



Connecticut Community Foundation

# Insight: Seniors

## Exploring Opportunities for Meeting The Needs of Older Adults in Our Region



## Dear Community Partner:

The Connecticut Community Foundation (CCF) is committed to improving the quality of life for the more than 320,000 residents of our twenty-one town region encompassing Greater Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills.

As a community foundation, our core mission is to identify critical needs and provide leadership and resources to develop solutions that work for our community.

With almost 50,000 of our residents over age 65, this is an important and growing sector of our population. While seniors have needs as they age, they are also an invaluable source of knowledge that can be tapped in each of our towns.

### **Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative**


In 2009, we received our largest gift ever. Members of the board of trustees of East Hill Woods, Inc. gave \$9.2 million to CCF to establish the East Hill Woods Fund, a permanent fund to benefit services and programs that help seniors in our region remain in their homes. The fund is the result of the sale of East Hill Woods, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, to Watermark at East Hill, a certified continuing care retirement community in Southbury.

Working with an advisory committee and community partners, we built the *Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative* in just one year to develop new approaches and build our regional capacity to benefit residents in our region who are age 65 and over.

One of our first goals was to acquire a better understanding of the senior population in our region. Over 18 months, we conducted interviews, site visits and eight focus groups as well as gathering census and service data to better understand the demographics, issues and service gaps while identifying successful programs and efforts already in place.

We are happy to share the results of our exploration with you. We hope **CCF Insight: Seniors** will lead to rich discussions about new approaches for enhancing the lives of seniors and the quality of life in our region.

Thank you,



Carol P. O'Donnell  
Director, Programs and Services



Deborah J. Stein  
Senior Services Program Officer

# Overview

The demographic trajectory of our aging nation has been well documented. **The growth of our population age 65 and over far exceeds that of the population as a whole.** With the leading edge of the baby boom generation now reaching Medicare age, growth will continue to increase significantly.

For this report, we define seniors as people age 65 and over. Within that group, there are actually many different senior populations. They vary along dimensions such as age, employment status, physical and mental health, activity level, family and community involvement, language and culture, financial stability and support needs.

Given the wide variability among seniors, can we generalize about them at all? If there is one overriding theme, it is that **most seniors** (80% of Connecticut residents according to the state's Long-Term Care Needs Assessment) **want to remain independent in their homes and communities for as long as they can.** The availability of timely information and concrete help in 'aging in place' – help that is affordable, easy to access and user-friendly – is essential to an individual's healthy aging. It is also a policy issue as institutionalization is costly – both in public and private dollars.

As you review this report, it is crucial to remember both sides of the equation. **Seniors are not only consumers of services; they also bring a wealth of resources to the table.** Many older adults are active employees and volunteers who continue to put their energy and creativity to work. Capitalizing on seniors' own contributions will be essential to meeting senior and general community needs as our region, our state and our nation age.

# Who Are Our Region's Seniors?

## Population Trends: An Older Region, An Older State

The 21-town region served by Connecticut Community Foundation (CCF) encompasses Greater Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills. The 2010 Census finds our region home to **49,606 people 65 years of age and older**; they comprise **14.6% of the total population**. As a whole, our population is **slightly older than the state of Connecticut overall whose senior population is 14.2%**. Our residents are also considerably older than the U.S. population as a whole with 13% of people aged 65+. See Table 1.

Equally noteworthy is the variation among towns. At 26.3%, Southbury's proportion of residents 65 and over is more than double the national average.

Professionals in the field of aging also pay close attention to numbers of people 85 and over. Although health status and activity levels vary widely, rates of disability and need for support services are markedly higher for people over 85 than they are for the 'younger old.'

According to the 2010 Census, there are **8,379 people 85 and over** living in our region or **2.5% of the total population**. Again, our regional proportion exceeds Connecticut's at 2.4% and the U.S. at 1.8%. The towns of **Southbury, Litchfield, Cheshire and Middlebury exceed our regional rate**.

