult Protective Services are 60 years and older

Source: Maine Adult Protective Services Data Trends Report, SFY2021–2024

strengthen the partnership between public and private sectors, the Coordinator of the Cabinet on Aging currently serves as the EJCP’s public sector co-chair. The Executive Director of Legal Services for Maine Elders serves as the private sector co-chair.

Recognizing elder justice as a core priority, the Cabinet, as one of its first initiatives, facilitated Maine’s successful application for grant funding to support an EJCP Coordinator position. In 2023, Maine was one of only eight states to receive funding through the National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions—one of just two states awarded funding for an existing coalition. Maine received a no-cost extension of the grant in the fall of 2025, allowing the EJCP Coordinator position to continue through March 2026.

In late spring 2025, the EJCP began a strategic planning process to update Maine’s 2021 Elder Justice Roadmap (2021 Roadmap). Since its publication, Maine has made significant progress advancing priority recommendations set out in the 2021 Roadmap, including through statutory and regulatory changes, new program development, enhanced training initiatives, and other investments in elder justice strategies. Examples included:

- In 2025, the Maine Department of Public Safety established a new statewide full-time Elder Justice Investigator position to help address the rising and often complex crimes targeting Maine’s older adults. Implemented as a two-year pilot, the

initiative is funded through the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG).

- Elder abuse training is being included as part of the 2026 mandated curriculum required for all law enforcement officers. In summer 2025, the Criminal Justice Academy Board of Trustees approved a mandatory training topic for 2026 on Elder Exploitation, Fraud, and Abuse to be rolled out in January 2026.
- Maine is also in the process of transitioning its current training curriculum for financial institutions from an in-person to a virtual, asynchronous training platform that will allow for increased access. Cabinet and EJCP members have been working in partnership with Maine Bankers Association and the Maine Credit Union League to raise awareness of how to recognize, prevent, and report instances of financial exploitation. This new training format will be available in early 2026.

While people of any age can experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the risk factors often compound with advancing age. Maine’s demographic trends highlight the need for the continued action of all of us to help detect, prevent, and respond to elder abuse. The EJCP anticipates releasing the updated Roadmap in early 2026, recommending actions that the public and private sectors can advance in the areas of direct service services, public and professional education, public policy, and data collection and evaluation.



The Community Connections Components:

- **Funding Community Ambassador** roles at each AAA to strengthen relationships and information/resource-sharing use among Age-Friendly Communities and municipalities in their service area.
- **Establishing Community Connectors** in 12 pilot communities across the state. As trusted community members, 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 aligned with Cabinet priorities for projects that improve quality of life, inclusion, and engagement of older adults.
- **Developing self-paced training modules to enhance skills and knowledge** designed by subject matter experts, offering interactive lessons, practical exercises, and real-world examples. These trainings can be accessed for free online on the [Skills Building](#) webpage maintained by Lifelong Maine.



"We're providing opportunities to make Saco a really inclusive community for all residents, particularly our older residents. We'll come to your house and do a home safety assessment. If you need safety grab bars in your shower or in your bathroom, we'll install them free of charge. If you need any small minor repairs done to your home, we have a handy neighbors program. And it's free cost to all neighbors."

—Joe Moreshead, Community Connector, Saco

[Watch the Video](#)

Maine's Community Connections Program

Over the past year, the Cabinet has continued to advance the **Community Connections Program** and its resulting partnerships, building on the planning and early engagement activities described in the Cabinet's previous report. Launched in 2024, the program was a \$2.5 million pilot in partnership with Maine's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), the University of Maine's Center on Aging, and Maine's Age-Friendly communities. The pilot was designed to better align state, regional, and community efforts to improve the welfare of older adults by strengthening local capacity for outreach, relationship-building, and connection to services, particularly in rural and underserved communities. It also created a linkage between the State's Age-Friendly Plan activities and those of Age-Friendly communities.

This project was funded under Section 9817 of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 to support and strengthen the critical work already underway at the regional and local level and included several complementary design elements. This investment recognized 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 moving

2,400+ OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

were completed by Community Ambassadors from the AAAs between April 2024 and June 2025, including in-person meetings, community events, and resource sharing—helping residents better understand and access available services.

into the future. This approach emphasized trust, local knowledge, and flexibility rather than a one-size-fits-all service model.

