

State News – A Quarterly Highlight of State Initiatives, Programs, and Legislation

Michigan: Calhoun County Elder Abuse Prevention Coalition

Just over a year ago, when Karla Fales (now Executive Director of Region IIIB Area Agency on Aging in Michigan) was developing program goals, she was struck by the region's lack of a coordinated elder abuse public awareness and outreach effort. She called representatives from various county aging and human services agencies to explore possible approaches. To her surprise, approximately 25 people responded. Participants of this ad hoc meeting told similar stories of increased reports of recent scams, particularly household contracting scams. The group responded by forming the Calhoun County Elder Abuse Prevention Coalition, adopting the initial goal of promoting awareness and education among professionals and the public. The coalition is tri-chaired by Ms. Fales, John Hallacy, the county's prosecuting attorney, and elder law attorney Stacey Lott, a private practitioner.

“We felt that there was a particular lack of public awareness of financial abuse and scams, including ‘affinity fraud,’ where perpetrators befriend the elder and have them turn over assets or invest in scams.”

The initial alliance involved only senior services providers, but a unique feature of this coalition is its growing involvement of community gatekeepers, people who have routine and frequent contact with seniors but may not work in traditional aging services arenas. The coalition currently includes: a home heating contractor, a funeral director, a durable medical equipment provider, and herbal product distributor, the editor of a senior community newspaper, along with home health care providers and other representatives from APS, the criminal justice system, the long-term care ombudsman program, and others.

“Every month we worried that this would be the meeting when no one would show up. We thought if we stopped serving refreshments, we'd really be in trouble!” Ms. Fales joked.

That has not been the case. Group meetings have drawn as many as 42 participants. They recently drafted a Fraud Fighter prevention plan similar to Kentucky's program (featured in the November 2007 NCEA E-News), incorporating additional input from Oregon's model. The program involves providing seniors with a one page form to give to door-to-door contractors offering services. The contractor is asked to complete the form which is pre-addressed to the county attorney for a background check, a strategy that sends fraudulent contractors retreating. Building on this program, the senior community newspaper now requires that advertising contractors include their license number in print ads. (To learn more about Kentucky Fraud Fighters, [Click Here.](#))

The response from seniors in this rural county has been very positive. One resident requested a stack of Fraud Fighter forms that she not only hands out to contractors but to other door-to-door solicitors, particularly magazine vendors. “We are sponsoring a lot of outreach programs for seniors, and we are hearing that politeness is one of the greatest obstacles in fending off scam artists. Seniors like the idea of handing them a form rather than having to say ‘no’ or to confront them,” Ms. Fales reported.

One of the coalition members recently received an \$8,200 grant from the Battle Creek Community Foundation to launch a public awareness campaign throughout the county. The initiative, which will focus on financial exploitation, will include a brochure, billboards, and other outreach materials. *(Cont. on page 4)*

Beeson Award *(continued from front page)*

“One of the important factors for this study is that it is a population-based approach as opposed to clinically-based. The CHAP study is a rigorously designed longitudinal epidemiological study with strong community support. It has achieved higher participation rates both at baseline (78.6 percent) and during follow-up (85 percent) than most recent epidemiological studies of this size and scope, which also reduces bias. In addition, the study’s cohort has been very well characterized, with up to 15 years (1993-2008) of detailed information on many relevant background variables. This feature will allow us to examine in-depth the potential confounders for our proposed study in this biracial population.” The project will serve as the cornerstone for future studies and policy development. The long-term goals are to develop strategies to identify older adults at risk for self-neglect in order to develop prevention strategies and targeted, early interventions to reduce or avert morbidity and mortality.

Dr. Dong serves as the principal investigator of the project and is grateful for the continued support of the institute and department of medicine at Rush University. Dr. Dennis Evans, the principal investigator of the Chicago Health and Aging Project study, and Dr. Terry Fulmer, Dean of the College of Nursing at New York University, are key advisors collaborating on the research.

Dr. Dong also sees the study as a vital opportunity to give back to the community. “I think that as physicians we are privileged to care for our patients. But I also deeply believe that we have broader responsibilities to society, especially for the vulnerable populations, not only through clinical care, but also through rigorous research, advocacy, and fostering inter-disciplinary collaborations.”

This philosophy was greatly influenced by his family history. The grandson of a village physician in rural China, he witnessed his grandfather imprisoned for championing human rights and religious freedom. As a University of Chicago undergraduate, Dr. Dong worked with community leaders and Amnesty International on human rights issues and other issues facing Chinese Americans. As a Rush University medical student he and his wife, Melissa Simon, M.D., M.P.H. (an obstetrician-gynecologist and health services researcher at Northwestern Medical Center), started the school’s first chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility. The group focused on education initiatives for Chicago medical students on the issues of domestic violence and gun violence. During his medical residency and geriatric fellowship at Yale University, Dr. Dong worked closely with Connecticut Social Services Agency on the issue of elder abuse. Since he moved back to Chicago, he continues to work extensively in elder abuse prevention, not only as a researcher, but as a clinician, and an activist in collaboration with a number of city, state, and national organizations.