As communities evaluate the needs of seniors and prioritize community resources, total numbers as well as population rates are important. **Although Waterbury has a lower proportion of seniors than our region as a whole, the city's population includes nearly 14,000 people 65 and over with 2,612 of them 85 and over**. It should be noted that 2.4% of Waterbury's population is 85+, the same proportion as Connecticut overall.

**Table 1**  
Total Population and Senior Population 2010\*  
CCF 21-Town Region, Connecticut, United States

Location	Total Population	Population 65+	Percent 65+	Population 85+	Percent 85+
Beacon Falls	6,049	783	12.9%	88	1.5%
Bethlehem	3,607	539	14.9%	63	1.7%
Bridgewater	1,727	416	24.1%	42	2.4%
Cheshire	29,261	4,102	14.0%	807	2.8%
Goshen	2,976	517	17.4%	56	1.9%
Litchfield	8,466	1,658	19.6%	281	3.3%
Middlebury	7,575	1,302	17.2%	209	2.8%
Morris	2,388	371	15.5%	46	1.9%
Naugatuck	31,862	3,806	11.9%	640	2.0%
New Milford	28,142	3,427	12.2%	469	1.7%
Oxford	12,683	1,712	13.5%	163	1.3%
Prospect	9,405	1,425	15.2%	179	1.9%
Roxbury	2,262	433	19.1%	38	1.7%
Southbury	19,904	5,235	26.3%	1,228	6.2%
Thomaston	7,887	1,047	13.3%	167	2.1%
Warren	1,461	275	18.8%	23	1.6%
Washington	3,578	735	20.5%	85	2.4%
Waterbury	110,366	13,943	12.6%	2,612	2.4%
Watertown	22,514	3,637	16.2%	558	2.5%
Wolcott	16,680	2,540	15.2%	408	2.4%
Woodbury	9,975	1,703	17.1%	217	2.2%
<b>21-Town Region</b>	<b>338,768</b>	<b>49,606</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>8,379</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
Connecticut	3,574,097	506,559	14.2%	84,898	2.4%
United States	308,745,538	40,267,984	13.0%	5,493,433	1.8%

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## Senior Growth Outpaces the General Population

The general population in our 21-town region grew at a rate of 5.3% between 2000 and 2010. During the same period, our 65+ population increased by almost 10% and our 85+ population increased by 27%.

Senior growth in all towns substantially exceeded general population growth with the noteworthy exception of Waterbury residents age 65+ who actually declined in number. See Tables 2 and 3 below for towns with the largest percentage increase in 65+ and 85+. Information on senior population changes for all 21 towns in our region appears in Appendix 1.

**Table 2**  
Comparison between 2000 and 2010 Population\*  
Largest % Increases in Age 65+  
Top Three in Region

Location	2000 Census 65+	2010 Census 65+	Number Increase	Percent Increase
Oxford	857	1,712	855	100%
Bridgewater	242	416	174	72%
Beacon Falls	506	783	277	55%
21-Town Region	45,292	49,606	4,314	10%
Connecticut	470,183	506,559	36,376	8%
United States	34,991,753	40,267,984	5,276,231	15%

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 3**  
Comparison between 2000 and 2010 Population\*  
Largest % Increases in Age 85+  
Top Three in Region

Location	2000 Census 85+	2010 Census 85+	Number Increase	Percent Increase
Roxbury	17	38	21	124%
Wolcott	189	408	219	116%
Thomaston	83	167	84	101%
21-Town Region	6,572	8,379	1,807	27%
Connecticut	64,273	84,898	20,625	32%
United States	4,239,587	5,493,433	1,253,846	30%

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The growing numbers and proportion of older adults challenge municipalities, volunteer and religious groups, businesses, nonprofit and health care organizations, and citizens in general to examine and address the impacts:

- What are the priority needs of older adults and what is the scope of those needs?
- Which segments of the community might play a role in meeting those needs?
- What are the fiscal impacts of an aging population?
- How can a town or region facilitate successful aging and improve the overall quality of life for all residents?

