Connecticut—Growing Older

The impact of our aging population: what funders need to know

Connecticut’s population age 65+ is projected to increase by 54% between 2010 and 2025 according to the Connecticut State Data Center. As our state and country age rapidly, funders will need to look at the work they do with a new demographic lens. Aging is not a narrow field of interest and older people are part of the families, neighborhoods and communities that are already our priorities.

Funders can find much common ground between aging and existing areas of focus including healthcare, children and families, workforce, civic engagement, housing, the arts and transportation. By supporting age-friendly communities, we also build places for a lifetime where people of all ages can participate fully.

The Connecticut Council for Philanthropy and a group of our members have been collaborating with Grantmakers in Aging and regional associations of grantmakers around the country on a project called EngAGEment. The project explores:

- How shifts in population – increasing numbers of older adults as well as a shrinking proportion of younger people – affect all aspects of society
- Ways to help people age with independence, choice and dignity within our local communities as well as our state
- How to mobilize the skills, energy and talents of older people to tackle pressing community challenges while enhancing their lives

In an effort to understand the major issues and provide recommendations, the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy interviewed experienced professionals from the aging field in Connecticut. After exploring their key messages, we conclude with first steps to help funders get started.

506,559
Number of Connecticut residents over age 65 in 2010

782,848
Projected number of Connecticut residents over age 65 in 2025

54%
Increase in projected population over age 65 between 2010 and 2025

EngAGEment has been supported nationally by Atlantic Philanthropies. The following members of the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy have supported our Connecticut initiative: The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven; Connecticut Community Foundation; Fairfield County Community Foundation; The Foundation for Community Health; Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; and United Way.
Rebalancing Services and Care

The dramatic increase in the older adult population is one major trend discussed by the aging professionals we interviewed. They often take special note of the 85+ population – generally those in greatest need of care and support. In Connecticut, numbers of residents 85+ grew from 64,273 in 2000 to 84,898 in 2010 and are projected to reach 96,394 by 2025.

Funders also need to consider another major trend. Connecticut is part of a national rebalancing of long-term care – a shift from institutional care to community-based services and supports. This often means increased consumer choice for people who prefer to continue living in their own home or the community where they have ties.

With Money Follows the Person, a federal/state program, Connecticut committed to moving older adults and people with disabilities out of nursing facilities and back into communities. Many hospitals and their partners are also focused on improving care transitions for discharged patients. The goals are to reduce hospital readmissions and address patient needs in the community when possible.

Investing in Prevention, Wellness and Livable Communities

This expanded view of long-term care includes the concept of livable communities with projects such as Complete Streets to ensure that traffic signals allow enough time for older adults as well as children and people with disabilities to cross safely.

Livability assets include flexible housing options, accessible transportation, lifelong learning and fitness opportunities as well as public spaces that encourage interaction across generations. For many people, retrofitting their homes will be essential for aging in place safely and successfully.

Several aging network members stressed that Connecticut cannot afford to focus all of its effort and money on those with the greatest care needs. We need to think more broadly about our older adult population. One popular strategy is to make evidence-based health, mental health and fitness programs such as Chronic Disease Self-Management, Tai Chi, and Fall Prevention more widely available.

Collaborators such as Connecticut’s Department of Transportation, Conference of Municipalities and local planning departments are needed to build communities that help... all residents participate actively.

The skills, energy and talents of older adults can be deployed to address a wide range of community needs.

To promote healthy, active lives and control future costs of care, we need to invest in prevention and wellness.
Challenging the System to Expand Local Capacity

With increasing emphasis being placed on the localities, it is important to note that municipal senior services in Connecticut vary widely among towns. The disparity in financial resources, staffing and expertise, and town commitment to aging services means that municipal aging programs range from nonexistent to comprehensive.

The five Area Agencies on Aging partner with local communities – senior centers, libraries, nonprofits and others, but, in some towns, there is nobody able or willing to partner. With stretched resources, Area Agencies can’t possibly reach all the seniors in their regions.