Year One findings demonstrated that the Community Connections pilot strengthened partnerships and effectively reached older adults who were not well connected to traditional systems of care or service delivery. Through the creation of dedicated **Community Ambassador roles** in each of the state's five AAAs, the project significantly expanded outreach and partnership-building with Age-Friendly Communities, municipalities, libraries, and local organizations. This work contributed to expanded community dining and social connection opportunities, improved benefit enrollment support, stronger housing and caregiver referrals, and increased visibility of AAA services, particularly in rural and geographically isolated communities.



"It's critical that people have a place that they can go to feel comfortable to request help. Being in the town office as well I think adds some reputability to being able to be trusted too."

—Misty Gleason, Community Connector, Sullivan

[Watch the Video](#)



Community Connections also advanced statewide collaboration and shared learning among the AAAs, resulting in more consistent messaging, shared outreach tools, and coordinated professional development. Staff participated in centralized training to strengthen public communication and cultural competency, while regular cross-agency convenings allowed regions to learn from one another and respond more effectively to local needs. While challenges such as transportation gaps, workforce capacity, and volunteer shortages remain, the initiative demonstrated that consistent presence, trusted relationships, and coordinated outreach significantly improve community trust and access to services.

A central element of the program focused on developing **Community Connector roles** in 12 pilot Age-Friendly communities across Maine to expand outreach and strengthen local service networks for older adults. Collectively, Community Connectors engaged over 13,000 people in programming over the first year. Community Connectors provided people with information on resources related to health and safety, transportation, digital access, social support, and other essential services. The pilot reached individuals who were often not connected to traditional systems, underscoring

the effectiveness of a locally embedded, relationship-based approach to reducing social isolation and improving access to supports.

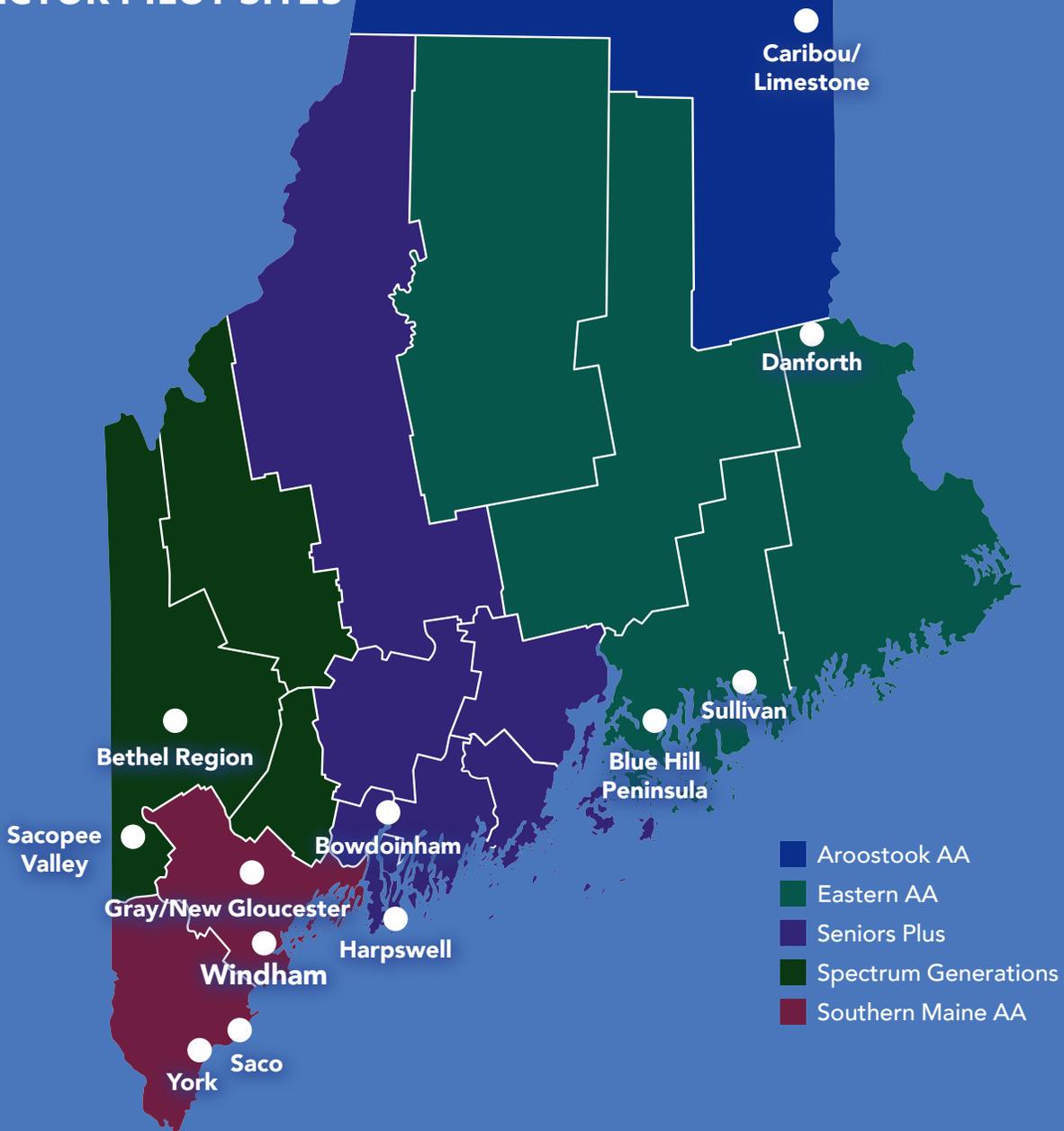
In addition to direct resident engagement, the pilot produced significant system-level outcomes. Community Connectors identified service gaps and mobilized local responses by engaging more than 400 community partners, including municipalities, nonprofits, health providers, and volunteer groups. This activity strengthened coordination among existing programs, increased awareness of available resources, and enhanced local capacity to respond to the needs of older adults. This network-building function was central to the pilot's impact, contributing to more integrated, community-driven aging supports and laying the groundwork for future scaling and sustainability.