## Senior Population is Becoming More Diverse

Although our region's residents 65+ are **more than 90% white**, the 2010 Census shows **increasing diversity over the past ten years. Changes in the ethnic composition of the region's seniors, especially Hispanic seniors, has increased demand for specialized services** such as bilingual case management, health education and program information and medical translation. However, as stated in the 2010-2013 Area Plan developed by the Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging, "...many programs do not have the capacity to respond effectively to an older adult whose first language is Spanish, either through primary staff contact or through written material."

**Table 4**  
**Comparison between 2000 and 2010 Population\* Residents Age 65+ in CCF Region by Ethnic Background**

Group	2000 Census People 65+	2010 Census People 65+	Percent Increase
Total**	45,292	49,606	10%
African-American or Black	1,487	1,983	33%
Asian	196	487	148%
Hispanic or Latino	951	2,023	113%
White	42,299	44,869	6%

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

\*\*Totals are slightly higher as they also include people of mixed and other races.

## The Rising Costs of Aging

The health and safety of low-income seniors is often at risk as they struggle to afford the basics such as food, housing, utility and medical costs on fixed incomes. Many older adults who consider themselves middle class are also challenged to find the money for rising out-of-pocket health care expenses as well as paying bills for assistance with yard work, home maintenance and routine tasks that they can no longer handle themselves.

The American Community Survey (part of the U.S. Census Bureau) is an ongoing assessment that includes estimates of poverty rates. According to their 2006-2010 Five-Year Estimates, **3,277 of our region's residents age 65 and over fell below the poverty level** (2010 Census poverty threshold: \$10,458 for a single person 65+ and \$13,194 for a two-person family with at least one member 65+). **The overall percentage of seniors in our 21-town region who are estimated to fall below the poverty level is 7%.** However, there is great variability from town to town ranging from 0% to 14%.

In November 2011, the U.S. Census Bureau released new poverty rates based on a revised formula. In contrast to the 'official' poverty rates discussed in the previous paragraph, the new Supplemental Poverty Measure tries to obtain a truer picture of economic need. It accounts for resources and benefits that add to a family's income as well as expenses that limit available income.

**Using the revised formula, Americans age 65+ showed the greatest increase in poverty rate to 15.9% due to out-of-pocket health care costs.**

For many seniors, even those who are not poor, the impact of uncovered medical costs on financial security cannot be overstated. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that, as of 2006, **median out-of-pocket health care spending among all Medicare beneficiaries was more than 16% of income. For those 85 and older, costs exceeded 23%. Out-of-pocket health care costs are predicted to continue rising – exceeding 25% for the average beneficiary in 2020.**

When a large and growing percentage of income is spent for health care, many seniors must devote remaining income to basic needs. Unanticipated expenses such as home repairs or 'optional' social activities may become unaffordable.

Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, is another key indicator of financial need. As of July 2011, **2,804 households 65+ in our 21-town region were receiving SNAP benefits.** Although qualification for SNAP is based on poverty status, eligibility calculation also includes deductions so it does not correspond precisely to poverty level. In addition, SNAP eligibility and benefit amount are determined by household rather than individual.

See the table below for five towns in our region with the **highest numbers of households age 65+ participating in SNAP.**

**Table 5**  
**Households 65+ Receiving SNAP Assistance July 2011\***

Town	SNAP Households 65+
1. Waterbury	1,732
2. Naugatuck	232
3. New Milford	150
4. Wolcott	115
5. Watertown	103

\*Source: Connecticut Department of Social Services

**SNAP participation has been increasing rapidly.** Among households 65+ in our 21 towns, there was a **40% increase between December 2009 and July 2011.** The gain is attributed to growing economic need, easing of eligibility requirements and enhanced recruitment efforts by nonprofit and municipal social service agencies.

Another source of information for determining major problems and needs of people 65+ is 2-1-1, a toll-free 24/7 information and referral line supported by the United Way and the State of Connecticut.