Professionals who are knowledgeable about local senior services in Connecticut note the lack of standards and models to help guide cities and towns. The state Department of Social Services is not funded or staffed to strengthen local programs. Aging experts stress the need for system-wide thinking in order to bridge the gap between the municipalities and the state and area agencies.

Improving Access to Information and Services

Access to information is a fundamental service – the first step in connecting older adults, families and caregivers to supports, benefits and programs. In order to negotiate the often confusing system, the availability of problem-solving and hands-on help is crucial.

The Department of Social Services and Area Agencies on Aging offer The CHOICES Program to provide information on health insurance and other services. Several years ago, they launched Aging and Disability Resource Centers which also facilitate access for people over 18 living with disabilities.

United Way 211, community action agencies, senior centers, libraries and nonprofits also deliver information. Some cities and towns have social workers for individual visits to assess needs, educate residents about services, and follow up. Despite all of these efforts, many older adults and their families still don’t know where to go for answers to their questions.

The Takeaway for Funders

Not everything needs to be reinvented in every town. Collaborating on a structure to systematically build local services and improve coordination would be of great benefit.

Training and mentoring of local senior services staff should be a priority. Groups wanting to share knowledge and best practices among towns often don’t have the resources.

An improved system for sharing information and updates on benefits and services would help local providers better inform residents and become partners in statewide efforts.

Benefits outreach works. Projects that walk low-income seniors through the benefits process can increase financial security and also bring in dollars that aid the local economy.
Workforce Development: Essential for Community-Based Care

Growing numbers of older adults, emphasis on aging in community, and re-balancing of long-term care lead to the need for more and better trained direct care workers. The Money Follows the Person Workforce Development Subcommittee says we will need 9,000 more direct care workers in the next five years. With the right training programs, some workers in institutional settings can be retrained for home care. Creating career ladders in home care can help build a pipeline of qualified and motivated workers.

Family caregivers, the unpaid workforce, are also experiencing increasing demands. They often want: timely skill training to match their current situation; Alzheimer’s disease and dementia training that addresses needs through the stages; coaching in person or on the web; and peer networks tailored to grandparents raising grandchildren.

THE TAKEAWAY FOR FUNDERS

New training partnerships are needed such as collaborations with community colleges, high schools and Workforce Investment Boards.

Family caregiving impacts all generations - from children raised by grandparents to the middle-aged ‘sandwich generation’ to older people.

FUNDERS’ INTERESTS AND THE ISSUE OF AGING: HOW THEY INTERSECT

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<tr>
<th>INTERESTED IN:</th>
<th>FUNDER MAY WANT TO:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Work with municipalities and nonprofits to increase access to prevention and wellness programs and in-home supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Development, Housing and Transportation</td>
<td>Collaborate with localities to craft a blueprint for successful aging that helps build more livable communities for everyone</td>
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<td>Civic Engagement</td>
<td>Support local nonprofits, community groups and schools to build their capacity to use the talents, energy and experience of older adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Needs</td>
<td>Partner with social services agencies in piloting projects that walk low-income seniors through the benefits process</td>
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<td>Workforce and Employment</td>
<td>Convene partners on training for home care workers to forge new alliances that can meet the demand and Advocate for retraining programs and flexible work schedules that help older people remain gainfully employed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children and Families</td>
<td>Explore training and support needs of family caregivers and find better ways to meet them</td>
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JOIN THE COUNCIL’S AGING AFFINITY GROUP AND COLLABORATE WITH COLLEAGUES TO CHAMPION REGIONAL AND STATEWIDE SOLUTIONS THAT STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEM. YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS ARE NEEDED!

HOW TO MAKE AN IMPACT:

Raise awareness: The aging population is everyone’s issue.

Support localities: Reach residents who need information, care, and opportunities for staying healthy and engaged.

Work with senior-serving agencies: Design cost-effective ways to share knowledge, expertise and success.

Advise grantees: How their organizations and services will be affected by population shifts.

Lead by example: Provide meaningful roles for older adults in your organization.

Create a niche: Have a positive effect on the aging communities you serve by finding and filling a need.

“Connecticut – Growing Older” was prepared by Deborah Stein, CCP’s Consultant in Aging Issues