



DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services



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DHS, partner agencies work to increase safety for older adults

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) has been hard at work on a three-year federal grant from the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) designed to offer enhanced training and services to end abuse in later life.

AAA's work on the grant began with a needs assessment that included interviews with local seniors and staff at provider agencies. As a result of the assessment, AAA will be taking a three-part approach to addressing abuse.

The first goal was hiring a victim resource navigator, a part-time, phone-based position that works alongside the SeniorLine to connect victims of elder abuse to resources and services. Unlike Older Adult Protective Services (OAPS), calls to the navigator will not create a report of need that results in an investigation; however, the navigator can refer victims to OAPS, if appropriate. The victim resource navigator, Tina White, began working in this role on June 7.

Secondly, AAA created a Community Coordinated Response (CCR) network to share educational information about elder abuse. Comprised of businesses and organizations that have close contact with seniors who may be experiencing some type of abuse, current network members include provider agencies, abuse centers, banks and community organizations. AAA has also recruited representatives from underserved and minority communities, including LGBTQIA+ and faith-based organizations.

Established in April 2021, the network plans to have ongoing discussion to determine the issues surrounding elder abuse locally, and to use the resources available to the network to address those issues. A resources and remedies manual that includes contact information for agencies and programs both inside and outside of the CCR network has been created and distributed to members.

Finally, a Memorandum of Understanding team has been established between AAA, the Center for Victims, the Allegheny County Police, and the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office to offer education and training and serve as a cooperative planning and networking body for the grant. In May 2021, the group worked with the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) to hold a community conversation event that was attended by agencies, service providers and community members. NCALL will also be providing a virtual training to 500+ police officers from precincts around Allegheny County to educate them on elder abuse. A training for judges and district attorneys will be held in the future.

"We've learned that seniors experiencing abuse are often hesitant to seek help because of the stigma associated with experiencing abuse," said Brian Heywood, care management/supports coordination supervisor in AAA. "Knowing where to turn for help and being assured of confidentiality in receiving help are important to anyone who is experiencing hardship. The navigator role at the AAA provides that. The networking component raises awareness of elder abuse from a variety of community participants – agencies and citizens. We encourage communities, individuals and organizations to be vigilant to the vulnerability that older adults can face, and to pursue help when needed."

To learn more about this work, please contact Rachel Smith, project coordinator, at Rachel.Smith@allegHENYcounty.us.