Between 7/1/2010 and 6/30/2011, 2-1-1 received 1,445 calls from or about people 65+ in our region. **Their top requests also reflect financial need such as financial/public assistance followed by utilities and heat** (primarily utility assistance and disconnection protection). When combined, these two categories comprised about 30% of total 2-1-1 requests pertaining to people 65+ in our region.

Thus far, we have a general picture of an aging region, a more diverse senior population and indicators of growing financial need among a significant minority. Now let's turn to key areas where we can make the greatest difference in the lives of seniors.

# A Local Look

## Priority Needs and Opportunities

To better shape the strategy of the *Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative*, we wanted a clearer view of local issues and service gaps impacting the lives of seniors. CCF organized **eight senior strategy focus groups that brought together more than 140 individuals from across the region.** Participants included seniors themselves, elected officials, municipal staff, nonprofit and health care providers serving seniors, community and religious leaders.

When focus groups gathered to discuss priorities, they were asked to keep the following in mind: **assisting the neediest seniors; helping seniors remain in their homes; and achieving real impact in local communities with limited dollars.**

Participants voted for their **top three priority issues and needs.** Table 6 displays the results for all groups combined. Despite the variation among our communities in income, ethnicity and population, the needs were remarkably similar. *See Appendix 2 for the top three choices of individual focus groups.*

Senior Issues and Needs	Percentage of Votes (All Groups)
1. Home Maintenance and Chore Services	13%
2. Transportation	12%
3. Access to Information on Programs and Benefits	12%
4. Isolation and Depression	10%
5. Home Health Services	9%
6. Health Care Costs	9%
7. Education, Exercise, Social and Volunteer Opportunities	7%
8. Family Caregiver Support/ Dementia/Alzheimer's Disease	7%

**Table 6**  
**Senior Strategy Focus Groups – Summary of Voting: Priority Issues and Needs**  
*Eight focus groups were held in May and June 2010. 142 participants voted for their top three priorities.*

As stated above, priority areas of concern were selected in part because of their impact on helping seniors remain at home and in the communities where they have lived for much of their lives. This is often called aging in place. The Aging in Place Initiative, developed by Partners for Livable Communities and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, helps communities across the country become better places in which to grow old.

Here's what the **Aging in Place Initiative** ([www.aginginplaceinitiative.org](http://www.aginginplaceinitiative.org)) has to say about the importance of the four top issues and needs identified by our focus groups:

Priority Areas	According to the Aging in Place Initiative:
1. Home Maintenance and Chore Services	"Every year, millions of unwilling Americans move to institutional facilities prematurely because there are no resources available to help them continue to live at home."
2. Transportation	"People need to have safe and easy access to services, amenities, and support networks (such as friends and family)."
3. Access to Information on Programs and Benefits	"One in five older Americans does not know who to call for information about local services in their community."
4. Isolation and Depression	"Studies have shown people who experience social isolation have been linked to declined physical and mental well-being... Engaged seniors report being more satisfied with retirement than less active adults."

### What's Happening In Our Region?

*See what's working well in our region in:*

- 1:** Home Maintenance and Chore Services
- 2:** Providing Transportation
- 3:** Access to Information on Programs and Benefits
- 4:** Reducing Isolation and Depression

**1: Home Maintenance and Chore Services** include some or all of the following jobs: house cleaning; shopping assistance; laundry; cooking; personal transportation; errands; minor handyman jobs; yard work; gardening; home organizing. In general, personal care and licensed home repairs are not included. As a side benefit, chore workers may offer companionship and reduce nagging worry about tasks left undone. Receiving the specific help needed may allow a senior to remain comfortably and safely in his or her own home.

#### **What's working well in our region?**

**The Litchfield Hills Chore Service** matches local chore workers with elderly and disabled residents in Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, Roxbury, Warren and Washington. Workers come into the home for up for 4 ½ hours per week and Program Coordinator, Sally Irwin is amazed at the impact those hours can make.

“Most of our clients are in their 80’s,” said Irwin. “We do the little things that get them through and help them remain independent. Our seniors want to stay in their homes and not be beholden to anybody.”