Community Connectors worked directly in their communities to identify isolated older adults, build relationships, and connect individuals to social, health, and community-based resources. The Community Connector pilot operated across multiple regions of the state, reflecting a mix of rural and small-town communities. Connectors engaged with residents through one-on-one outreach, community events, and referrals to and from Maine's five AAAs.

Community Connectors serve as relationship brokers, helping older adults to:

- **Learn about available services and supports**
- **Connect with community activities and social networks**
- **Access available transportation, food, health, housing, and aging services**
- **Overcome barriers related to isolation, mistrust, or lack of information**
- **Partner with other agencies and organizations to maximize impact and capacity**

12 LIFELONG MAINE COMMUNITY CONNECTOR PILOT SITES



"It takes time to build relationships and trust. It helps to share the same sense of community and culture... Sometimes it's just a conversation and you start there. 'Comment allez-vous? Avez-vous besoin de quelque chose? Qu'est-ce que je peux faire pour toi?' We're here. This is what we do. And everyone is welcome."

—Marie St. Pierre, Community Connector, St. John Valley

[Watch the Video](#)

Key outcomes included:

- **Increased social connection:** Many participants reported reduced feelings of isolation and increased engagement with community activities and peers.
- **Improved access to services:** Connectors facilitated referrals and warm handoffs to AAAs, health providers, housing supports, and other community resources.
- **Stronger local networks:** The pilot strengthened coordination among local organizations, municipalities, and service providers, improving awareness of available supports and reducing fragmentation.
- **Trust-based engagement:** The locally embedded model proved particularly effective in rural areas, where personal relationships and familiarity were critical to engagement.

Qualitative feedback from participants highlighted the importance of having a consistent, trusted point of contact who could listen, follow up, and respond flexibly to individual needs.

Recognizing that not all communities are able to participate in the Community Connections pilot due to capacity or other considerations, the Cabinet included a **mini-grant opportunity** open to all Age Friendly communities. Over 40 grants were awarded in November 2024 for quick-action projects. Awards ranged from \$1,500 to \$20,000, for a total of \$330,000. An additional \$420,000 was awarded in May-June 2025 to 25 communities to support a range of activities and projects. A full list of awardees and activities can be viewed [here](#). All activities aligned 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.

While federal funding was phased out in 2025, stipends for the Community Connectors in the pilot communities are currently being funded through October 2026 through several sources, including the University of Maine Center on Aging and the University of New England's Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program ([AgingME](#)). The Cabinet continues to support the program and partner with the AAAs and communities to build on the existing partnerships and activities together.



As a mini-grant recipient, Age-Friendly Windham partnered with local and county emergency responders to educate residents about disaster preparedness. Credit: GOPIF

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: ONE YEAR OUTCOMES



13,447

**People Attended
a Program**

82

New Projects Launched



addressing social, housing, transportation,
health and education needs



445

Partners Engaged

Agencies on Aging
Libraries
Town Halls
Parks & Rec
Churches
Food Pantries
Healthcare
Banks
Local Businesses
and more!

