engAGE in Community

By 2015, the number of people aged 65 and older living in Clackamas County will increase by nearly 48%

Is your community prepared?

Learn more on May 18th from 8 am -2 pm in the Gregory Forum at Clackamas Community College!

Our nation is aging, and Oregon is no exception. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of people aged 65 and over living in Clackamas County will increase by nearly 20,000. The “boom” will not stop there. The Oregon Department of Human Services states in their 2009 Healthy Aging by County Report that within just one generation the population of adults 60-74 years will increase by about 130 percent in Oregon. The population aged 75 years and older will increase by approximately 170 percent. The Census Bureau anticipates, by 2050, one American in 20 will be 85 years old or older, compared to one in 100 today.¹ Is your community prepared?

Why is it important to focus on aging? The aging population is driving our demographic transition and the concept of ‘aging in place’ is reported a top priority for older adults across the nation. Aging adults in Clackamas County are no exception. This is fortunate when you consider many aging adults represent an underutilized reservoir of experience, talent, and expertise that can strengthen all levels of society and address critical social needs.

A new paradigm of an “age-friendly community” is emerging. According to AARP, more than a quarter of seniors already reside in a “naturally occurring retirement community,” or NORC. These communities promote healthy aging, independence, and community building through a multifaceted approach. What kind of programs and policies will improve the ability for older adults to age in place? The key elements include health care management and prevention programs; job opportunities, education, socialization, and recreational activities; case management and social work services; and volunteer opportunities. Other provisions such as curb cuts, transportation, safe neighborhoods and libraries are pivotal attributes for communities that aspire to be “age-friendly”.

Communities where older adults can live as independently as possible reduce the burden on family caregivers. A study, entitled “Working Caregivers and Employer Health Care Costs: New Insights and Innovations for Reducing Health Care Costs for Employers,” examines the relationship between family care-giving, caregivers’ health status, and employer health costs. Working family caregivers cost U.S. employers an estimated $13.4 billion a year. Subsequently, the cost of care-giving to caregivers themselves is not as simple as accounting for

hours. There are out of pocket expenses including lost wages, social security, health insurance, and retirement savings. More than one third (37 %,) of caregivers to persons age 50 and older reported quitting their job or reducing their work hours in 2007.”

And who will take care of the caregiver? As we move ahead, the most productive strategies will not to focus on just one generation but will consider the entire society and the interactions of all of the generations.

This strategy purposely defines the vision for **engAGE in Community**. “Clackamas County residents of all ages, backgrounds, and socio-economic levels will have access to and choices for housing, transportation, health care, education, recreation, and social, cultural and civic engagement in communities that are economically resilient and support healthy, active, and successful living and aging.” Only in this broader context can we consider the essential dynamics of the overall population and identify the key opportunities for meaningful change.

**engAGE in Community** is a community based action initiative with the mission of establishing Clackamas County as an age-friendly place that supports the ability of people to age actively and successfully in their home or community of choice. **engAGE in Community** will recruit, mobilize, and empower individuals and organizations within Clackamas County who want work together toward the goal of creating in Clackamas County the supports and infrastructure that will allow all county residents to age in their home or community of choice.

Project components include a mail-in survey to county households with occupants aged 55 to 75, an on-line survey for county residents of all ages, and an in-depth, volunteer lead assessment of five to ten individual communities where the attributes that contribute to the age-friendliness of the community are identified and mapped. We will also be using an exciting new community engagement tool, Participatory Photo Mapping (PPM), to document age-friendly supports and barriers in Clackamas County communities.

The project kickoff event will occur on May 18th at the Gregory Forum at Clackamas Community College. By December of 2010, a summit will be held to present our initial findings and discuss ways to move forward to address the issues that come to the forefront during the assessment process.

There are many opportunities to learn more about **engAGE in Community** and to get involved. Please join us in our efforts to establish Clackamas County as an age-friendly place that supports the ability of people to age actively and successfully in their home or community of choice. For more information, please contact:

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