A grant from the Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging, contributions from participating towns as well as private donations allow for a sliding scale hourly fee. According to Irwin, most seniors can afford to pay something and they want to contribute.



Evelyn connected with the Litchfield Hills Chore Service through Philip Birkett at Litchfield Social Services. She could no longer drive due to vision problems and needed help getting to the grocery store and to doctor’s appointments. “I really needed the help and I am very happy to have Suzanne. I don’t know what I would do without her.”

Chore worker, Suzanne Shradly is equally pleased with the arrangement. “Evelyn is fabulous. We have a good time and learn from each other.”

The Naugatuck Elks Lodge 967 offers a volunteer approach to home chore services with their **Elks Senior Home Work Project**. Thanks to grants received from the Elks National Foundation, the Lodge has purchased equipment, tools and supplies as well as occasional services from a plumber or electrician. Their own volunteer labor has done the rest by helping 60-70 senior or disabled Naugatuck residents every year. Services have included raking leaves, trimming trees, cleaning gutters, replacing light bulbs, removing and reinstalling air conditioners and storm windows, fixing stairs, repairing railings and painting porches.

Jim DesMarais, Lodge secretary who helped to start the project, reports that much of the work is done one Saturday morning per month when 10-20 volunteers report for duty.

Harvey Frydman, Naugatuck’s Senior Center director, is grateful for the service. “The Elks are like guardian angels for the seniors in Naugatuck,” he said. “I call them with requests throughout the year and I know that help is just a phone call away.”

Service clubs, religious organizations, retiree, employee or student groups can help seniors remain in their homes by arranging assistance with chores and errands. The volunteer model can be adapted to focus on priority senior needs in the community.



**2: Providing transportation** for seniors who stop or limit driving is vital to keeping them independent and connected to friends, programs and basic services.

Transportation for seniors may be provided by municipalities, senior centers, transit districts, livery services, hospitals, volunteers, churches or nonprofits. Riders typically have access to medical appointments, shopping, banking, nutrition, senior center and religious programs, and social outings. However, ride availability, reservation policies, fees, allowable destinations and passenger assistance vary among providers. Securing needed rides is challenging in some locations.

**What’s working well in our region?**

**Cheshire Senior Center Van Service** operates four buses with lifts for Cheshire residents over the age of 55 as well as those who are permanently or temporarily disabled. Senior center staff members are proud of their comprehensive program which provides rides for medical appointments, shopping, eating out, socializing, cultural and senior center activities. Out-of-town medical rides and Saturday grocery shopping are also available.

According to Cheshire Senior Center Director, Stephanie Ferrall, adjusting to the service is a process for many seniors.

“Giving up their independence is the hardest thing a senior has to do,” she said. “At first, our riders are negative about not having their cars, but after a while they get used to it. The transportation is a lifeline.”

Although Cheshire’s service is municipal, vehicles were obtained with help from a Federal Transit Administration grant program via the Connecticut Department of Transportation. Cheshire riders also contribute \$.50 for each one-way ride locally and \$2.50 for out-of-town trips.



Another transit option working well for seniors in the region is the **Be Well Bus** sponsored by Waterbury Hospital with support from participating physicians. The van runs five days a week bringing seniors from Waterbury and ten surrounding communities to medical appointments in Waterbury and Middlebury. Rides are free but are limited to the hospital and offices of physicians who underwrite the service. According to hospital staff, patients appreciate the service and find it friendly and accommodating.

Businesses that benefit from senior customers may be willing to provide rides to bring seniors to their doors especially in communities where transportation is limited. It's not always necessary to create a separate transportation service. Local enterprises such as grocery stores can help underwrite existing programs.

**3: Access to Information on Programs and Benefits** encompasses information on Medicare and other health insurance, financial benefits, help in the home, health issues and legal concerns as well as community programs ranging from nutrition to volunteer involvement. Information reaches seniors, family members and caregivers through written materials, the Internet and media sources, group presentations, telephone help lines and individual meetings with senior services workers. Obtaining **the right information at the right time** is the first step in connecting older adults to needed resources.