\$540,000+

**Back to
Older Mainers**

through MSP, property tax
abatements, & other programs



383

**Volunteers
Recruited**

827

**Links to
Resources**

local, regional, statewide



Community Connectors share information about home weatherization during a monthly Community Café Lunch at New Gloucester Congregational Church. Credit: GOPIF

"The ability to help people with the Medicare Savings Program and help them fill out the application has been huge. A lot of people don't have internet. They don't use their phone to get information. And we've used space that's very trusted and known space in the community."

—Julie Fralich, Community Connector, Gray New Gloucester



Building Livability
In New Gloucester

[Watch the Video](#)

Supporting Older Workers and an Age-Diverse Workforce

Older adults serve an essential role as part of our volunteer workforce, and are also an increasingly critical component of the paid workforce in Maine. Based on the state's [Economic Development Strategy](#) plan, Maine needs to add at least 75,000 people to its workforce between 2020 and 2030. Maine's demographics present a clear opportunity to engage older adults as part of the solution in ways that benefit employers, workers of all ages, and the state's economy.

For many adults, continued participation in the workforce provides important personal benefits. While some people need or choose to work longer for financial reasons, employment can also offer social connection, a sense of purpose, and ongoing opportunities for learning and growth. Research further shows that older workers bring valuable experience and expertise, a strong work ethic, mentorship and leadership skills, and diverse perspectives that contribute to innovative and dynamic workplaces.

At the same time, these individual benefits translate into broader economic and workforce advantages. Based on demographic trends, the participation and retention of older workers will be increasingly



essential to meeting labor demand, sustaining productivity, and supporting economic growth across industries.

The projected growth of Maine's population aged 20-64 is anticipated to decline slightly over the next 10 years, while 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 34,185 in 2014 to 56,198 in 2024, a 64 percent increase. Most of the growth in job holding among people 65 and older is from incumbent job holders in their early 60's who are employed and age into the 65 and older age category. This trend underscores the importance of retention and the continued need to identify and reduce barriers to those seeking employment as older adults.

In 2025, Maine DOL and the Cabinet pursued a project with the Consortium for Aging Policy Research and Analysis (CAPRA), a collaboration that includes the University of Southern Maine's Catherine Cutler Institute and the University of Maine Center on Aging, to investigate older people's motivations and challenges in working or not working in later life. This study, to be released in early 2026, included a literature review, key informant interviews with human resources staff from a variety of employer types, and focus groups with older adults, both employed and not employed.



Reasons older people want to work:

- Financial need
- Meaning and purpose
- Overall enjoyment
- Contributing to community
- Health insurance
- Cognitive benefit
- Socialization
- Sense of identity
- Learning
- Flexibility

Reasons older people do not work:

- Health
- Barriers in job searching process
- Enjoying retirement
- Lack of flexibility
- Technology barriers
- Transportation barriers
- Outdated skills
- Employer perceptions and actions
- Family obligations

Overall, the study found that the range of older adult employment statuses and preferences underscores the complexities of late-life work realities and the associated challenges for policymakers, employers, and workers themselves in navigating increased longevity and the diverse range of work, life, and health circumstances. The demographic diversity among older adults, coupled with their diverse views and feelings about late-life paid work, suggests that messaging and outreach needs to be tailored. The findings also highlight opportunities to address barriers and build on positive attributes of employment.

The final report will include recommendations for strengthening retention and recruitment of older workers.

Findings from the report also highlight the value of existing worker resources, such as Maine's [CareerCenter](#) services. MaineDOL supports over 2,000 older Mainers with career counseling, training support, and supportive services through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, apprenticeship and CareerCenter programs. This includes hosting a workshop series for older workers focused on career choices, resume creation, navigating digital job searches, and presenting transferable skills. Another important resource is Maine's [Bureau of Rehabilitation Services](#), which assists older workers experiencing disabilities to access technology and assistive devices for employment success. This Office has provided services for over 1,200 older individuals with a disability who want to enter, maintain, or advance in their employment. As part of the MaineDOL's Business Relations Team, staff provide outreach, training, and consultation to businesses



Maine's [Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap](#) highlights the importance of older workers in meeting goals of generating economic growth, fostering community well-being, and advancing climate resilience and stewardship. The report notes that 31 percent of outdoor recreation industry workers are over 55 years old, providing an opportunity for those entering the industry to gain skills and training from an experienced workforce.



seeking to attract and retain older workers on topics such as accommodations, assistive technology, and inclusion training for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing. These are not the full extent of supports and services aimed at retaining and attracting older workers and promoting age-diverse workplaces but represent areas of opportunity for continued development.