Note: The deadline for 2009 Beeson Awards Request of Applications is November 3rd, 2008. Letters of intent to apply are requested by October 3rd, 2008. For more information, visit: [Click Here](#). As quoted from the program’s web site: “Since 1995, the Paul B. Beeson Career Development Awards in Aging Research Program (formerly the Beeson Physician Faculty Scholars Program) has supported 139 Beeson Scholars from 39 of the nation’s top medical schools and research institutions. Today, the Beeson program continues to foster the independent research careers of clinically trained investigators — a growing cadre of talented physician-scientists — whose research and leadership are enhancing the health and quality of life of Americans, particularly older people.” The National Institute on Aging and the American Federation for Aging Research currently share administrative responsibilities for the program. Other funding partners include the John A. Hartford Foundation, the Star Foundation, and the Atlantic Philanthropies. Dr. Mark S Lachs, M.D., M.P.H. of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University was named an inaugural Beeson Scholar in 1995 for his research project: “Depression And Self-Neglect In Community-Dwelling Elders.”

State News: Michigan *(continued from page 2)*

The initiative will rely heavily on consumer-based businesses (grocers, hair salons, etc.) for dissemination. Ms. Fales points out, “The aging services people across the country are very generous and have been very willing to share their ideas and resources.” For example, the Calhoun coalition has been assisted by nearby Kalamazoo County, which recently received funding from Blue Cross and Blue Shield for its own campaign. In turn, both the Kalamazoo and Calhoun coalitions have obtained permission to use materials from San Diego’s successful “Silence Isn’t Golden” campaign.

“At this point, we have more ideas than energy – for example, we want to create a FAST team, and we want to create training for home health care workers and others. We are looking for a model of a community advocate, a vetted volunteer, who could be present when a senior who does not have a support person needs to make an important decision.”

Ms. Fales worries about the impact of increased service demands that would no doubt accompany a successful public awareness campaign. Until six months ago, the county had only one investigator for elder abuse cases; it now has two. Along with the other members, she realizes that this is all the more reason to strengthen and continue the prevention efforts of the coalition.

Delaware: Senior Protection Initiative

State Attorney General Joseph R. “Beau” Biden, III recently announced new measures to enhance the prevention of senior victimization and to enhance the prosecution of crimes committed against older Delaware residents. “Through the Senior Protection Initiative, the Delaware Department of Justice is redoubling its efforts to prosecute those who have committed senior abuse, encourage victims to come forward and bring together state agencies, law enforcement and advocates to tackle these issues,” said Biden.

Veteran prosecutor Marsha White was named Senior Protection Deputy, and will lead a new multidisciplinary team of prosecutors, law enforcement, and advocates involved in elder abuse prevention and response. The team will begin meeting monthly in October to staff and respond to cases involving senior abuse.

In addition to the newly created multidisciplinary team, the initiative will include public outreach efforts and increased training in detecting abuse for local law enforcement.

New York: The Eddy Haven for Abused Elderly

The Eddy, part of the Northeast Health network in upper state New York, has recently initiated The Eddy Haven for Abused Elderly. The program will target elder abuse prevention and intervention through a wide range of services.

The Eddy Haven will serve individuals aged 60 and older who reside in Albany and Rensselaer counties. The program will provide a comprehensive umbrella of coordinated community resources and services for victimized elders who may need to leave their homes. Services range from temporary shelter at an undisclosed location, nursing care, home care, counseling and/or legal support, case management, and referral for additional services. *(Continued on page 5)*

State News: New York (*Continued from page 4*)

Since law enforcement are often first responders to victims of abuse, The Eddy Haven program will collaborate with law enforcement to create and deliver training. The program will also engage health care and other professions who provide care for seniors, and will reach out to seniors themselves to raise awareness.

California: Sacramento County Unveils “Stop.Listen.Care.” Campaign

Eight years ago, the Sacramento County Adult & Aging Commission was charged with developing a plan for senior protection. The resulting recommendations called for a comprehensive public awareness campaign which has resulted in a new program: “Stop.Listen.Care.” The central theme of the campaign is that any individual in the community can make a vital difference in the life of a vulnerable senior.

“We want to engage people at a proactive level rather than a reactive level,” states Committee Chair Peggy Forseth-Andrews.

The program was designed to help community members understand how they can become involved before a crisis sets in to help decrease isolation, a risk factor for elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. The approach emphasizes practical suggestions for recognizing the subtler warning signs of mistreatment. It also promotes awareness of major county resources and services.

“*Keeping Your Distance is Overrated*,” is the tagline for brochures, posters, and letters designed for the public as well as professionals. A campaign web site is under development. Dissemination of campaign literature is ongoing, and an important strategy will be the distribution of information referral cards through a retail grocery chain.

Ms. Forseth-Andrews, a volunteer working with the Commission since its inception, notes that a key element of the campaign launch was a roll-out breakfast attended by approximately 30 aging and social services professionals and advocates. Attendees were urged to commit to the effort, in writing, in various ways: where and how they could assist in distributing the literature; they were invited to join the speaker’s bureau; and, most importantly, they were asked what doors they could open to expand the initiative’s reach. Phase two of the roll-out will include a similar breakfast event for professionals in the business community and collaboration with city councils.

Campaign development and launch has cost approximately \$14,000 dollars, and the Commission is seeking additional funding to continue to support outreach efforts. In an effort to measure the project’s impact, they will track incoming requests on the county’s 211 line, and also monitor requests to the speaker’s bureau.

For more information on the “Stop.Listen.Care.” campaign, contact Nancy Yavrom, program coordinator of Sacramento County Adult and Aging Commission by email at nyavrom@communitycouncil.org or by telephone 916-447-7063.

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Editorial note: The Federal Legislative Update, Elder Abuse Research and Literature, and State News are quarterly postings. Up Next:
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January – State News