### A Complex Network of Services

Although this report highlights local programs, the majority of senior services and benefits are not local. Many programs, starting with Medicare and Social Security, begin at the federal level. Other services supported by the Older Americans Act (such as Elderly Nutrition) depend on federal funding which is passed through to states and then granted locally in collaboration with Area Agencies on Aging. There are also crucial state services such as the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders which is partially federally funded.

What's available for seniors is often a moving target with changes in funding and legislation as well as programs that open or close to new participants. Workers 'in the trenches' are challenged to keep tabs on this intricate web of services in order to explain and interpret them for seniors and their families. The increasing numbers of older adults (including more frail and vulnerable seniors) demand greater efforts and more varied approaches to getting the word out.

Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging (WCAAA), located in Waterbury, covers all towns in CCF's service area in addition to 20 others. Their CHOICES program provides presentations, telephone and in-person consultations regarding Medicare and other health insurance. They are also one of the two lead agencies in the region for Community Choices which is an Aging and Disability Resource Center. As funding for staff is limited, WCAAA also trains volunteers and collaborates with local senior services.

### What's working well in our region?

**COPE (Comprehensive Outreach Project for Elders)** is a program of New Opportunities, Inc., in Waterbury, a community action agency focused on reducing poverty. COPE is active in Waterbury and the surrounding area with the goal of assessing seniors' needs and eligibility for financial benefits and other services.

Two keys to the program's success are home visits that are available when a senior cannot come to the office, and the COPE worker who is experienced in the intricacies of each program including often complex application processes. COPE helps seniors apply for benefits and follows up if problems arise.

"Last year, COPE helped more than 600 seniors. We make it as easy as possible for frail and homebound elders to access the benefits and services they need," said Mary-Kate Gill, Elder Services director for New Opportunities. "We even bring a portable copier to their homes so they don't have to make copies of documents for applications."

**Hispanic Coalition of Greater Waterbury, Inc.** is also connecting an increasing number of seniors to benefits and services. According to Executive Director Angie Medina, the demand is due in part to the growing number of Spanish-speaking seniors. However, she believes that there are several other key reasons.

First, Hispanic Coalition is a known and trusted agency in the community and trust is especially important for seniors. Second, because they serve all ages, it is not necessary to self-identify as a senior to receive help. Finally, within the limits of agency resources, case managers go the extra mile for seniors and they take that literally by providing rides to appointments when there are no alternatives.



Miriam Echevarria, coordinator and case manager at Hispanic Coalition, works with Flor to help her through the many steps of applying to become a U.S. citizen. "What she wants most is to be a citizen so she can vote," explains Miriam. "I can't wait," Flor said gratefully to Miriam. "My dream is going to come true. What would I have done without you?"

The agency has also increased its capacity to serve an ever growing number of seniors and others through the use of technology. With support from both CCF and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Hispanic Coalition uses the **Earn Benefits** software program to assist individuals in applying to multiple sources of assistance at the same time – saving staff time and easing the process for often stressed clients.

Delivering information on programs and benefits is not only important in urban areas. Older adults in rural areas and small towns sometimes find it even more difficult to locate the resources they need. To educate town residents and their families, the **New Milford Senior Center** has two senior services counselors on staff. During home and office visits, they take the time to get to know the seniors and their concerns while offering guidance on the full range of senior programs and benefits.

*Keys to helping seniors access and use information:*

- Taking time to develop trusting relationships and clarify needs
- Understanding the range of programs including the process of applying for the benefit as well as using and maintaining it
- Flexibility in reaching seniors such as offering home visits and outreach
- Ongoing updates through sources such as WCAAA

**4: Isolation and Depression** are common in older adults, but may be hidden. Isolation may result from loss of loved ones, retirement, giving up driving or diminished finances which can limit social activities. Life changes and losses of aging can sometimes lead to or unmask a depression which was held in check by regular work and family routines. Certain medical conditions, medications and factors such as chronic pain can also contribute to depression. Isolation and depression may in turn impact physical health, energy, appetite, sleep, work, relationships, activity, concentration and memory. **Depression is not a necessary part of aging and can very often be successfully treated.**

*What's working well in our region?*

Helping seniors stay engaged and connected to others takes many forms.