Moving into 2026, the Cabinet will continue to build on current initiatives, including the State's certification as an Age Friendly Employer, and further evaluate strategies to support an age-diverse workforce. Based on the State's demographics, Maine has an opportunity to lead in developing best practices

and workforce innovations. This works across all state agencies and supports developing strong partnerships with others advancing similar goals. The Maine Council on Aging and AARP, as well as many other public and private sector organizations and employers, are actively working to enhance workforce opportunities for older adults. This includes Maine's Office of New Americans, which is part of the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future.



Supporting Sustainable Living

Complementary to the initiatives described above, Cabinet members and staff engage daily on a variety of initiatives that support sustainable living so all Mainers can age safely, affordably, and in ways and settings that best meet individual needs and preferences. This includes priorities across the Departments that comprise the Cabinet as well as the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future such as those that address climate change, housing, food security, and response to the opioid crisis. 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.

Food Security

Maine’s food and nutrition programs not only ensure that older adults have access to healthy food, but also help reduce loneliness, strengthen community ties, and promote overall wellbeing. Maine five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) continue to deliver a continuum of nutrition services that meet people where they are — through home-delivered meals, congregate

and social dining sites, and innovative partnerships with local restaurants that provide both healthy meals and meaningful opportunities for social connection. State Fiscal Year 2025 reporting data shows that the AAAs delivered over 890,000 meals to more than 6,000 Mainers through these vital programs. Maine’s Age-Friendly Communities also offer a range of programming, such community meals, transportation to food pantries, community gardens, and home delivered food services.

These efforts and the work of the Cabinet are closely aligned with that of the broader coalition that forms the Ending Hunger in Maine Initiative (Ending Hunger) and the Roadmap to End Hunger, released in 2021. As detailed more fully in the [2025 Annual Report on Ending Hunger](#), federal funding cuts and programmatic changes have created significant headwinds in Maine’s goal of decreasing food insecurity. Many of the Roadmap’s strategies rely on the strength of federal nutrition programs that have long been proven to reduce food insecurity. However, this year, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) faced the largest cuts in its history as a result



Volunteers serve a hot lunch, cooked with donated food, to a monthly gathering put on by Age Friendly St. John Valley Community Connections program. Credit: GOPIF



Volunteers with the Southern Maine Agency on Aging provide nutritious home-delivered meals and wellness checks to homebound older adults in Cumberland and York counties. Credit: Southern Maine Agency on Aging

of the federal Budget Reconciliation Bill (known as H.R. 1), taking food assistance away from thousands of Mainers and imposing new restrictions. These historic changes, alongside cuts or reductions to other key supports, have made it more challenging for Mainers who rely on these programs to meet their basic needs.

In November 2025, when the federal administration decided to withhold SNAP benefits during the federal government shutdown, many state leaders, businesses, nonprofits, and community members came together to help mitigate the harm. Governor Mills designated \$1.25 million (\$1 million from the Governor’s contingency account and \$250,000 from the John T. Gorman Foundation) to help bolster food pantries and meal programs facing rising demand. Of that, \$600,000 was directed to AgeWise, the state association of Maine’s Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). The AAAs used this emergency nutrition funding to provide prepared meals directly to older SNAP beneficiaries, many of whom were at risk of going without adequate nutrition. It also allowed the AAAs to expand meal access, increase deliveries in

hard-to-reach areas, and provide immediate relief to older adults who rely on SNAP but still face significant barriers in accessing sufficient food each month. As of January 1, 2026, the AAAs had provided over 25,000 meals to older adults and people with disabilities through this emergency nutrition funding.

Despite these challenges, Maine continues to seek opportunities to improve and strengthen access to nutrition and food programs. In late 2025, the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services submitted and received approval to amend the State Plan on Aging to expand Congregate Dining services funding under the Older Americans Act. This benefit now includes Grab-and-Go options such as shelf-stable, pick-up, carry-out, and drive-through meals. This flexibility enables the AAAs to reach older adults who cannot easily participate in on-site dining and helps ensure more consistent access to nutritious food.

The DHHS Office for Family Independence also recently significantly enhanced outreach activities for SNAP, submitting an annual plan to federal funders at USDA Food and Nutrition Services

for \$1.6 million, which will bring 50% of that total (\$800,000) back to the contractors who conduct or support SNAP Outreach in Maine communities. This represents a new model of outreach not previously available in Maine. This expanded outreach helps to increase awareness of the SNAP program, combat stigma, and provide support for individuals and families applying for SNAP.

Allowable SNAP Outreach services include:

- One-on-one application assistance
- Eligibility pre-screening
- General information-sharing about SNAP
- SNAP training for community partners

Ten community-based organizations are approved contractors for this work, including Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging. Providing enhanced SNAP outreach complements the many other services provided by AAAs, including existing meal and nutrition services, as well as information, referral and care coordination that helps meet other existing needs.

Housing

The lack of affordable and accessible housing remains a significant challenge across the state and a top priority for the Mills Administration, the Legislature, and public and private sector partners. 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. These funds have supported the creation of more than 2,100 new units of housing, with 1,800 additional units currently under construction and nearly 1,500 more in the pipeline. Together, these projects represent the largest housing production output in the agency’s history. See the [Housing Production Dashboard](#) for additional detail. Included in this number are nearly 1,500 completed units specifically designed for older Mainers, with almost 1,000 additional units under construction or in the pipeline.

Last year, the State established the Housing Production Fund, the first-ever dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing production.



Construction of Meadowview II Apartments in Gray began in 2024. Now complete, it provides 26 one- and two-bedroom affordable homes for Mainers aged 55-plus. Credit: Avesta Housing

This new fund, administered by MaineHousing, is financed through incremental revenue generated by increasing the tax rate on the portion of real estate sales exceeding \$1 million. It is projected to generate more than \$17 million in its first year, with revenues expected to grow over time. Additional housing reforms have addressed zoning and land use barriers, mobile home park preservation, and increased funding for emergency housing needs. More information on these and other housing initiatives approved by Governor Mills and the 132nd Maine Legislature can be viewed [here](#). Many of these benefit older adults where they reside or through supporting the workforce that is needed to serve older adults and provide other community services.

In addition to new construction, continued investment is also required to repair and modify existing homes to ensure they remain safe and accessible—an especially pressing concern given the age of Maine’s housing stock. As homes age, a growing share become uninhabitable due to poor condition, while those that remain occupied pose increased risks to residents’ health, safety, and financial stability. MaineHousing’s Community Aging in Place Program exemplifies efforts to address these challenges by helping older adults remain safely in their homes through no-cost home safety checks, minor repairs, and accessibility modifications for eligible low-income elderly and disabled homeowners. Since its inception in 2019, this program has funded over \$775,000 in services and benefited close to 1,500 households. Many other programs also contribute to safe and comfortable housing. As one example, Maine’s Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) plays a critical role for many in supporting home heating and cooling. Over 24,000 households in Maine with one or more persons over the age of 60 received a HEAP benefit, totaling just over \$12 million, and indicating the critical importance of this program to older Mainers.

The Cabinet also works closely with state agencies and partners focused on climate resiliency and energy

efficiency to ensure the needs of older adults are fully integrated into strategic planning efforts. This collaboration includes improving the safety and efficiency of homes as well as advancing community and municipal planning that is inclusive of older adults and people with disabilities—populations that are often most affected by, and least able to respond to, extreme weather events. These efforts will remain a key focus in 2026.

Transportation and Mobility Access

Increasing the availability of safe and affordable transportation options and alternatives helps reduce social isolation, supports health and independence, and improves access to essential services within our communities. Equally important are safe streets, walkable communities, and accessible public spaces. Given the complexity and breadth of transportation needs across the state, a comprehensive description of all state, regional, and community transportation partners and initiatives is beyond the scope of this report, particularly as many efforts represent multi-year strategies and span multiple sectors and populations.

In the 132nd Maine Legislature, LD 1451, Resolve, Directing the Department of Transportation to Establish the Maine Coordinating Working Group on Access and Mobility was enacted, requiring MaineDOT to establish this working group and develop an implementation plan to establish a mobility management approach that considers the needs





of people experiencing transportation barriers to accessing needed services or destinations. This implementation plan will include a timeline, budget and staffing plan, and will be captured in a report to the Transportation Committee of the Maine Legislature this year.

MaineDOT continues to focus on providing a safe transportation system for all users, regardless of travel mode. This includes efforts to support safe roadways, walkable communities, and other community-based improvements. For example, MaineDOT's Community-Based Initiatives are a set of funding mechanisms that emphasize partnerships with local communities to plan and deliver projects that reflect shared visions and priorities. These initiatives support the planning, design, and construction of a wide range of projects, including demonstration projects. One example of a Community-Based Initiative is the Village Partnership Initiative, which prioritizes projects in lower-speed areas where people live, walk, shop, and conduct business.