Noureen Hakim, director of Circulation at the **Cheshire Public Library**, also runs the library's Homebound Program. She delivers hand-selected books to seniors and volunteers her own time to stay and talk for a few minutes if the senior is interested.

**New Opportunities** runs the popular **Senior Dine Program** in Greater Waterbury and Greater Danbury. Senior Dine allows seniors to eat nutritious meals at participating restaurants for a low cost. In addition to the meal itself, the program has a substantial social benefit keeping seniors connected to peers and out in the community.

Local programs that help our region's seniors stay active and connected to others also reduce isolation and help to avoid depression.

**St. Margaret's Willow Plaza Neighborhood Community Center** in Waterbury offers a Senior Group on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The 20 regular attendees host speakers and entertainers, enjoy lunch together, and engage in spirited discussions. Perhaps most importantly, participants take ownership of their program. They suggest program topics, help plan outings, raise money, encourage new members and brainstorm ways to keep the group growing such as providing transportation for those who no longer drive. In addition, they look out for one another and call members who miss sessions to make sure they are okay.

Center President, Rafael Herrera sees many benefits in the group.

"The seniors enjoy the education and information to keep them up to date on everything from medicine to current events," he said. "They look forward to the peace and comfort of being within a supportive group, the companionship and the laughter. For many, it fills a lonely spot in their lives."

**Litchfield Community Center's Tai Chi Class** has been meeting every Wednesday for the past three years. Students range in age from early 50's to early 90's.

Eileen Rindos, a volunteer instructor and a senior herself, shares her love of Tai Chi by teaching her devoted group of students. "Everybody always feels better when they walk out," she said.

"The atmosphere is very positive and nurturing and provides participants with the opportunity to experience something with peers that is challenging to their bodies and their minds," said Berta Andrulis Mette, executive director of the center. She added that the social connection is also important and that class members "linger a bit after class and stay in the spirit of it."

Student, Mig Lake, has found both social and physical benefits. "The program gets me out of the house to see people and I have also improved physically just because I'm moving," she noted.

Even when Eileen can't be there in person, her students meet for class. On those Wednesdays when Eileen is unavailable, they follow her instruction on a DVD to complete their exercise routines which also keeps the group connected.

Combining activities with social connection fosters seniors' long-term participation and involvement — antidotes for isolation.





## Envisioning What's Next: Key Steps for Communities

Services for seniors in our region and throughout the state vary widely from community to community. In a few pages, we have shared many bright spots with programs that address priority needs and work well in one locale, and that might provide inspiration or a starting point for others.

Here are five key points to keep in mind as you ponder the next steps in helping older adults age in place in your own community:

- If you want to understand crucial senior needs or service gaps in your community, ask seniors, their families, and those who see them regularly. Outreach visits or questionnaires (perhaps using volunteers or student interns) can clarify priorities and build local consensus for action.
- Successful programs that engage seniors and offer recreation, education, wellness or socialization opportunities can take place in a variety of locations and through an array of partnerships. Catalog and make use of your own cultural, educational, business, health care, fitness, volunteer, civic and other assets. A community that is 'senior friendly' with benches, walking paths and clear signage is also a better place for all residents.
- It's not necessary to re-invent the wheel. There are great program models that have been developed around the country including many that are based on research and years of experience. These range from Faith in Action programs for friendly visiting and medical rides to curricula for fall prevention, exercise and chronic disease self-management.
- Don't overlook or underestimate seniors as resources. Many older adults, even those who are homebound, are eager to contribute. Some are happy to provide the kinds of assistance (such as rides) for others that they may later need themselves. Others are anxious to share their skills and knowledge by volunteering in schools, libraries and other venues.
- Share ideas with other communities and borrow the ones you like. There is no shortage of ingenuity and creativity in local senior services in Connecticut. This may be a first step toward collaboration which will become ever more important as local resources are stretched.