In addition, partnerships formed through the Cabinet's Community Connections pilot, described earlier in this report, continue to provide opportunities to strengthen, support, and expand community

volunteer transportation programs. These programs play a critical role in providing rides to medical appointments and other essential services and will be a continued focus in 2026.

Expanding mobility access can also include efforts to help ensure that public spaces and services are usable by everyone, regardless of physical ability. Accessible trails and outdoor spaces support healthy aging by promoting physical activity, mental well-being, independence, and social connection for older adults. Studies have consistently shown that older adults across the state value Maine's natural beauty and opportunities for hiking, swimming, and other recreational activities. In response, the Maine Office of Tourism, Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation, and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands have made significant progress in improving accessibility at the State's cultural and natural attractions. Tools such as the Maine Trail Finder highlight specific accessibility features at parks, open spaces, trails and historic sites, including parking, ramps, accessible restrooms, and other amenities. Advancing inclusive and accessible outdoor recreation is a core goal of the [Maine's Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap](#), with continued progress demonstrated through initiatives supported by the federally funded Community

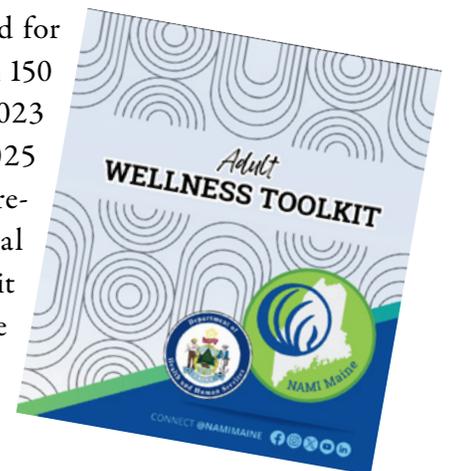
Outdoor Recreation Assistance Recovery Program grants, including expansion of the Maine Gear Library Network, which increases access to free or low-cost outdoor equipment for residents across the state

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 the Office of Aging and Disability Services and the latter by the Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention (Maine CDC). Both plans include complementary goals and strategies for increasing training, education, and counseling for care partners.

In 2025, DHHS introduced a bill to make permanent the Respite for ME program, a pilot program established in 2022 that provided flexible benefits to caregivers. Governor Mills signed the bill into law in July 2025, adopting the pilot program’s successful features and aligning the program with the federally funded National Family Caregiver Support Program. Information on the program and other state care giver supports is available [here](#).

The DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services also partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maine to deliver two national best-practice education programs to caregivers, which focused on providing strategies and tools to family and/or formal caregivers supporting adults living with physical disabilities and mental health challenges. This allowed for 14 sessions for more than 150 caregivers from May 2023 through February 2025 and also funded the creation of NAMI’s Mental Health Wellness Toolkit available for statewide distribution.



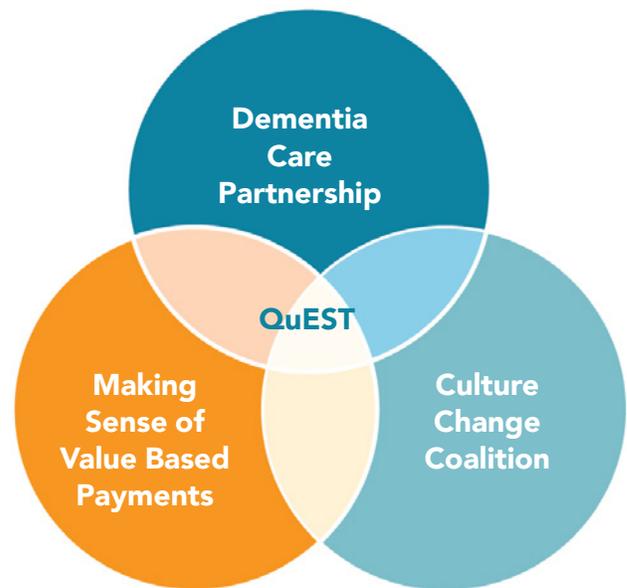
The Maine CDC oversees the Healthy Brain Initiative, a collaborative effort by DHHS and a broad array of public and private partners to address Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias. This initiative focuses on improving brain health and includes strategies to reduce dementia risk, improve early detection and diagnosis, and strengthen community resources. The Healthy Brain Initiative Coalition represents 72 partners in 18 different sectors.



Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS)

Following the transformative implementation of nursing facilities rate reform described in the Cabinet’s second Annual report, DHHS, Maine Health Care Association and the Maine Long-term Care Ombudsman Program collaborated to offer a monthly technical assistance series to nursing facilities known as QuEST, or Quality, Excellence, Staffing, Teamwork. QuEST closely aligns with the value-based purchasing portion of rate reform and is designed to support nursing facilities in reducing nursing staff turnover through culture change initiatives, reducing the use of antipsychotic medications, and measuring and increasing resident and family satisfaction. In 2025, the monthly QuEST learning calls had high levels of participation and engagement, received high ratings from participants, and successfully brought facilities together to learn from experts while also sharing best practices through peer-to-peer learning. In 2025, year one of rate reform, participation in the QuEST calls, along with other quality activities, determined each nursing home’s eligibility for a portion of an \$8.1 million quality bonus pool. Beginning in 2026, quality payments will progressively be more challenging and awarded based on measured outcome performance. Based on survey feedback from participants, the QuEST technical support calls will continue in 2026.

QuEST had its origins with the [Nursing Facility and Residential Care Innovation and Quality Advisory Council \(IQAC\)](#), a group of interested partners first convened in April 2023 as the Department was beginning its redesign process for nursing home payments. The IQAC issued a report in January 2024, *Improving Quality in Maine’s Nursing and Residential Care Facilities: Themes Emerging from the Nursing Home and Residential Care Facility Innovation and Quality Advisory Council*, in which it identified priorities for achieving high quality, person-centered care in nursing homes, identifying the foundation as a stable, well-trained direct care staff, making excellent clinical outcomes and good resident experiences possible.



Maine continues for a second year as one of nine states selected to participate in the National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP)’s Nursing Home Learning Collaborative. NASHP played a vital role in Maine’s nursing facility rate reform by sharing best practices from around the nation, directly from subject matter experts, and will continue to offer support to DHHS in 2026 to study and address the multi-faceted challenges facing nursing homes.

Workforce shortages remain a primary concern and continue to be a major focus of collaboration among state agencies, the Legislature, educational institutions, and public and private sector employers and providers. Significant efforts to stabilize the workforce have been undertaken over the past several years, many of which are outlined in prior Cabinet reports, with a strong emphasis on both recruitment and retention in addition to reimbursement strategies.

In July 2024, DHHS, in partnership with Maine DOL, launched *Careers with Purpose*, a comprehensive marketing campaign to recruit and retain direct service workers in aging, intellectual disability, brain injury, physical disability, and mental health services. The campaign continues to generate a substantial number of referrals and contacts for Maine DOL CareerCenter Counselors with healthcare expertise. As of December 31, 2025, these counselors have

served more than 763 people from every county in Maine, with 24 percent of participants enrolling in a workforce training opportunity.

DHHS also continues to move forward with the Worker Portability and Advancement Initiative, which aligns and consolidates training requirements for Personal Support Specialists and Direct Support Professionals. This initiative establishes a portable baseline credential, expands opportunities for advanced training, and facilitates easier transitions between service populations. A pilot program

has been launched while rulemaking is underway to implement this training framework.

In addition, DHHS released revised regulations for assisted housing facilities, effective September 2025. The updated rule simplifies the licensing structure to improve clarity, compliance, and alignment with best practices in assisted housing. In 2024, DHHS also issued new rules for personal care agencies, replacing the previous registration requirement with a licensing process and establishing clear standards for personnel qualifications, training, supervision, recordkeeping, and confidentiality.



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 other priority issues.

In 2026, the Cabinet will continue to monitor the impacts of federal changes on services and programming supporting older adults and our communities at large. While the federal Reconciliation Bill, often referred to as H.R. 1, is estimated to cost Maine over \$5 billion in federal health funding over the next 10 years, the recent award of \$190 million for federal fiscal year 2026 as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program provides an opportunity to promote cross-agency and sector work that addresses the needs and strengths of older adults. Population health strategies include community paramedicine and spreading the effectiveness and implementation of evidence-based programs such as falls prevention work, disease self-management, and caregiver supports. Other strategies address workforce, technology innovation, and access to care. Through continued collaboration, strategic investment, and a focus on innovation, Maine is well positioned to strengthen supports for older adults while building resilient, and inclusive communities that benefit residents of all ages.



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