# Pathways Senior Services Initiative

## What We Can Do Together

After reviewing the results of our needs assessment, we considered how together we could most strategically use our funding, knowledge of the community, and network of professionals to achieve impact and promote change in how services are delivered to older adults.

To advance its fundamental goal of connecting seniors and their families with information and services in order for them to remain safely and independently in their homes, the **Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative** adopted the following strategies:

- Support for collaborative efforts and community planning to develop coordinated, easily navigated systems of services and promote successful aging in place
- Introduction of new services and approaches with a focus on core programs and best practices to reach isolated, 'unconnected' seniors
- Capacity building for senior serving agencies including board development, technology and strategic planning as they struggle to meet the growing demand

**Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative is a community leadership effort of the Connecticut Community Foundation** offering a competitive grant process, access to latest research and best practices, technical consultations to improve senior programs, educational forums for senior services personnel as well as leadership projects convening groups of organizations to tackle particular problems.

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For more information on the Connecticut Community Foundation and its *Pathways Services for Seniors Initiative*, go to [www.conncf.org/seniors](http://www.conncf.org/seniors).



### Appendix 1

## Population Changes from 2000 to 2010\*: Age 65+ and Age 85+

CCF 21-Town Region, Connecticut, United States

Location	2000 Census Age 65+	2010 Census Age 65+	Percent Increase or Decrease	2000 Census Age 85+	2010 Census Age 85+	Percent Increase
Beacon Falls	506	783	55%	48	88	83%
Bethlehem	440	539	23%	52	63	21%
Bridgewater	242	416	72%	24	42	75%
Cheshire	3,592	4,102	14%	591	807	37%
Goshen	410	517	26%	41	56	37%
Litchfield	1,413	1,658	17%	181	281	55%
Middlebury	1,067	1,302	22%	143	209	46%
Morris	327	371	13%	33	46	39%
Naugatuck	3,633	3,806	5%	483	640	33%
New Milford	2,571	3,427	33%	385	469	22%
Oxford	857	1,712	100%	87	163	87%
Prospect	1,153	1,425	24%	147	179	22%
Roxbury	295	433	47%	17	38	124%
Southbury	4,841	5,235	8%	1,071	1,228	15%
Thomaston	909	1,047	15%	83	167	101%
Warren	187	275	47%	19	23	21%
Washington	569	735	29%	50	85	70%
Waterbury	16,045	13,943	-13%	2,414	2,612	8%
Watertown	3,050	3,637	19%	386	558	45%
Wolcott	1,992	2,540	28%	189	408	116%
Woodbury	1,193	1,703	43%	128	217	70%
<b>21-Town Region</b>	<b>45,292</b>	<b>49,606</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>6,572</b>	<b>8,379</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>470,183</b>	<b>506,559</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>64,273</b>	<b>84,898</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>34,991,753</b>	<b>40,267,984</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>4,239,587</b>	<b>5,493,433</b>	<b>30%</b>

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### Appendix 2

## Senior Strategy Focus Groups Voting Results for Priority Issues and Needs

Connecticut Community Foundation held eight focus groups in May and June 2010. There were a total of 142 participants. Each voted for the top three issues and needs.

Results for each group are listed below with the two Waterbury groups and two Southbury groups combined.

	#1 Priority	#2 Priority	#3 Priority
Focus Group Locations:	Home Maintenance and Chore Services	Transportation	Access to Info on Programs & Benefits
Cheshire	Tie between #2 and #3		
Litchfield	#1	#3	
Naugatuck	#3		#2
New Milford	#2		#3
Southbury (2 groups)		#3	#2
Waterbury (2 groups)		#2	#1
	Isolation and Depression	Home Health Services	Health Care Costs
Cheshire		#1	
Litchfield		#2	
Naugatuck			#1
New Milford			#1
Southbury (2 groups)			
Waterbury (2 groups)			#3
	Education, Exercise, Social & Volunteer Opportunities	Dental Care and Insurance	
Cheshire		Tie between #2 and #3	



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